Wirtschaftsinformatik 2024 Proceedings   Wirtschaftsinformatik

2024

Do Organizations Utilize Social Media Affordances? A Qualitative Investigation of Social Media Management Activities

Kader Arslan
Paderborn University, Germany, kader.arslan@upb.de

Matthias Trier
Paderborn University, Germany; Copenhagen Business School, Denmark, trier@upb.de

Follow this and additional works at: https://aisel.aisnet.org/wi2024

Do Organizations Utilize Social Media Affordances? A Qualitative Investigation of Social Media Management Activities

Research Paper

Kader Arslan[1], and Matthias Trier[1]

[1] Paderborn University, Department of Business Information Systems, Paderborn, Germany
{kader.arslan, trier}@upb.de

Abstract. Social media (SM) changed the communication between SM managers, who manage an organization's SM account and users (representing (potential) customers). While research offers affordance systems that focus on various roles, e.g., employees or politically active users, the important linking pin of both worlds, the SM manager, has so far not been systematically linked to this affordance perspective. The purpose of this study is to extend research by investigating how SM managers utilize the SM affordances visibility, editability, persistence and association (EVAP) when enacting their SM activities with customers. Based on research and in-depth interviews with SM managers from 14 different organizations in Germany, findings show that they mostly focused on managing visibility and association and less on editability and persistence. Further, sub-affordances were identified that mostly expressed that SM managers rather look forward in a planning manner than backwards on their post history.

Keywords: Affordances, Social commerce, Social media, Social media manager.

1 Introduction

Billions of users, e.g., customers, take part in social media (SM) dialogues (Alhabash & Ma 2017, Appel et al. 2020, Haenlein et al. 2020, Statista 2024) where they interact and connect with others (Boyd & Ellison 2008, Kaplan & Haenlein 2010, Montalvo 2011, Vaast & Pinsonneault 2022). Also, organizations, e.g., business-to-consumer (B2C) companies, increasingly use SM to reach their business goals and digitalize their customer interface (Akar & Topcu 2011, Appel et al. 2020, Haenlein et al. 2020, Kotler et al. 2017, Parsons & Lepkowska-White 2018). Thus, SM management has become an important profession that is critical for organizations to form relationships with their (potential) customers (Arslan & Trier 2023, Boudreaux 2011, Haenlein et al. 2020, Jacobson 2020, Mangold & Faulds 2009, Montalvo 2011, Neill & Moody 2015).

The SM manager is the executing role in the organization, the storyteller who represents the organizations' brand and image and the responsible person who must establish

a satisfactory customer relationship (Jacobson 2020, Neill & Moody 2015, Vaast & Kaganer 2013). A well-conducted SM management is essential for organizations to stay competitive and reach their goals, e.g., to increase sales (Alalwan et al. 2017, Boudreux 2011, Mangold & Faulds 2009, Montalvo 2011, Wang et al. 2021). One important requirement for a successful SM management is an understanding of the social media platforms' (SMPs) features (Hoffman & Fodor 2010, Kaplan & Haenlein 2010, Kietzmann et al. 2011, Newberry & Wood 2024), e.g., to tailor SMP-specific content and to increase its visibility. Research highlights challenges for SM managers to effectively cope with the individual requirements of SMPs (Parsons & Lepkowska-White 2018, Stenmark & Zaffar 2014). There is, however, less research that empirically examines the role of SM managers and their use of SMPs to reach their goals (Hoffman & Fodor 2010, Hollebeek et al. 2014, Jacobson 2020, Montalvo 2011, Neill & Moody 2015).

In previous information systems (IS) research, many different roles and contexts have been analyzed by using a widely established affordance lens (Bucher & Helmond 2018, Ellison & Vitak 2015, Volkoff & Strong 2017). Examples include knowledge managers or general employees using enterprise social networks (ESN) in organizational contexts (Khan et al. 2023, Leidner et al. 2020, Sun et al. 2021, Treem & Leonardi 2012), as well as particular user groups, such as youths (Shane-Simpson et al. 2018). In this context, an affordance describes action possibilities offered to an individual by the design aspect of an object and suggests how an object should be used (Hutchby 2001, Leonardi 2013, Majchrzak et al. 2013, Majchrzak & Markus 2012, Markus & Silver 2008, McGrenere & Ho 2000). This is a quite common concept where also concepts of affordances (that are high-level and broad) and sub-affordances (that are low-level and concretize the broad affordances) exist (Fang et al. 2021, Malsbender et al. 2013, Steffen et al. 2019).

As far as known, there are no studies of the SM managers' activities and their use of affordances available as of now, despite their use of the same technology and their relevant positioning at the intersection between organizational and public SM use. Knowing how SM managers actualize SM affordances sheds light on the requirements of this management role. This lens further allows to reflect on the organizational capability of utilizing SMPs to achieve strategic objectives. Thus, the research objective of this study is to extend the application of the affordance lens to investigate SM managers' activities in order to better understand their SMP use to attain organizational goals. Applying this lens provides detailed insights on the actual practices of SM managers from a socio-technical perspective. Our study is guided by the following research question (RQ): *What are the typical affordances and sub-affordances utilized by SM managers?* To fill the mentioned gaps, we investigate the contextualized use of SM by the particular stakeholder group of SM managers from 14 different organizations from an affordance perspective. To address the challenge of bringing various affordance approaches together, Treem & Leonardi´s (2012) four affordances of 'editability', 'visibility', 'association' and 'persistence' (EVAP) have been used as they serve as a suitable content-related classification of affordances (Karahanna et al. 2018, Khan et al. 2023, Vaast & Kaganer 2013). The very abstract affordances of the EVAP approach can serve as broad meta-categories to which affordance categories of other studies can (loosely) be related. For example, O'Riordan et al. (2012) noted that the 'social connectivity' is manifested in

'connecting, connection search, suggestions and connection lists/groups'. This affordance can be related to association as it refers to 'connections between 'people to other people', 'people to content' or 'content to content' (Treem & Leonardi 2012). Our contribution is, however, not only to assess the EVAP category system from a SM manager perspective but also to extend research by identifying sub-affordances and to shed light on what happens inside these four EVAP affordance categories. As such, we contribute to the still scarce empirical literature on SM managers' use of affordances and on how to structure their SM activities (Arslan & Trier 2022, Culnan et al. 2010). Further, we contribute to a better understanding of SM managers' activities and to a better competency development in practice.

