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## **EXPLORING THE ROLE OF BUSINESS SOCIAL NETWORKING FOR ORGANIZATIONS**

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### **Abstract**

This article explores the relationship between communication, with the emphasis on public relations, and social network perspectives. What, then, does social networking for business mean in communication, particularly in public relations? This paper argues that business social networking play an important role in improving organizations communications. The goal of our paper is to identify the basic characteristics of social networks and its role for public relations for the effective implementation of social networking initiatives and tools in the workplace. Business social networking tools such as Facebook and LinkedIn are being used by organizations to reach the corporate objectives and to create a positive company image. Specific social networks, such the personalised networks of influence, are perceived to be one of the main strategic resources for organizations.

**Key words:** internal communication, business social networking, public relations

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## **Introduction**

The aim of this article is to offer critical reflection on the way in which the concept of social networking for business has been used. There are clear signs that organizations are implementing social networks as a tool to improve internal communication and to deepen customer relationships. Many companies are continuing to incorporate advertising on affinity networks in their campaigns to reach highly targeted audiences with measurable response rates (Davis Kho, 2007). Also Gonzalez and others (2014) argue that network synergy refers to the combination of benefits from multiple networks to produce joint effects that are greater than the sum of their individual effects.

People often associate social networks, socialization and interaction groups of people with similar interests. Social networking is becoming an inevitable part of life and work in the field of communication. This represents communication channels to actively communicate with users by helping companies to follow new trends. Social networks are particularly suitable for increasing brand awareness, recognition of the company and its bid to improve customer relations and to create new user groups. To achieve these objectives it is necessary to analyse the current situation and create a communication strategy. Organization has to coordinate a variety of strategies, tactics, messages and communication channels to create a message that will be clear and convincing users. And most importantly, it must be a message to be shared and recommended by friends and acquaintances by users.

Communication is at the heart of managing relations with their publics. Organization should develop the relationships with their publics. Organizations, inform customers about new products and prices that remind them of their existing products and attempting to make a positive impact on their perception of using different communication tools. Also organizations communicate with various other stakeholders such as employees, government, suppliers, brokers and investors in their efforts to manage relationships for mutual benefit. Until recently, the nature of the message tended mainly to be clear. Internet has changed the nature of the organization to communicate with their stakeholders in ways that are unprecedented. Communication with stakeholders will no longer be a one-way, and stakeholders are increasingly communicating with each other (either around or not an organization, as the case may be), this communication becomes infinitely more complicated. Public relations become more like managing effective communication with stakeholders - is evolving to become managing communication among stakeholders, as well (Van der Merwe et al, 2005.)

Definition of a press release is also renovated. Press release is no longer just a tool, media relations. Now, with the Internet search capabilities, a direct-to-consumer website online content to consider. This reversal in the news means that consumers now have access to the press releases at the same time. This has important implications for the content of the press release, style and design (Croft, 2008).

The initial period of the Internet has been characterized by an Internet user who had a connection with the website completely passive role. The web site visitors have read and accept only what companies or individuals offered on their websites. With the development of new services arising from the programming language, an Internet connection, these users are becoming more curious, difficult, important and active. Consequently the dialog began to emerge between the website and its visitors. In addition to establishing two-way communication, social networking allows users to add comments, participate in forums, adding pictures and videos on the site, assessing the contributors and content, connect with other site visitors, exchange views and build a network of contacts (Skr, 2007).

Social networking is a way of communicating and making friends online. There are a variety of popular networking sites, and if you can effectively create a positive image of the company. Social networking means that there are websites where people can find and connect with each other and may have an impact on a specific target public. The advantages of building a social network as a tool of public relations for the organization are as follows. Social networking can increase the production of content by user organizations. It can also help to build social network feedback systems, generating members of online social networks and interests can enable sharing, and you can begin to build relationships (Hozjan, 2010).

In literature, social networking is often mentioned as a key factor for business success and has been given a lot of attention. This article contests this view by highlighting the positive effects of social networks on achieving success in the field of public relations in general.

The methodology used in this paper, refers to a review of the basic literature in the field of public relations, literature review on the Internet as a social space and social networks. We will use secondary data sources.

