A Framework for Enterprise Social Media Guidelines

Completed Research Paper

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ABSTRACT
Companies’ adoption of social media has strongly increased in recent years. Managers are challenged to inform their employees about the potentials and the risks associated by using social media in enterprise communication. Providing guidelines on social media usage for employees is twofold: on the one hand guidelines might increase the awareness of risks, on the other hand publishing guidelines might result in a reduced employee’s engagement in social media. In this paper we classified 34 social media guidelines of large enterprises and analyzed them by applying an open coding approach. Based on the analysis of the content we propose a framework that summarizes the most relevant aspects of content in enterprise social media guidelines. Our work helps researchers to better understand the structure and content of social media guidelines. Furthermore, by providing a comprehensive framework and analysis of patterns in social media guidelines, our study supports practitioners in designing or benchmarking their own guidelines.

Keywords
Social media, guidelines, grounded theory, enterprise social media guideline framework.

INTRODUCTION: RELEVANCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA GUIDELINES
The usage of social media has increased strongly within the last couple of years. Wikipedia currently contains about 19 million entries in more than 270 languages (Wikipedia, 2012). The social network Facebook has reached about one billion active users, more than 50% of them access the site on a daily basis (Hachman, 2012). Over 400 million tweets are generated at the microblogging platform Twitter per day (Bea, 2012). Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) claim that this enormous growth is not limited to digital natives. Increasingly, elderly people start to use social media. A significant example for the demographic change is made by the structure of the newly registered Facebook users. By now, Facebook sees its biggest user growth in the group of those people who are between 40 to 50 years of age (Roth, 2012). The usage of social media is established in nearly everyone's everyday-communication.

Additionally, numerous companies adopted social media to support internal communication and collaboration or to interact with customers and other stakeholders (Backhouse, 2009; Stieglitz and Krüger, 2011). Regarding internal usage based on social business software, essential benefits are expected for example in supporting knowledge management (e.g. search of experts), improved communication (e.g. activity streams vs. email), and support of collaboration (e.g. document exchange). The external perspective (customer-orientated) is focused on social media marketing (e.g. brand management) and human resources management (e.g. social media recruiting) as well as customer relationship management (e.g. customer support).

Generally, social media is based on user-generated content which is provided by Internet users (e.g. status updates, information sharing, comments). Organizations get more and more affected by user generated content (Welchmann and Pierpoint, 2009; Kaganer and Vaast, 2010; Kane et al., 2009; Komito and Bates, 2009; Interactive Advertising Bureau, 2008).

Moreover, the probability for an enterprise’s reputational ‘damage’ is increased by the rise of using social media in the business context by employees who might not have sufficient knowledge to act responsible in public social media (Gallaugher and Ransbotham, 2010). One example for the influence of Internet content on organizations is the case of Domino’s Pizza: two employees posted a video on YouTube which showed shocking actions performed on customer’s meals.
Rapid diffusion of this issue on Twitter resulted in a volume of some 20,000 tweets, generated in a time-span of eight days (Park et al., 2012). The company suffered severe reputational damage. Videos of the reporting of this case were seen more than 1 mio times on Youtube (Ramox3: Dirty Dirty Dominos pizza, clicks: 1.056.588) and nearly 186.000 videos can be found by typing ‘domino’s pizza original video in the youtube-search.

This shows that social media provides potentials as well as risks, which are omnipresent for private customers and companies alike (ISACA, 2010; Bruns and Stieglitz, 2012; Krüger et al., 2012). Companies are expected to be responsible towards their employees and stakeholders by acting as a solid business partner and prevail in the market through good reputation management. This is tightly coupled with the mitigation of potential risks for the company’s image, reputation, financial consequences and other negative evolutions. Damages in the public image of an enterprise as well as a lack of communication with customers might lead to a decreased turnover and revenue (Rossmann, 2011). To prevent these disadvantages, many companies design and publish behavioral guidelines or documents with the aim to help users to get orientation in social media (Zerfass, 2010).