The next section introduces into the theoretical background. Section 3 details the qualitative research method and data analysis of interviews with SM managers from 14 different organizations. Section 4 presents the key findings that will be discussed in section 5. Section 6 summarizes the research and outlines future research suggestions.

2 Theoretical Background

2.1 Social Media and the Role of Social Media Managers

As SMPs are designed for different target groups and purposes, each SMP has its own characteristics and features (Ngai et al. 2015) and continuously new SMPs appear. For example, Facebook (FB) is a social networking site, Twitter (TW) focuses on short text messages while Instagram (IG) focuses on pictures and short videos (Kaplan & Haenlein 2010, Kietzmann et al. 2011). Further, some SMPs offer analytic tools, such as 'FB Insights' or 'TW Analytics', to measure and optimize SM performance (Kannan & Li 2017, Wedel & Kannan 2016) that can help to adjust the SM management accordingly.

In this context, SM management refers to all tasks of using Web 2.0 platforms or tools to reach business goals (Alalwan et al. 2017, Mangold & Faulds 2009, Montalvo 2011, Wang et al. 2021). SM management is important for different industry branches and contexts such as retail (Gallaugher & Ransbotham 2010), consulting (Stenmark & Zaffar 2014), recruiting (Cotriss 2024) or politics (Halpern & Gibbs 2013). Especially SM managers (or similar notions, e.g., online marketing managers) are the responsible and operating roles who manage and implement the organizations' brand and online presence (Jacobson 2020). They try to reach (potential) customers via brand building campaigns or to engage with them in discussions (Ashley & Tuten 2015) while working professionally inside the organization. Further goals are to increase sales, to improve customer experience or to gather customer feedback (Alalwan et al. 2017, Appel et al. 2020, Hanna et al. 2011, Kane et al. 2014, Laroche et al. 2013, Lysyakov et al. 2019, Mangold & Faulds 2009, Wang et al. 2021). SM managers take a special role, as they are located at the interface of the above contexts. They take on organizational role, interact with colleagues and pursue business goals. At the same time, they serve (potential) customer needs and aim for customer satisfaction. In such a setting, SM managers use the same SMP from a different perspective and thus may face the same affordances as their (potential) customers. This highlights the challenge for SM

managers to deeply understand the different SMPs and the challenge to effectively cope with the individual characteristics of their SMPs (Parsons & Lepkowska-White 2018, Stenmark & Zaffar 2014) to reach business goals. The above-mentioned research gaps and the changing nature of communications between different stakeholder groups highlight the importance to extend research by investigating the SM managers' use of SMPs empirically and by linking their activities systematically to the affordance perspective. The next section introduces the affordance perspective in detail.

2.2   The Concept of Affordance

In IS research, the affordance concept refers to action possibilities that can be taken given by a defined technology (Hutchby 2001, Leonardi 2013, Majchrzak et al. 2013, Majchrzak & Markus 2012, Markus & Silver 2008, McGrenere & Ho 2000). To investigate the SM managers' use of SMPs, particularly the affordance lens was adopted as it is about a potential action (Volkoff & Strong 2017) and emphasizes *"[…] the relation between an artefact and a goal-oriented actor or actors"* (Strong et al. 2014, p. 14) and thus sheds light on how this role is deliberately using a SMP.

Previous IS research shows that various roles and contexts have been analyzed by using the affordance lens. For example, some studies target the organizational context of knowledge managers or employees using ESN (Khan et al. 2023, Leidner et al. 2020, Sun et al. 2021, Treem & Leonardi 2012) or the self-presentation context of designers or bloggers (Duffy et al. 2017), while some others target the general internet users (O'Riordan et al. 2012, Vitak & Ellison 2013) or politically active users (Halpern & Gibbs 2013, Koc-Michalska et al. 2021). The investigation of the SM managers' activities and their use of affordances, however, remains underresearched from an affordance lens. Thus, there is a particular gap in examining how the SM managers, who do not consume SM contents but produce them for customers, utilize SM affordances. Neill & Moody (2015) identified that SM management perceived various roles at work, e.g., technology tester or issues manager. Each role in SM usage can lead to several goals (Hacker et al. 2024). In fact, the SM manager role is exclusively acting via SMPs, needs a fundamental understanding of the design and how to use them in a way that is focused on achieving business goals (Ashley & Tuten 2015, Haenlein et al. 2020, Hollebeek et al. 2014, Wang et al. 2021). As such, SM managers have an important role that has not yet been studied sufficiently from an affordance lens. Further, Neill & Moody (2015) suggested that SM managers' activities need to be monitored while focusing on how they use SMPs. We noted, however, that particularly the SM managers and their use of various SMPs to reach their business goals and thus influence the organization's success remain underresearched (Jacobson 2020, Neill & Moody 2015), whereas a diversity of above-mentioned other roles' SM use has been analyzed in previous research. Applying the affordance lens enables us to study SM managers' affordance actualizations in the context of SM management.

In previous research, affordances have been defined broadly with several different but conceptually-related definitions. We noted that there is no standardized approach or category system to structure affordances. In existing approaches to structure SMP affordances, most authors addressed organizational social networking with a focus on

how employees establish relationships and share expertise (Majchrzak et al. 2013). In public SM environments, studies focused either on creating a comparative analysis of SMP design elements (O'Riordan et al. 2012), social networking and social capital formation (Vitak & Ellison 2013) or on particular groups, e.g., political communities and their SM use (Halpern & Gibbs 2013). The derived affordance categories from these studies are rather stable but relate to different contexts (Arslan & Trier 2023). The latest discussions in this area of research suggest that visibility is a fundamental affordance (Leonardi & Treem 2020, Treem et al. 2020) but, however, there is not yet any coherent discussion of the most relevant affordances (Fromm et al. 2020). Further, researchers suggest more specific affordance systems that investigate how SMPs are used to reach a particular goal (Halpern & Gibbs 2013, Khazraee & Novak 2018).