Our contribution consists of three parts. In the first part we introduce the concept of communication and present different definitions of public

relations. The next section refers to the computer-generated information and the definition of the Internet as a medium. We also introduce the differences between the Internet and traditional media. We tried to set up the internet in social context. The message is the essence of the Internet and can establish relations between people. So, the Internet is creating a virtual community. So follow the chapter define the concept of virtual communities and present their characteristics. People are increasingly associated with social media on the Internet; we present the growing importance of public relations. In the third chapter we discuss the use of social media in public relations. The Internet is changing the practice of public relations, so we make this change.

Overall, in this paper is to present a study, the objectives of which are:

- to introduce the definitions of communications and public relations,
- to explore basic characteristics of social networks and its role for public relations, and
- to improve the understanding of using social networking to create a positive company image.

### **Social networks as a part of communications**

The constitutive nature of communication can be said to be the defining feature of another key idea reflected in public relations – the concept of social networks (Pieczka, 2011). Goodman (2012) state that: “in recent years has been a transformation of the corporate communication discipline through dramatic consolidation of internal and external functions -- marketing, public relations, and employee relations. Increases in internal focus are supported by greater budgets for corporate culture, intranet, and employee communication functions”.

Many authors differently define the concept of communication(s). From the simplest definition where communication is define as the social interaction through messages (Kalla, 2005). We can also said that that communication is “an interchange of ideas, facts and emotions, by two or more persons, with the use of words, letters and symbols based on the technical problem of how accurately the symbols can be transmitted, the semantic problem of how, precisely, the symbols convey the desired meaning, and the effectiveness of how the received meaning affects conduct in the desired way” (Oliver, 1997: 64). In order to understand better the nature of communication(s) and some of the definitions for communications will now be examined.

The impact on the communication profession over the next few years will mean a renewed focus on crisis management and the role

communication plays to ensure companies, employees, clients and customers have the tools and mechanisms in place for business continuity, minimal confusion and chaos, and zero human casualties. Crisis communication planning and the ability to lead come hell or high water may become a required skill set for professional communicators (Kalla, 2005).

Some authors distinguish between communication and effective communication (Bove'e and Thill, 2000); whereas others accept the message, in order to always refer to the effective communication (Oliver, 1997). For example, Bove'e and Thill (2000: 4) believes that effective communication takes place only when the participants "common understanding, encourage others to take action, and to encourage people to think in new ways". But on the other site, Oliver (1997) argues that communication is always a two-way process of convincing.

The concept of integrated internal communications is by many authors seen like the cross-section between communication and organisational life, i.e. business, organisational, management, and corporate communication (Gruning, 2002; Kalla, 2005).

### **The definitions of communities and social network**

In the business arena, working adults use LinkedIn to manage their professional images and network with others, non-profit organizations advertise events and connect with volunteers through their social networking pages, and businesses use these media to mainstream news items or update product information (Kane and others, 2014).

A common definition of social network doesn't exist. Social network analysis has appeared in the social sciences for nearly a century (Borgatti et al. 2009; in Kane et al., 2014). What makes social network unique, at least among the social sciences, is its reliance on the network as its central construct. Kane and other (2014: 276) that a network is a set of nodes interrelated by dyadic ties. The nodes, or actors, can consist of any kind of entity, from individuals to collectives (for example organizations, countries etc.). Ties typically are conceptualized as a social relation, such as »friend of« or »boss of«, or a dyadic interaction, such as »talks to« or sells to.« Furthermore, the set of ties that link nodes is not dependent; rather, ties link up to form paths, which provides a mechanism for nodes to affect one another indirectly (Kane et al., 2014: 276). Ellison (2007: 211; in Kane et al., 2014) define social network sites as »web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and

(3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system«. Therefore, Kane and others (2014: 279) updated definition of social media networks and said that: »it possesses four essential features, such that users (1) have a unique *user profile* that is constructed by the user, by members of their network, and by the platform; (2) *access digital content* through, and *protect* it from, various *search* mechanisms provided by the platform; (3) can *articulate* a list of other users with whom they share a *relational connection*; and (4) *view and traverse* their connections and those made by others on the platform.«

### **The definition of public relations**

The discussion of public relations theory here focuses on concepts of symmetrical communication, relationship management, and responsibility (Pieczka, 2011: 109). Valentini (2010: 154) argued that in order to possess influential networks, public relations practitioners need to establish strong personal relationships with different influential groups. A personalised network of influence is a type of social network whose influence is exercised on a specific network of publics. The influence is personalised because it is obtained through continuous and exclusive face-to-face interactions between one individual and another (Valentini, 2010: 154).