These guidelines have the potential to support the users regarding their behaviour, describe the social media landscape, sensitize the users for risks, and describe the company view on social media as a communication channel. In practice these documents are known as ‘social media guideline’, ‘blogging policy’, ‘social network guideline’ or in regulatory instances as ‘social media policy’. Zerfass (2010) defines these as follows: ’Social media guidelines (…) describe and provide advice on how social media communications shall be dealt with by all of the members of an organization and how it can enable all of them to become communicators in participative online environments.’

During the design of the guidelines several aspects have to be considered. Besides the content, different levels of hierarchy, responsibilities and roles have to be addressed (Katajisto, 2010). Furthermore, the corporate identity and corporate design as well as strategies for the design, such as ‘infotainment’ have to be considered (Selin et al., 2006).

However, until now little research exists regarding the context and circumstances of an enterprise creating a guideline. In order to contribute to the academic discussion, we present results of a content analysis of 34 social media guidelines in order to identify patterns which might help to both better understand purposes and concepts of social media guidelines from an academic point of view and to create guidelines in practice. We seek to extract the standard aspects and the generic usage in the enterprises’ view of what should be regulated on the one hand to help their employees handle communication on social media (RQ), and on the other hand to clarify the enterprises’ aims, potentials and risks emerging from its social media presence. Following this research question the aim of this research step is to develop a framework which regards the relevant aspects affecting the process of developing or rethinking a guideline on the one hand and on the other hand to isolate affecting variables for a deeper analysis.

The article is structured as follows: The literature review on the topic of social media guidelines (in the following: SMGs) and their classification within the scientific discussion serves as the foundation for the chapter of empirical study. In the empirical part we present our results and suggest a classification of content in enterprise social media guidelines. The conclusion summarizes our work, discusses the limitations, and provides an outlook for further research.

STATE OF THE ART

Although the topic of social media was already paid attention to in numerous academic disciplines, a number of niches remain that so far have received relatively little attention. Currently there exists a gap between practice and academic discussion concerning the knowledge about the design and usage of social media guidelines. The practitioners’ literature addresses numerous recommendations and examples about the design of social media guidelines (Grensing-Pophal, 2010; Gibbs, 2011; Farley, 2011; Raysman, 2012) whereas academics provide very little research about the necessity and the design concerning aspects like content, visualization, strategy, target group in the context of corporate culture and – structure as well as the legal boundaries (Husin and Hanisch, 2011). Furthermore, analysis about the use and value of the conceptualization of social media guidelines is lacking.

Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) recognize that, ‘Social media has changed the way of corporate communications towards a world where corporations have increasingly less influence on published information about them. Therefore it is crucial for firms to have guidelines that can respond to these new forms of communication’. Kuikka and Äkinnen (2011) investigate the use of social media with regard to internal and external application using a case study of a multinational company specialized in metal manufacturing. They conclude that the arising challenges from social media in the fields of reputation management, legal compliance, information security, and resource management require the implementation of social media guidelines. Gallaugher and Ransbotham (2010) point out that guidelines should not only provide guidance concerning these issues likewise for managers and employees but also establish follow-up steps in critical moments involving social media. Husin
and Hanish (2011) share this prevailing opinion, but also state that guidelines and policies should not only aim at avoiding negative impact on business activities. Moreover, it is important that policies do not impair the potential and value of these technologies by excessively strong restriction and limitation of social media. In fact there has to be a balance between providing necessary guidance to employees and protecting the organization and required flexibility in order to create an added value through the use of social media. Therewith Husin and Hanish (2011) extend the general statement that policies either bring benefits or avoid negative effects to the organization (Althaus et al., 2007).