Volkoff & Strong (2017) observed that affordance categories can be nested within other affordance categories and criticized that this results in various unrelated affordance category systems with different levels of granularity. This indicates the difficulties to synthesize previous approaches into one coherent and overarching theory. We noted, however, that the abstract EVAP (editability, visibility, association and persistence) affordance category system of Treem & Leonardi (2012) is a potent candidate to serve such a role, as many approaches reference this suitable approach in different contexts (Karahanna et al. 2018, Khan et al. 2023, Vaast & Kaganer 2013). Editability (E) refers to 'craft content before it is viewed' and to 'recraft or delete content after it has been communicated' in SM. Visibility (V) refers to 'make previously invisible information visible to others'. Association (A) refers to connections between 'users (e.g., IG followers)', 'users and content (e.g., tagging)' and 'content and content (e.g., recommendations provided by a SMP)'. Lastly, persistence (P) refers to the 'reviewability or the permanence of content after it has been posted'. Other approaches can be broadly linked to these EVAP affordance categories, e.g., in form of a derived specialization of broad affordances (Boyd 2010, Ellison & Vitak 2015, Majchrzak et al. 2013). For example, Majchrzak et al. (2013) identified the affordance 'triggered attending', where employees in organizational social networks can be notified when the profile of someone they are following changes. As triggered attending is dependent on edited content, at a high-level, this affordance can be related to the editability (E) affordance. Outside the organization, Boyd (2010) refers to 'searchability' of available content which refers to the persistence (P) of content.

Based on these illustrative examples, we argue that the EVAP affordance category system is a promising bridge across available approaches from different contexts that can improve theoretical comparability and coherence. Thus, the EVAP affordance categories appear as a suitable overarching guiding framework that are not bound to one context. A second useful property of the EVAP affordance category system is the possibility to categorize SM activities of different stakeholders that use the same SMP feature into the system. For example, when users post something, the post increases their visibility, can be edited, remains persistently available or is being shared by others as a form of content association. This use is in line with the organizational use of SM. With these properties, the abstract EVAP affordance categories have been adopted as a helpful guiding structure to uncover SM management activities in an organizational setting which is also aligned with previous research on other stakeholders.

3   Research Method

Data Collection. Qualitative interviews are a suitable method to study the affordances of SM managers, as it involves their interpretations of technology and intentions on how to use SMPs to reach their goals. The research team developed a protocol for semi-structured interviews by following interview guidelines (Flick 2009, Saunders et al. 2009) with main questions pertaining to SM strategy, target groups and SM activities. To evaluate the reliability and validity of questions, the first interview result has been assessed. As the interview guide worked appropriately, only very minor changes have been made to the interview guide, which did not affect the theoretical structure of the research. Data was collected in four waves between between July 2021 and June 2022. As SM management happens in various branches and contexts, the research for participants was conducted based on the role names, especially in order to capture a breadth of different industries. Based on research in two online platforms, we searched for SM managers (and similar notions, e.g., online marketing managers) located nearby in northern Germany. Individuals were approached via text message and only allowed to participate when using at least one SMP. They were asked to take part in the voluntarily, unpaid and anonymous interview through a preferred medium (e.g., via videocall) or face-to-face. After approaching more than 120 business contacts, a total of 14 accepted to participate. The 14 interviewees are representative for organizational experts that are challenging to get for interviews. Their answers overlapped, so we obtained very similar views and achieved a saturation of results. Table 1 shows our sample, that has representations from different industries and contexts such as banking or retail. 11 female and 3 male SM managers (and similar notions) located in Germany, aged between 23-37 (median=28), were interviewed. They worked in the marketing department of small, medium and large sized companies and managed different accounts on FB, IG, TW, YouTube (YT), TikTok (TI), Pinterest (PI), LinkedIn (LI) and Xing with a B2B and/or B2C focus. 12 interviews were conducted by videocall (Microsoft Teams (Teams) or Zoom) and two by phone. The interviews lasted on average 50 minutes (m). They were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim.

   Data Analysis. To obtain insights into SM managers' activities, data analysis was conducted in an iterative coding process (Miles & Huberman 1994). A team of three coders inductively open coded the data within the pre-defined EVAP affordance categories with the software MAXQDA by first analyzing various sections of the data separately and then discursively establishing coding categories where the team did initially not agree. In line with the methodological approach of Trier & Richter (2015), our qualitative inquiry used the EVAP affordance categories as abstract 'sensitizing' theoretical concepts that enable the identification of sub-categories in an inductive approach (Blumer 1954, p. 7). Later, we explored to what extend the interview details directly addressed the EVAP affordance categories or whether it was useful to group sub-affordances. During this process, we noted that the SM managers' affordances are not perfectly aligned with user affordances in the literature, indicating the intent to manage the SMP. However, the identified open code categories were still within the boundaries of the guiding EVAP affordance categories and linked to the user side.