One of the best-known models of public relations is the one Grunig and Hunt (1984) developed, in which they conceptualize the practice of public relations as consisting of four models. These are the press agency model; the public information model; the two-way asymmetrical model; and the two-way symmetrical model (Ibraheem & Odozi Ogwezzy-Ndisika 2012: 23-24).

The discipline of public relations often moves in a dynamic rhythm and is driven by the changing competitive landscape and unpredictable shifts in public opinion. Public relations are a component of management who are responsible for the efficiency and effectiveness of relationships between an organization and its publics. Public relations management consist of making sense, directing, planning, organizing, implementing, monitoring and evaluation of projects.

However, there are different definitions of public relations. Among them are differences arise because the authors of these definitions are not uniform with regard to public relations and communication. Some authors define the communication is broader than public relations. Communication is seen as the management of communication functions within the organization.



Public relations on the other hand are seen as one of the sub-functions, mainly in the form of publicity, public relations and marketing support. For example, Kotler and others (1999) defined public relations as one of the most important tools of marketing. Kotler and others (1999) also define public as any group that has an actual or potential interest in or impact on the company's ability to achieve your goal.

The authors have different views of the Public Relations and someone see public relations as a broader concept. Cutlip and other authors of public relations defined it as the management function that establishes and maintains mutually beneficial relationships between an organization and the public, which determine the performance of the organization. Notwithstanding the definition of public relations is viewed as a management function, which leads research to determine public attitudes, then plans and implements communications programs that earn public understanding and acceptance (Cutlip et al., 2000).

Gruban and others (1997) define public relations as a function that is planned and processed with the aim of influencing the creation of a positive public impact on the basis of mutual communication. With the help of long-term internal and external communications company can maintain or improve the company's reputation. Indirectly through the company pursues its business objectives (Gruban et al., 1997). Thus, we can assume that is what discipline is concerned with communication, but what is involved with the "relationship" (Pieczka, 2011).

### **Social networks for business and its role for public relations**

Beyond the role that social networks can play for an organization's internal and customer communication, online professional communities like LinkedIn and Ecademy encourage connections between different companies (Davis Kho, 2007). Computer-based social interaction has been around for 20 years or more (Inks, 2012). It will, however, be difficult for public relations to fully realize the potential of social media if challenges it poses are not fully unravelled. The most immediate challenge lies in identifying the more credible and influential opinion leaders, who are capable of driving effective word-of-mouth (Ibraheem & Odozi Ogwezzy-Ndisika 2012: 22).

Ibraheem & Ogwezzy Ndisika (2012: 23) state that social media holds huge potential for social and business interaction. It provides a means of demonstrating that public relations, as a mutually reinforcing exchange of meaning between organizations and defined publics, are closer to being a reality than an ideal. It also brings out with new urgency the debates around the history and models of public relations that Grunig

and Hunt proposed in 1984. The next section discusses this in greater detail by looking at the models of interaction between organizations and their publics, encapsulated in Grunig and Hunt's (1984) four models of public relations practice (in Ibraheem & Ogwezzy-Ndisika, 2012: 23).

The Internet has had a transformative influence on corporate communication from its beginnings to its current form as Web 2.0. That influence extends not only to the introduction of a wide array of new communication channels, but also to the very core of what we consider to be corporate communication. The extraordinarily high levels of interactivity and transparency enabled by the Internet have made the elemental practices of corporate communication – corporate reputation, employee communication, shareholder communication, community relations, and public affairs (Goodman, 2012). Also Shu and Chuang (2011) argue that many organizations realized that it is important for the success of an organization to participate in social networks.

