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Informing the Successful Adoption of Social Media for Healthcare Human Resources: A Delphi Study

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The proliferation of social media platforms, including Facebook and Twitter, has forced a radical rethinking of corporate communications, particularly in healthcare. However, the majority of studies in this area have focused on the use of social media in the context of patient-to-patient or patient-to-physician communications.

Yet, recent studies have emphasized the need to study the use of social media within healthcare organizations, specifically in the context of HR management. Recent surveys have shown that only 25% of healthcare organizations currently have a formal policy on social media and the workplace. However, HR practitioners need a systematic understanding of social media to minimize risk and misuses associated with these tools.

Therefore, in this paper we report the results of a Delphi study with 37 healthcare HR practitioners to understand the most pressing challenges associated with healthcare HR generally as well as the most urgent activities and challenges of social media usage in healthcare HR.

Five priority areas of research and improvement emerge for informing the successful adoption, implementation, and use of social media in healthcare HR namely:

1. *Strategy and Leadership:* there is a need for greater involvement by leadership and for the top-down communication of visions and value propositions of social media in HR and the organization at large

2. *Governance and Control:* there is a need for organizations to create clear policies and guidelines. In turn, communicating policies organization-wide will allow for social media control to be decentralized rather than centralized.

3. *Training and Development:* beyond policies and guidelines for social media use, organizations need to train and develop their workforce, both regarding the technology and its functionalities but also with respect to the appropriate use of these tools

4. *Organizational Culture and Values:* there is a need for a supportive organizational culture that places trust in the workforce and value individual ownership and responsibility rather than fostering an attitude of fear in the context of social media usage.

5. *HR Practices and Processes:* there is an increased need for using social media to target specific HR activities, most importantly talent recruitment, but also employee relations as well as training and development.

The above findings offer several contributions to both research and practice. In regards to research, first, the emerged priority areas guide scholars in further investigating factors that are likely to be critical in the successful implementation and adoption of social media technologies for each of the functional HR areas. Although the five priority areas were specifically formulated in the context of healthcare HR, these areas seem to be generalizable to any organizational context in which social media is implemented and can therefore guide social media research in various organizational settings to answer related research questions regarding the adoption and use of social media technologies for strategic organizational goals.

Beyond contributions to research, at a strategic level, this study highlighted the need for a conducive culture and leadership involvement during social media implementations. Furthermore, qualitative insights regarding user experience with social media for healthcare HR were generated. While users saw the value of social media in their context, user self-efficacy, performance, and satisfaction with the organizational adoption of social media are likely to improve following the introduction of both formal and informal training opportunities.

Future studies should explore the uses of specific social media platforms and the impacts of their unique affordances so as to identify which tools offer the best support for distinct HR practices and organizational processes.