Table 1. Interviewee Information (FB=Facebook, h=hour, IG=Instagram, LI=LinkedIn, OM= Online Marketing, n. s.=not specified, PI= Pinterest, TI=TikTok, TW=Twitter, YT=YouTube)

#	Position	Years in the Firm	Branch	Total Size (ca.)	Customers	Used SMPs	Medium & Duration
1	OM manager	1 year	OM agency	6	B2B	FB, IG, YT	Teams (1h 20m)
2	Junior OM manager	1 year	Retail	71	B2B, B2C	FB, IG, TW	Teams (51m)
3	OM manager	2 years	Banking	100	B2B	FB, IG	Teams (41m)
4	SM manager	n. s.	Wood working	350	B2B	FB, IG, LI YT, Xing	Phone (1h)
5	SM manager	n. s.	Press	110	B2B, B2C	FB, IG, PI	Phone (1h)
6	SM manager	n. s.	Tax	80	B2B, B2C	FB, IG, LI, YT, Xing	Zoom (1h)
7	SM manager	n. s.	Catering	11-50	B2B, B2C	FB, IG, LI	Zoom (50m)
8	SM manager	2 years	Furniture	11-50	B2B, B2C	FB, IG, PI, YT, TI	Zoom (37m)
9	SM manager	2 years	Furniture	90	B2B, B2C	FB, IG, PI	Zoom (35m)
10	SM manager	2 years	Con-struction	6,000	B2B, B2C	FB, IG, PI	Zoom (1h)
11	Brand and SM manager	2 years	Furniture	95	B2B, B2C	FB, IG, PI, YT	Zoom (45m)
12	OM manager	2 years	Furniture	4,300	B2B, B2C	FB, IG, PI TW, TI	Zoom (40m)
13	SM manager	4 years	Retail	350	B2C	FB, IG, LI, YT, TI	Zoom (1h)
14	SM manager	4 years	Football	150	B2B, B2C	FB, IG, LI, TW, YT	Zoom (54m)

For example, when SM managers emphasized a high reach of content, this implies that their activity is primarily not about editability, persistence or association but about visibility of content. Even that leads to one of our key findings that the affordance lens is applicable as a broad structuring device, which will be presented in the next section.

4 Findings

The primary objective of this study was to identify typical affordances utilized by SM managers. Within the EVAP categories, however, we retained nine sub-affordances (Steffen et al. 2019) to capture the essential activities of SM managers. These are: 'Tailoring editability', 'adaptability and optimization', 'visibility through designing for sharing', 'targeted visibility', 'visibility reduction via direct messages', 'high reach association', 'conversion association', 'deepening association' and 'analytics' (Table 2). For several categories, multiple statements of interviewees were collected, however, due to the page restrictions of this paper, only few representative statements can be reported in the findings section. Further interviewees with similar views are listed after a semicolon in brackets by their interviewee numbers (also indicated in Table 1 as #). Our affordance system reflects the link of feature description, tasks and goals of the SM managers and demonstrates that they execute actions (not for their own sake) to attain objectives. In the following, we will systematically report these sub-affordances.

Table 2. Affordances and Sub-Affordances Utilized by Social Media Managers

Editability (E)	Visibility (V)	Association (A)	Persistence (P)
• Tailoring editability • Adaptability and optimization	• Visibility through designing for sharing • Targeted visibility • Visibility reduction via direct messages	• High reach association • Conversion association • Deepening association	• Analytics

Editability Management. Editability emerged as a highly relevant element of SM activities. Editing content happened predominantly before the publication and is closely linked to brand awareness: *"We want to strengthen our identity and present who we are and why we are perhaps different than others. But it also includes creating a closeness between fans and us"* (#14; #6, #7). Some SM managers expressed that it was an effortful activity to create SMP-tailored content. For example, some edited content carefully to fit to specific SMP contexts: *"Not every content is well received on every SMP. If we adapt it to the SMP, the numbers are much better"* (#9; #13, #14). This sub-affordance of editability was labelled as 'tailoring editability'. The importance of professionally editing content to suit target groups in a specific SMP was also noticeable in statements about outsourcing it to agencies: *"We cannot handle aspects related to SMPs and the associated work, both editorial and paid, alone"* (#10). The comprehensiveness of editing multiple posts was also illustrated in the use of editorial plans: *"We can insert our SMPs into the SM management tool, we can edit our editorial plan and see what we post on which SMP"* (#13). *"When it comes to the frequency, we try to roughly stick to three posts a day on FB and IG. In the morning, noon and evening"* (#14). We further noted that the editability effort highly depended on available resources, e.g., time and staff: *"Unfortunately, we do not have the resources to post at least one story per day"* (#10). Sometimes, they saved time by following a copy-paste strategy. However, they also argued that this was not the ideal approach: *"We have been running these copy-paste campaigns but we are currently in the process of revising that. Users on FB and IG are very different and act differently. We are in the process of working on that and want to play out tailored campaigns"* (#11). Further, the SM managers mostly reported that content was not re-edited after it was posted, despite the SMPs option to change existing posts. Rather, conversations consisting of multiple sequential posts were optimized over time by learning from previous mistakes and successes: *"We always deal with it in a very objective and friendly way [...] even if it is negative, ironic etc. Maybe we can learn from it and improve our product"* (#12). Statements (by #2, #6, #10, #14) alluding to this special way of editing content over time were aggregated to the sub-affordance 'adaptability and optimization'.

Visibility Management. The visibility of content has been actively managed by de-liberately utilizing a wide array of features, such as images, hashtags, stories or reels. Especially, fast-paced, informational, entertaining, inspirational and visual content types have been mentioned as aspects that foster the visibility of content. Further, we identified three sub-affordances that improved the visibility of content. The first has been labelled as 'visibility through designing for sharing'. SM managers articulated

that they have a particular goal of benefiting from their content's high visibility. This was mostly driven by an intention to create a good brand awareness that was being shared by others as well: *"We want to inspire as many people as possible with our channels. That's the main goal. We want as many people as possible to identify with us, become fans. If someone is a fan of us, then at some point they would turn other people into fans"* (#14). The second sub-affordance has been labelled as 'targeted visibility', meaning that SM managers generated added visibility for posts through investment to make them noticeable by particular target groups: *"These sponsored posts are something I can use to reach my target audience. I can display it by age, region, interests, pages that are liked so that I can address my target group very precisely"* (#14). The third sub-affordance is 'visibility reduction via direct messages'. SM managers indicated that they made efforts to reduce the visibility of critical content instead of deleting it: *"We do not start to discuss something in the comments. In case of any problems, we say please send us a direct message so that we can solve the problem. We refer to direct messages to shift the communication"* (#10).