Craig (2010) argues that no other business discipline has the capability to help transform organizations like public relations and puts the following definition: »Social media can help it achieve this goal and it is already - partially because it is inherently a dialogic communication mechanism. ... It is in this area of transforming organisations that public relations must shine and provide business worth, or else it will become marginalised. Because of the synergy between social media and two-way symmetrical communication, public relations is the logical owner of social media from a strategic and tactical perspective, not least because dialogue and accommodation are essential to both.«

We are facing the rapidly changing nature of media in our society. Thus, a re-examination of the public sphere along with ideas about the social responsibility of the press and in light of new media realities is instructive. Such a careful consideration of these combined ideas will lead to questions about the nature or actual existence of a public sphere and of "mass" media. As a result, transformational change in the world of media and in the practice of corporate communication is occurring at an accelerating rate of speed (Penning 2006: 396).

Rapid environmental change also brings high-speed public relations responses, which can be assured with tool of social networks. The key elements of public relations in a high-speed environment are: creation and communication of commercial values, exploiting diversity by creating values relevant to the varied requirements and tastes, participatory public relations with opportunities for consumers to engage in a dialogue, coherence, consistency, and continuity in everything a

brand communicates, in all media and in all vehicles of communication are essential to minimize the powerful forces of demassification in the volatile business environment pulling a brand in different directions (Martin, Jr. 2006: 306).

In recent years practitioners of public relations are putting greater attention on the Internet with a focus on how best to adapt traditional practices with new technologies (Ryan, 2003). The discipline of public relations is dealing with the management of relationships with stakeholders of the organization. The function of public relations in most cases the department dealing with these unintended messages. Increases the power of interest groups, the public relations practitioners must develop strategies to deal with the growing power of different interest groups on the Internet (Van der Merwe et al., 2005).

Traditional and new media can differentiate by factors like credibility and experience. For example the "new" media can hardly claim the same experience, objectivity and credibility as a traditional print or electronic journalist. Their result often tends to lack objectivity credibility. Instead of waiting patiently for the scheduled evening/morning newscast or print run, the public has developed a crushing need to access news and information practically before it exists, and so there is a growing dash to find out what's new or breath taking as quickly as possible via blogs, vodcasts, social network sites and other "new" media that mushroom exponentially on a daily basis. The "new" media is growing popularity by its ability to address specific target audiences has the potential to impact negatively (Croft, 2008).

Internet has also a lot of benefits for an organization such as providing more and better information to the public. Consequently organizations must adapt and become available to users also on the Internet. For the effective and successful communications, organizations have to identify their target audiences. For the organizations it was much to define specific groups and to choose the appropriate medium for reaching them. Internet characteristics can allow to more over the geographic boundaries and has the possibility of breaking national, cultural and political differences and to target publics all over the world. At the same time we are witnessing the traditional media moving online, which means to attract both old and new audiences, and this imposes difficulties when trying to accurately determine its public (Ihator, 2001).

One of the main differences between traditional media and the Internet is the nature of the public. Burnett and Marshall (2003, p.201) states that "the Internet allow your audience to shift from a passive, hierarchy,

centralization and isolation to a more active participation in the production of meanings, interactivity, non-linearity, conformity and decentralized. Internet as a medium also differs from traditional media in their Hypertexts, multimedia, reciprocity and timeliness. This is a complex communication platform that produces a complex network of interconnected activities and communications arenas". We can say that interactivity creates internet. With the information we can create different content and indirectly increase the efficiency of the Internet as a cultural phenomenon (Burnett and Marshall, 2003).

Before the introduction of the Internet, organizations can monitor all forms of communication. With the introduction of Internet, organizations need to identify those social networks that represent their target audience. Social capital can be seen in the context of the term social network, which represents personal connection between participants (Hanson, 2001). The advantages of building a social network as a tool of public relations for the organization is that public relations on the internet, including cost effective because there is no intermediary, and also implement virtual events, conferences and research.

Social networks can be defined as a type of virtual communities which can be affected by the online environment. We can also said that social network is a group of individuals who interact through specific and well-defined medium. Each social network, which is connected with the organization, represents a potential target organization. Each should therefore be assessed in terms of potential impact on the organization. We also need to determine the level of participation of organizations in it and build a relationship with her. When users for some time to participate in such social network, gain some trust other members. Organizations can establish areas of knowledge and other users can contact them when you need help. Those who are the most trusted and most know they also have a higher status than other participants. There are internal norms and rules of conduct, conflicts battle for control in times of crisis, as well as integration to achieve common interests (Holtz, 2002).