Husin and Hanish (2011) propose the framework ‘Social Media and Organisation Policy (SOMEOP)’ which is built upon interpretive content analysis in cooperation with a media and consulting company as well as an extensive literature review. It provides a holistic approach to develop a social media and organizational policy. According to the SOMEOP, the policy has to cover the essential components in the fields of legal obligations, different levels of management, general and concise statements, social media etiquette and notification and standardization. Regarding social media, they identified the following aspects as significant for the company itself as well as for the employees: (1) the responsibility for the written information, (2) the understanding of the impact on the reader, and (3) the creation of added value. It provides an integral approach for the support of the creation of a guideline by combining two aspects: on the one hand, strengthening the understanding of legal obligations and the impact on employees and on the other hand, the flexibility for companies in order to benefit from social media. Each of the five components is based on the combination of the development of standard communication guidelines (Yin, 2009) and the analysis of the elements necessary for the generation of added value. Three of these five components derive from the core aspects, which should be part of the communication guidelines of all companies according to Gersing-Pophal (2010). The framework provides a general concept for different industries. For instance, in further research Husin and Hanish (2011) apply their framework in practice to a public sector entity using a case study approach as part of a larger longitudinal study into social media origination. Therefore, the initial social media policy of the entity was investigated resulting in the evidence that improvement could be made by applying the SOMEOP-framework. The application of the framework allowed the identification of specific issues. Further, it provides an approach to develop a holistic policy in order to ensure effectiveness.

Tan and Vasa (2011) used a different approach and present the ‘Social Media-Beliefs, Action and Outcomes (SM-BAO) model’, which aims at providing the foundation for an organizational social media policy framework. In their research, they emphasize the role of social media as a service for creating business value, adapting Melvilles (2010) BAO model and focus on the social-technical aspects of the technologies.

Kaganer and Vaast (2010) applied the social representations theory in order to analyze to what degree decision-makers incorporate their common sense of knowledge of end-user driven technologies into social media policies. These decision-makers do not only have to understand the new technology innovations, but also to develop ways to guide and direct users. Thereby the guidance mainly concerns the possibilities and limitations in the use of Social Media. The focus is put on the content of the policies and whether it reflects the decision-makers’ nascent social representation of the specific technology. Therefore, Kaganer and Vaast (2010) conduct an empirical study of 25 corporate policy documents. By doing so, they come to the conclusion that there are mainly three core elements of social representation in the policies which represent the nascent comprehension of social media. These comprehensions are linked to their existing social representations of organizational communications. As a result, Kaganer and Vaast (2010) provide evidence of the fact that the responsible decision-makers extended traditional communication policies and applied them to social media. Althaus et al. (2007) emphasize that there are five standard components in general policies which answer the usual ‘w’-questions: (1) why? – purpose statement, (2) who and what action? – applicability and scope statement, (3) when? – effective date, to whom? – responsibilities, and (4) what? - policy statement. Besides these general statements in literature, there are currently barely any discussions on which models and design parameters can be used for the development of social media guidelines.

The niche of analyzing aspects that seems to be generic and standard in the development of SMG lacks. To contribute to this research gap we did an empirical analysis of social media guidelines.

**EMPIRICAL STUDY**

**Research Design**

The empirical analysis is based on the examination of a sample of publicly accessible social media guidelines of 34 large companies acting on the German market (e.g. adidas as a sports equipment producer, Dell as a technology distributor). The selection of the enterprises is based on the following criteria: (1) open-access to social media guidelines, (2) visible stakeholder communication in social media (screening of social media activities of Twitter and Facebook) /general public interest, (3) large number of employees (>250), and (4) activity on the consumer market. The guidelines differ in their
presentation of layout, length and text-features, which naturally limits and influences this analysis as well as the facts of gathering the SMGs, we are aware of the preselection of search engines results and the public accessibility.

For the coding phase (2) we involved three independent encoders with no knowledge on frameworks like the SOMEOP. However, nowadays most of the Internet users in general have an idea or a feeling on what needs to be in a social media guideline. The open-coding method was used to identify relevant content (marking possible interesting terms). For instance, the terms ‘private’, ‘working hours’, ‘focus’, and ‘main job’ were marked by the encoders and added with notes. These and other terms build the content category ‘use of social media during working hours’. To support the encoding and develop the groups, we used the software NVivo 9.0. The results are presented in the following section.