Association Management. Several statements related to association have been categorized into three different sub-affordances of association. The first sub-affordance referred to 'high reach association': *"I think the most important feature for me is that I can just post content on FB which I then distribute directly to a large audience"* (#2). We noted that such posts aimed to evolve relationships between the brand and a maximum of users rather than just focusing on developing individual links. The second sub-affordance referred to 'conversion association'. It captures that SM managers used SMPs to extend their associated users to external websites with the goal of increasing conversions and sales in the target environments: *"We tend to publish webshop topics, campaigns that we run in the webshop, sales actions, launches of new items. There is a bit more focus on sales and conversions, webshop traffic, link clicks, these are our goals"* (#13; #5). Features that fostered the conversion association have been identified as using posts including a link or placing the link into stories in form of a swipe-up feature that referred mostly to the website of an organization. The third sub-affordance referred to 'deepening association' that emerged due to statements of SM managers indicating that they were interested in their (potential) customers' loyalty: *"Of course, it is nice if they like our posts and we can bind them. In the end, they should buy and that is the most important thing"* (#2; #1, #7). Managers also articulated that they were particularly working on deepening relationships to well-known people (e.g., influencer) to increase brand awareness: *"You really notice when you play content with people who are somehow known. They really provide total input and share a lot. They also create a lot themselves and then there are many fan pages where the content is posted. This strengthens our brand awareness"* (#11). In particular, we noted that using story features along with engagement features such as questions or ratings helped SM managers to deepen associations with their target groups.

Persistence Management. The SM managers used persistence-related affordances rarely. The above use of association affordances also requires persistence of content or relationships. However, interviewees only went back to those previous posts of influencers or status updates of their followers when they had been tagged: *"We encourage and motivate our followers to post our products in their home using the hashtag. And*

then we like to repost it in our stories and show it again" (#12). We noted that these rare persistence-related activities were mostly based on stories that only persist for a maximum of 24 hours in SMPs (#13). Further, we noted that most SM managers were not concerned with building a repository of valuable contents to signal the value of a relationship by emphasizing its history. Rather, they referred to the importance of fast-paced content: *"SM is too fast-moving. The information flood is too great to take the time to look at our posts from three months ago"* (#10). SM manager #12 also referred to the small role of persistent content: *"Nowadays, users don't have the time and they want to consume as much as possible in the shortest possible time"*. The SM managers also noted that they mostly used persistence of content indirectly for 'analytics' purposes, which emerged as a sub-affordance of persistence: *"After the sponsored post, we collected a lot of data. Then we went into the first ad campaign and could optimize it again and see which target groups were working well or bad. Out of these data, we experienced which targeting was the most efficient for us"* (#10).

In the following, the identified affordance categories will be discussed.

5   Discussion

This study contributes to IS research by analyzing SMP activities and advancing the understanding of SM managers' use of affordances to reach their business goals, e.g., to increase sales. SM managers act as 'agents' for organizations and play a crucial role in using SM affordances in different creative ways. We noted that the SM managers' activities can be categorized through an affordance lens using the EVAP affordances as broad categories. Within these EVAP affordances, however, we identified important nuances that differentiate SM managers from other stakeholder groups studied in the literature, such as knowledge managers (Majchrzak et al. 2013). Correspondingly, we derived sub-affordances (Table 2) utilized by the SM managers, which concretize the EVAP meta-categories. These sub-affordances address our RQ, extend the academic discourse on affordances and constitute the main contribution of this study. For SM managers, our findings offer useful insights on achieving effective SM campaigns, in terms of how they can increase the reach of their communication. Further, the fact that SM managers (#8, #12, #13) are adopting newer SMPs like TikTok underlines the need of adapting to these changes and seizing new opportunities to stay competitive.

Editability Management. In the SM management context, the editability affordance mainly refers to carefully tailor SMP-specific content before it has been communicated. While some SM managers worked with editorial plans and took time to tailor content, others were duplicating content but intended a more focused editability in their future posts due to feature and target group differences. Findings show that editability happened more across posts rather than re-editing existing posts and is mainly based on learning from previous errors and successes (except for censoring critical posts). This implies that editability is considered, but it's more indirect, as the next post is edited based on the performance of the previous post. Thus, editability is more implicit than in the original affordance theory of Treem and Leonardi (2012). A practical implication is that SM managers should consider 'tailoring editability' to solve the

above-mentioned challenges to deeply understand and to effectively cope with the individual requirements of SMPs (Ngai et al. 2015, Parsons & Lepkowska-White 2018, Stenmark & Zaffar 2014). As noted by SM managers *(#10, #11)* there are disadvantages to editability which implies to consider contextual aspects when studying affordance actualizations by SM managers, such as time stress that is open for future research.

Visibility Management. The data reveals that the SM managers' main interest lies in visibility. In addition to the original visibility affordance suggested by Treem & Leonardi (2012) three important sub-affordances emerged that reflect different types of visibility-related SM use. They derived from the context-specific possibility to use SM software tools to target content and the fact that SM managers refer to direct messages when the visibility of critical comments should be reduced. While SMPs offer different possibilities to highlight the visibility of brand posts (Ashley & Tuten 2015), e.g., through pictures as shown in the findings *(#10),* an important implication is to reduce the visibility of critical content by 'visibility reduction via direct messages'. SM managers should be aware that sometimes it is more effective not to discuss critical aspects publicly, but rather via private messages in a more hidden talk.