This is not necessarily restricted to organizations that have already established social networks, you can build yourself. Structure is established when members of a recognized common communication features of their professional, social characteristics or the common values that they want to maintain or expand. In parallel with the establishment of such facilities, additional sources of information, communication, according to hierarchical levels, is a common tasks

created. Additional resources are forcing people to communicate and specifying the topics of communication.

### **The use of social networks in public relations practice**

As demonstrated by the popularity of social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter, Internet social networks have become an important part of everyday life, and many companies are now involved in these networks, either as service providers or as participants. In addition, the inter-organizational networks are becoming increasingly common phenomenon in many industries, not just on the Internet. Despite the growing importance of networks for businesses, there is little theoretical study on corporate social responsibility in these networks, and how these responsibilities impact of different types of networks (Chen and Bouvain, 2009). We describe corporate social responsibility in social networks, which have been developed from studies on the social networks of individuals and can be used to shed light on corporate social responsibility in social networks.

Social responsibility of each organization is resulting from the impact of their activities on society in terms of improving the well-being of society. At the same time we want the organization to gain personal benefit. Special role in the revised framework of social responsibility have also public relations. We encounter the development of international campaigns of social networks in the field of public relations, particularly with regard to charitable events. They must identify key target social and demographic groups against which an organization can focus their online efforts (Baker, 2008). In this way, they can focus on different target groups.

With the introduction of social media, public relations have the opportunity to use new digital media and thus become more important in its communication strategy. Social networks are a type of virtual communities, affecting a specific group of consumers. We are talking about the personal impact when communication is performed directly. The impact is on the network members in their personal relationships and how to understand each other. Users of social networks show some common features, such as searching for information, as well as a participant in these networks want to encourage interaction and dialogue.

The function of public relations is not only informing the public on the crisis, but most important, and according to some authors, such as Sears (2009), an equivalent of marketing communication online. With the help of public relations company builds its image, identity and

reputation. Public relations help to influence consumer behaviour, which is consequently reflected in the shopping (and other) decisions to the public, which is engaged in business. Advantages of public relations in comparison to other marketing communication tools are mainly the following: lower costs, greater self-confidence, the ability to reach certain groups, but requires careful strategic planning and choosing the right activities at the right time.

Social networks are also used in other areas of marketing communications, for example in the field of sales promotion. Some companies support the use of social networks for business purposes, because they believe that the positive effect and encourage testing for certain products or services (Sears, 2009). Organizations using social networks must be aware that using social networks can not directly sell their products, but you can build some relationships through forums, blogs and other forms of social media.

Another area of marketing communications is the development of an interactive Internet home page. With the increasing popularity of the Internet, companies are spending a lot of money for the creation of websites protocols and procedures, which include sophisticated tools for the treatment of purchase transactions to ensure customer information, gathering competitive intelligence, marketing and monitoring the implementation of the city. However, the organization would like to know how effective the Web, or can be as a marketing tool, before they adopt as part of their marketing strategy (Lynn, 2002).

Twitter has become the latest media in public relations, where you can find most of the new information, topics and answers. Many publicly present their products or services to the public via Twitter, which has a strong influence on some other forms of public relations (Žbogar, 2010). Yaxley (2008) noted some examples of how public relations practitioners engaged in social networking:

- Social networking is about engaging in conversations, so that the organization must be ready to leave comments.
- Organisations should also monitor what is being said about the organization or brand through Google Alerts (<http://www.google.com/alerts>).
- It is not important to proactively manage online footprint of the organization, because it is important to be aware of what is being said, and to ensure that it is accurate, reliable information.
- It is important to connect with others online - point of networking is to connect with colleagues, contacts and information sources.