Results

By analyzing the social media guidelines we encoded 23 content groups and 589 terms. On average 17 terms were marked in each social media guideline. The 589 expressions of the coding phase have been grouped by topics describing the 23 aspects which, based on their appearance, seemed to be of high relevance for creating a SMG. Table 1 shows the 23 grouped aspects ranked by their quantity of mentions within the sample.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Content-groups</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Percentage of all analysed SMGs</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(1) sustaining a certain netiquette</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>showing respect towards others, restrain from insulting comments (1&amp;1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(2) violation of data protection principles</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>respect confidentiality, abstain from publishing information about a third party without permission (Daimler AG)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(3) staying transparent</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>94,1</td>
<td>being honest, use one’s real name, state for which company one is working (Intel)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(4) violation of copyright</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>79,4</td>
<td>respect intellectual property rights (GREY)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(5) target group of the guideline</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>73,5</td>
<td>employees (Equity Story AG)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(6) violation of privacy</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>73,5</td>
<td>protect oneself and one’s personal data (DATEV)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(7) purpose of the guideline</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>67,6</td>
<td>teach a responsible handling of social media (Roche)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(8) relevant aspects of social media for the company</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>67,6</td>
<td>employees as brand ambassadors (Tchibo)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(9) dysfunctional communication</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>67,6</td>
<td>using a false name (DFKOM)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(10) expected benefit of Social Media</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>64,7</td>
<td>wide reach, bidirectional communication, accessibility (Deutsche Telekom)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(11) sustainability of the content</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>64,7</td>
<td>difficulty of deleting content, traces remain (Deutsche Post DHL)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(12) responsibilities</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>61,7</td>
<td>the person publishing content is responsible for it, target group of</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 1. Content classification and frequencies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The content group</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>The guideline (GfK)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(13) mixing business and private life</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>differentiate between company statement and personal comment, add a standard phrase/disclaimer under personal comments (Kodak)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(14) standing up to done mistakes</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>admit mistakes, point mistakes out and correct them (Intel)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(15) public accessibility</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>published information is accessible to a broad public (Materna)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(16) which goals are being followed with this guideline</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>protecting the employees and the employers image (Kodak)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(17) acceptance of different opinions</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>treat other people’s opinion respectfully (Intel)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(18) handling of criticism and negative contributions</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>react in a calm and professional manner to criticism (Intel)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(19) contact person</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>contact person in case of questions (GfK)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(20) consequences</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>labour law-related terms apply (1&amp;1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(21) use of social media during working hours</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>work-related use of social media (Deutsche Telekom), oftenly private and professional use of social media mingle, private use has to be deducted from overall working time (Datev)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(22) loss of productivity</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>not reacting to non-serious comments (Daimler)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(23) technical risks</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>threats evolving from viruses or hackers (Datev)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The content group ‘sustaining a certain netiquette’ (100%) was represented in every analyzed social media guideline. Therefore, addressing issues concerning the netiquette in SMGs seems to be one of the major goals of enterprises. But why is that important? The netiquette is a set of social conventions that facilitate interaction over networks. It is of general importance, particularly when the users operate as a representative of the enterprise to avoid harm by not acting in line with the net community.

The high occurrence of the content group ‘violation of data protection principles’ (97,0%) shows the fear of enterprises losing control of their data security. It is a serious risk for enterprises to allow and enable the employees to take control over certain parts of the enterprise communication. The employees share data like pictures and documents. For this reason, enterprises need to provide guidelines (in this part of a SMG it might be more appropriate to talk about policies) to prevent the loss of data and information.