Association Management. SM managers formed and utilized associations in various nuances beyond focusing on building individual associations as identified in the original affordance system (Treem & Leonardi 2012). They aimed to maximize their number of associations, which were then broadened by redirecting users to their owned channels. The SM managers also pursued strategies to first deepen associations with influential people to improve targeted associations with their broad audience. Practical implications of these approaches are that the first signals a more instrumental approach to evolve customer relationships and the second reflects the main goal of a SM manager to build associations: a high reach of target groups and addressing (potential) customer satisfaction. Especially in addressing the practical challenge of identifying and addressing the right target group (Parsons & Lepkowska-White 2018, Stenmark & Zaffar 2014), SM managers should be aware of the different sub-affordances of association. This is because a 'high-reach association' requires a different approach (e.g., an impersonal mass-approach) than 'deepening associations' with loyal customers (e.g., those with a strong brand association who expect a personal dialogue).

Persistence Management. Unlike the ESN context, in the SM management context, persistence of contents is not used as an archive to reuse information (e.g., of expertise). It is used solely to derive analytical metrics (e.g., visits) from cumulative data records and this is only possible, if the posts are collected over time and their views, responses, etc., can be measured. Thus, persistence is used indirectly via metrics to inform how future posts should appear. This feeds back to the editability and visibility affordances.

More broadly, the data indicates that SM managers' use of affordances can be ordered into a process starting with creating posts for visibility, then creating future posts depending on the results of earlier posts, followed by tapping into benefits of persistence, associating with as many users as possible. We noted that the employee size was not the main determinant of the proficiency of managing SM in the various organizations. Rather, it depended on whether SM is approached strategically and progressively. This study shows that despite using similar SM affordances (e.g., post visibility) as other stakeholders from the literature, such as general internet users, SM managers use

SM affordances differently. This emphasizes the importance of considering this stakeholder group and its context. For example, SM managers are more instrumental in their activities, intentionally pursuing a mass-approach to develop relationships or to increase brand awareness. The challenge, also for SMP providers, is to see how the different affordances offered to end-users, such as customers, link in a useful way with the affordances utilized by SM managers.

6 Conclusion and Future Research

With our study, we contribute a systematic and theory-driven understanding of platform-oriented actions of SM managers. We adopted the affordance lens that has previously been used to understand users like knowledge workers in teams and extended this strand of research by examining the highly relevant stakeholder group of SM managers. Knowing about their specific use of affordances and sub-affordances enriches our understanding of how users and creators (in our case the SM manager) together co-construct the unfolding SM experience. We can further imply relevant management activities that can guide competence development.

Going back to the argument that context is a very important determinant of affordance actualization (Volkoff & Strong 2017), we noted that the general EVAP affordance categories of different stakeholders remain applicable. This allows us to align our findings with other literature that applies the abstract EVAP affordance system. We can conclude that, generally, the same SM affordances are utilized. However, the specific organizational goals of SM managers result in novel variants of actualizing these main affordances on a more detailed level, which we conceived as sub-affordances. Thus, a key contribution of our study is the operationalization of broad EVAP affordances into role-specific sub-affordances. For example, the goals 'high reach of target groups' and 'addressing customer satisfaction' of SM managers are very different from the goals of knowledge managers in a company or the goals of general SM users in the public internet, while still addressing the same overall affordance of creating associations. We further note that the EVAP affordance category system is a suitable point of departure, but the activities of SM managers are reflected more precisely in the presented sub-affordances.

Similar to other empirical studies, this study has limitations. Our research approach only reflects management activities that refer to design and interface aspects of SMPs. Furthermore, these activities are based on the SM managers' recall of SMP use rather than a direct observation of it, resulting in an emphasis on strategic actions.

In future research, it could be interesting to explore the use of the same SMP by different roles. For example, examining the creator (or influencer) role, which shapes experiences for end-users. Furthermore, future research can use our approach to compare campaign managers with customer service managers which may reveal the ongoing issues and trade-offs in coordinating between SM marketing and customer service (e.g., Culnan et al. 2010).

References

Akar, E. & Topcu, B. (2011), 'An examination of the factors influencing consumers' attitudes toward social media marketing', *Journal of Internet Commerce* **10**(1), 35–67.

Alalwan, A. A., Rana, N. P., Dwivedi, Y. K. & Algharabat, R. (2017), 'Social media in marketing: A review and analysis of the existing literature', *Telematics and Informatics* **34**(7), 1177–1190.

Alhabash, S. & Ma, M. (2017), 'A Tale of Four Platforms: Motivations and Uses of Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Snapchat Among College Students?', *Social Media and Society* **3**(1), 1–13.

Appel, G., Grewal, L., Hadi, R. & Stephen, A. T. (2020), 'The future of social media in marketing', *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science* **48**(1), 79–95.

Arslan, K. & Trier, M. (2022), Towards a Process Model for Social Media Marketing, *in* 'ACIS 2022 Proceedings'.

Arslan, K. & Trier, M. (2023), Similar Affordances, Different Use Practices? An Investigation of Socio-Cultural Contexts in Facebook, Instagram and Twitter, *in* 'ICIS 2023 Proceedings'.

Ashley, C. & Tuten, T. (2015), 'Creative strategies in social media marketing: An exploratory study of branded social content and consumer engagement', *Psychology & Marketing* **32**(1), 15–27.

Blumer, H. (1954), 'What is Wrong with Social Theory?', *American Sociological Review* **19**(1), 3–10.

Boudreaux, C. (2011), How to Develop a Social Media Strategy, *in* Wollan, R., Smith, N. & Zhou, C. (eds.), *The Social Media Management Handbook: Everything You Need To Know To Get Social Media Working In Your Business*. Hoboken: Wiley.

Boyd, D. (2010), Social network sites as networked publics: Affordances, dynamics, and implications*, in* Papacharissi, Z. (ed.), *A networked self.* New York: Routledge, pp. 39–58.

Boyd, D. & Ellison, N. (2008), 'Social network sites: Definition, history, and scholarship', *Journal Computer Mediated Communication* **13**(1), 210–230.

Bucher, T. & Helmond, A. (2018), The Affordances of Social Media Platforms, *in* Burgess, J., Marwick, A. & Poell, T. (eds.), *The SAGE Handbook of Social Media*. London: Sage, pp. 233-253.