- When sharing information organizations add value to their presence - what information the organization may share or offer that will be useful to others and help build the organization's reputation online?
- Blogging and participating in social networks can optimize the organization's presence on the web and what the organization has to say more prominent.
- Social networking is a big time sucker that's dedicated to your use of web-based tools, rather than aimlessly dealing with trivia, and look for smart opportunities to deal with the media, for example through mobile technologies.
- Professional communicators use video and audio as well as the written word, so that the organization look out for useful podcasts, which can be downloaded on an iPod or mobile phone to keep up with the latest happenings on the web.

As the Internet has evolved as a marketing tool, consumers are faced with the challenge of wedding anonymous website visit with offline data to facilitate targeting. Banner and advertising targeting rises on the web behavioural indicators, such as keywords or visitors looking for a site that you see in the past, which are recorded by cookies (Goodwin, 2007).

In the case that organizations reach a specific goal, it is necessary to possess a certain level of impact on social networks. The degree of influence is a term that is closely linked with power. The impact of social networks can often be described as capacity or as something that allows it to do things or to do other than we want. According to Grunig (1992; in Valentini, 2010: 156), those organizations which have excellent communication departments are those which have a senior communication manager as a member of the dominant coalition, that is, a public relation practitioner that has obtained enough power to influence overall performances and values of the organization.

Although importance will be placed on understanding the proliferation of channels driven by technology, the range of options available, and the strengths and weaknesses of each, a fascination with channels shouldn't distract communicators from addressing the bigger issue of having poor content to communicate in the first place.

### **Directions for further research**

Rapid changes in global business practices, technology, and media require creative communication, using "new" media as social networks for business. Future research should also be emphasized issues such as international communication and the role of social media. We need to

be aware of trends such as globalization and the internationalization of business, so that more attention should be paid to research communication strategy. The media are also increasingly globalized and that in turn leads to some globalization, social and cultural factors in the business environment. For example, interest in environmental issues is increasing in many countries, and the media has played an important role in this. Similarly, the globalization of the media also helped create some of globalized social phenomena such as international teen culture, which are familiar with the use of social networking.

The consequences of this would be that the organizations targeted group of consumers who have similar desires and needs on a global or perhaps a European level, without the need to rely on national differences. This would open new possibilities for the use of techniques of public relations and social media. It would also be very useful to explore intercultural communication and its impact on the practice of public relations and social media, too.

Following the trends of recent data would be useful to explore the deeper concept of the "Next Frontier" outside multimedia technologies and discusses video streaming, broadcasting, virtual worlds and mobile communications. All these issues should be discussed with experts in public relations who want to optimize their communications in today's competitive business environment.

## **Conclusions**

This paper offers a framework to highlight the issue of business social networking. Globalization and the Internet have transformed the function of public relations, outlining best practices and providing strategic advice for communicating. Organizations can use a variety of techniques like popular social networking tools like Twitter and Facebook and reach new online audiences and create new marketplaces. The role of public relations is no longer in doubt. It is a function that plans and manages relationships with key target audiences and company stakeholders. Public relations allows organization to alter opinions, views, attitudes, goals, products, countries, companies, institutions and individuals, no matter in what capacity the individual act and what are the mutual expectations of the environment. The function of public relations is to be the equivalent part of marketing communication mix. Through public relations firm builds its image, identity, and reputation. Public relations help to impact on consumer attitudes, which are consequently reflected in the shopping (and other) decisions to the public, which company is involved.



With the introduction of the Internet environment is changing the practice of public relations. The social media includes the internet too, and public relations practitioners can create a business social networking sites. Social networks are based on interactions among participants, and can help to establish a relationship, shared consciousness, a sense of belonging and moral responsibility to the community. Social networks have changed the fundamental role of public relations as a practice and discipline.

Virtual communities are manifested through social media, which also include a social network. For organizations, it is important that these proactive media work, joining the conversation virtual communities perform other activities such as gathering feedback, conflict resolution, and support for consumers, which can be seen in virtual communities and businesses. We can conclude that social media can be an effective tool for public relations.

First, the article offers a way of looking at communications through the changing word of communication. It enables us to have a different point of view to see all possible aspects of information technology changing the way of communication which is taking place within communication. Second, viewing social network as a medium used in public relations field may help us to understand how communication contributes to the organisation's positive image. This warrants further research to be conducted.

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