The ‘staying transparent’ content group (94,1%) advises employees to clarify whether the employee acts on his own representing his opinion or he acts as a representative of the enterprise. By making this transparent, the enterprise and the employee are prevented from misunderstandings. For instance, if an employee recommends a product which is not offered by his enterprise, he should make transparent that this is his private opinion. It is remarkable that the content groups ‘technical
risk’ (8%) and ‘loss of productivity’ (26.4%) were mentioned rarely. One possible interpretation might be, due to the fact SMG handle the behaviour of individuals, that technical risk and the loss of productivity, which both are mainly issues of the enterprise, are mainly relevant for the IT department.

In regard to the groups we classified, we developed a framework which interprets the different levels of contexts affecting the creation of a SMG as layers: (1) norms, (2) external context, (3) internal context, and (4) role context (management and employee). By developing our framework we considered that the layers affect and interact with each other.

Figure 1: Enterprise Social Media Guideline Framework

As the proposed model shows, norms (which may differ between countries) affect the overall understanding and purposes of social media guidelines. E.g. social, political, and legal aspects affect these norms. The framework also differentiated between the external context of the organization and its internal context. Within the internal organizational-context different role-contexts are identifiable. The different contexts can be seen as independent systems interacting with each other and as being affected by their environments. As it is shown, social media guidelines usually do address several of those domains.

Nearly each of the analyzed social media guidelines is categorically structured in different sections like introducing the field and the social media landscape, explaining risks, instructions and hints for related to different contexts, impacts and responsibilities. One aim of social media guidelines is to make employees aware of potential impacts of internal and external communication. For this, it is needed to recall rights, duties, and potential consequences which are related to the role of an employee (20). The management sustains the roles of being responsible (12) and to envisage the contact person for questions respecting the SMG (19). As shown in Figure 1 we can assign certain content groups to the internal perspective which aim on clarifying, e.g. blurring of business and private life (13), using one account in one network and rules for being present in social media during working hours (21), and hints regarding the sustainability of user-generated-content (11). The usage of social media in and for the external corporate communication is addressed by nearly half of the identified content groups. These include e.g. netiquette (1), transparency (3), and behavioural rules regarding made mistakes (14). Furthermore, advices are given about how to handle with criticism and negative contributions (18), how to prevent dysfunctional communication (9), and that it is required to accept different opinions (17). We identified the purpose of the SMG (7), the relevance of social media for the company (8), the expected benefits of being present in social media (10), and the definition of goals of the SMG (16) as further purposes. The coating norm-contexts are reflected in the SMGs as the content-groups violation data protection principles (2), violation of copyright (4), and the group violation of privacy (6). Technological- and organizational aspects inside the company characterize the internal context. In the analyzed SMGs this context is regarded by
showing what risks may come up with the use of social media, on the one hand related to the technology (23) and on the other hand by negatively affecting productivity (22).

CONCLUSION

In order to contribute to the field of social media guidelines, we conducted an explorative content analysis on 34 social media guidelines. By conducting this content analysis, we investigated which aspects or key components are cognizable in social media guidelines. We have discovered several aspects which are relevant for enterprises. In our opinion, the company’s culture, the structure of the employees, the structure of the target group, and therefore also the character of the products have to be considered when developing SMGs. Not only the content of social media guidelines but also the way of presentation and therefore the enterprises’ strategies in employer management should be analyzed.

Our proposed framework aims on the one hand to reflect, summarize, categorise, and interpret the content of social media guidelines to support practitioners in the creation process of their own guidelines. For example by using the identified categories as a checklist or guidance for the creation of social media guidelines. On the other hand, the academic discussion might profit from the results of this study, which as far as the authors know, is the first approach depending on the analysis of existing social media guidelines. The different contexts we identified may serve as a good starting point for further research in this field.

One limitation of our work is that it is, reasoned by a lack of existing literature, rather explorative and regards only a small sample of SMGs created by enterprises with nearly similar characteristics, which leads to the fact that these findings are not generizable. A next logical step in our research is to validate our identified categories and content-groups by analyzing further social media guidelines, for example those of smaller companies or of enterprises which are located in different countries.

REFERENCES