Cotriss, D. (2024), *Social Media for Business: Marketing, Customer Service and More,* https://businessnewsdaily.com/7832-social-media-for-business.html. Accessed: 20.06.2024.

Culnan, M. J., McHugh, P. J. & Zubillaga, J. I. (2010), 'How large U.S. Companies Can Use Twitter and Other Social Media to Gain Business Value', *MIS Quarterly Executive* **9**(4), 243–259.

Duffy, B.E., Pruchniewska, U. & Scolere, L. (2017), 'Platform-specific self-branding: Imagined affordances of the social media ecology', *ACM International Conference Proceeding Series. Association for Computing Machinery*, 1–5.

Ellison, N. B. & Vitak, J. (2015), Social Network Site Affordances and Their Relationship to Social Capital Processes, *in* Sundar, S. (ed.), *The Handbook of the Psychology of Communication Technology.* Boston: Wiley-Blackwell, pp. 205–227.

Fang, Y. H., Li, C. Y. & Bhatti, Z. A. (2021), 'Building brand loyalty and endorsement with brand pages: Integration of the lens of affordance and customer-dominant logic', *Information Technology and People* **34**(2), 731–769.

Flick, U. (2009), *An Introduction to Qualitative Research - Fourth edition*. Thousand Oaks: SAGE.

Fromm, J., Stieglitz, S. & Mirbabaie, M. (2020), A Systematic Review of Empirical Affordance Studies: Recommendations for Affordance Research in Information Systems, *in* 'ECIS 2020 Proceedings', pp. 1–11.

Gallaugher, J. & Ransbotham, S. (2010), 'Social media and customer dialog management at Starbucks', *MIS Quarterly Executive* **9**(4), 197–212.

Hacker, J., Trier, M. & Richter, A. (2024), 'Unfolding the contextual nature of enterprise social media use – a morphogenetic approach', *European Journal of Information Systems*, 1–32.

Haenlein, M., Anadol, E., Farnsworth, T., Hugo, H., Hunichen, J. & Welte, D. (2020), 'Navigating the New Era of Influencer Marketing: How to be Successful on Instagram, TikTok, & Co.', *California Management Review* **63**(1), 5–25.

Halpern, D. & Gibbs, J. (2013), 'Social media as a catalyst for online deliberation? Exploring the affordances of Facebook and YouTube for political expression', *Computers in Human Behavior* **29**(3), 1159–1168.

Hanna, R., Rohm, A. & Crittenden, V. L. (2011), 'We're all connected: The power of the social media ecosystem', *Business Horizons* **54**(3), 265–273.

Hoffman, D. L. & Fodor, M. (2010), 'Can you measure the ROI of your social media marketing?', *MIT Sloan Management Review* **52**(1), 41–49.

Hollebeek, L. D., Glynn, M. S. & Brodie, R. J. (2014), 'Consumer brand engagement in social media: Conceptualization, scale development and validation', *Journal of Interactive Marketing* **28**(2), 149–165.

Hutchby, I. (2001), 'Technologies, texts and affordances', *Sociology* **35**(2), 441–456.

Jacobson, J. (2020), 'You are a brand: social media managers' personal branding and the future audience', *Journal of Product and Brand Management* **29**(6), 715–727.

Kane, G. C., Alavi, M., Labianca, G. J. & Borgatti, S. P. (2014), 'What's different about social media networks? A framework and research agenda', *MIS Quarterly* **38**(1), 275–304.

Kannan, P. K. & Li, H. A. (2017), 'Digital marketing: A framework, review and research agenda', *International Journal of Research in Marketing* **34**(1), 22–45.

Kaplan, A. M. & Haenlein, M. (2010), 'Users of the world, unite! The challenges and opportunities of social media', *Business Horizons* **53**(1), 59–68.

Karahanna, E., Xu, S. X., Xu, Y. & Zhang N. A. (2018), 'The needs–affordances–features perspective for the use of social media', *MIS Quarterly* **42**(3), 737–756.

Khan, M., Mowbray, P. K. & Wilkinson, A. (2023), 'Employee voice on social media – An affordance lens, *International Journal of Management* **25**(4), 1–20.

Khazraee, E. & Novak, A. N. (2018), 'Digitally Mediated Protest: Social Media Affordances for Collective Identity Construction, *Social Media and Society* **4**(1), 1–14.

Kietzmann, J., Hermkens, K., McCarthy, I. & Silvestre, B. S. (2011), 'Social media? Get serious! Understanding the functional building blocks of social media', *Business Horizons* 54, 241–251.

Koc-Michalska, K., Lilleker, D. G., Michalski, T., Gibson, R. & Zajac, J. M. (2021), 'Facebook affordances and citizen engagement during elections: European political parties and their benefit from online strategies?', *Journal of Information Technology and Politics* **18**(2), 180–193.

Kotler, P., Kartajaya, H. & Setiawan, I. (2017), *Marketing 4.0: Moving from Traditional to Digital*. Hoboken: Wiley.

Laroche, M., Habibi, M. R. & Richard, M. O. (2013), 'To be or not to be in social media: How brand loyalty is affected by social media?', *International Journal of Information Management* **33**(1), 76–82.

Leidner, D. E., Gonzalez, E. & Koch, H. (2020), 'An Affordance Perspective of Enterprise Social Media and Organizational Socialization', *in* Strategic Information Management, pp. 364–402. Routledge.

Leonardi, P. M. (2013), 'When does technology use enable network change in organizations? A comparative study of feature use and shared affordances', *MIS Quarterly* **37**(3), 749–776.

Leonardi, P. M. & Treem, J. W. (2020), 'Behavioral visibility: A new paradigm for organization studies in the age of digitization, digitalization, and datafication', *Organization Studies* **41**(12), 1601–1625.

Lysyakov, M., Zhang, K. & Viswanathan, S. (2019), 'Retail firms' use of social media - Insights from analysis of large-scale twitter data', *40th International Conference on Information Systems, ICIS 2019. Association for Information Systems.*

Majchrzak, A., Faraj, S., Kane, G. C. & Azad, B. (2013), 'The Contradictory Influence of Social Media Affordances on Online Communal Knowledge Sharing', *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* **19**(1), 38–55.

Majchrzak, A. & Markus, M. L. (2012), Technology affordances and constraints in management information systems, *in* Kessler, E. (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Management Theory*. Thousand Oaks: SAGE, pp. 831–836.

Malsbender, A., Hofmann, S. & Becker, J. (2013), Aligning capabilities and social media affordances for open innovation in governments, *in* Hepu, D. & Craig, S. (eds.) 'ACIS 2013: Information systems: Transforming the Future: Proceedings of the 24th Australasian Conference on Information Systems', pp. 1–11.

Mangold, W. G. & Faulds, D. J. (2009), 'Social media: The new hybrid element of the promotion mix', *Business Horizons* **52**(4), 357–365.

Markus, M. L. & Silver, M. S. (2008), 'A foundation for the study of IT effects: A new look at DeSanctis and Poole's concepts of structural features and spirit', *Journal of the Association for Information Systems* **9**(10/11), 609–632.

McGrenere, J. & Ho, W. (2000), 'Affordances: Clarifying and Evolving a Concept', *Graphics Interface*, 1–8.

Miles, M. & Huberman, A. (1994), *Qualitative Data Analysis: An Expanded Sourcebook* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks: Sage.

Montalvo, R. E. (2011), 'Social Media Management', *International Journal of Management & Information Systems* **15**(3), 91–96.

Neill, M. S. & Moody, M. (2015), 'Who is responsible for what? Examining strategic roles in social media management', *Public Relations Review* **41**(1), 109–118.

Newberry, C. & Wood, A. (2024), *How to Create a Social Media Marketing Strategy in 9 Easy Steps*, https://blog.hootsuite.com/how-to-create-a-social-media-marketing-plan. Accessed: 20.06.2024.

Ngai, E. W. T., Tao, S. S. C. & Moon, K. K. L. (2015), 'Social media research: Theories, constructs, and conceptual frameworks', *International Journal of Information Management* **35**(1), 33–44.

O'Riordan, S., Feller, J. & Nagle, T. (2012), Exploring the Affordances of Social Networking Sites: An Analysis of Three Networks *in* 'Proceedings of the 20th European Conference on Information Systems, Association for Information Systems'.

Parsons, A. L. & Lepkowska-White, E. (2018), 'Social Media Marketing Management: A Conceptual Framework', *Journal of Internet Commerce* **17**(2), 81–95.

Saunders, M., Lewis, P. & Thornhill, A. (2009), *Research Methods for Business Students*. New York: Pearson.

Shane-Simpson, C., Manago, A., Gaggi, N. & Gillespie-Lynch, K. (2018), 'Why do college students prefer Facebook, Twitter, or Instagram? Site affordances, tensions between privacy and self-expression, and implications for social capital', *Computers in Human Behavior* **86**, 276–288.

Statista (2024), *Number of social media users worldwide from 2017 to 2028, https://statista.com/statistics/278414/number-of-worldwide-social-network-users/.* Accessed: 20.06.2024).

Steffen, J., Gaskin, J., Meservy, T., Jenkins, J. & Wolman, I. (2019), 'Framework of Affordances for Virtual Reality and Augmented Reality', *Journal of Management Information Systems*, **36**(3), 683–729.

Stenmark, D. & Zaffar, F. O. (2014), 'Consultant strategies and technological affordances: Managing organizational social media', *20th Americas Conference on Information Systems, AMCIS 2014. Association for Information Systems*.

Strong, D. M., Volkoff, O., Johnson, S. A., Pelletier, L. R., Tulu, B., Bar-On, I., Trudel, J. & Garber, L. (2014), 'A Theory of Organization-EHR Affordance Actualization', *Journal of the Association for Information Systems* **152**, 53–85. Sun, Y., Fang, S. & Zhang, Z. (2021), 'Impression management strategies on enterprise social media platforms: An affordance perspective', *International Journal of Information Management*.

Treem, J. W. & Leonardi, P. M. (2012), 'Social Media Use in Organizations: Exploring the Affordances of Visibility, Editability, Persistence, and Association', *Annals of the International Communication Association* **36**(1), 143–189.

Treem, J. W., Leonardi, P. M. & Van Den Hooff, B. (2020), 'Computer-Mediated Communication in the Age of Communication Visibility', *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* **25**(1), 44–59.

Trier, M. & Richter, A. (2015), 'The deep structure of organizational online networking – an actor-oriented case study', *Information Systems Journal* **25**(5), 465-488.

Vaast, E. & Kaganer, E. (2013), 'Social media affordances and governance in the workplace: An examination of organizational policies', *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* **19**(1), 78–101.

Vaast, E. & Pinsonneault, A. (2022), 'Dealing with the Social Media Polycontextuality of Work', *Information Systems Research* **33**(4), 1428–1451.

Vitak, J. & Ellison, N. B. (2013), 'There's a network out there you might as well tap: Exploring the benefits of and barriers to exchanging informational and support-based resources on Facebook', *New Media and Society* **15**(2), 243–259.

Volkoff, O. & Strong, D. M. (2017), Affordance theory and how to use it in IS research, *in* Galliers, R. D. & Stein (eds.), *The Routledge Companion to Management Information Systems*. New York: Taylor and Francis, pp. 232–246.

Wang, K., Tai, J. C. F. & Chang, H. L. (2021), 'Influences of place attachment and social media affordances on online brand community continuance', *Information Systems and e-Business Management* **19**(2), 459–493.

Wedel, M. & Kannan, P. K. (2016), 'Marketing analytics for data-rich environments', *Journal of Marketing* **80**(6), 97–121.