

Managing Knowledge on Social Media-An Empirical Study of Social Media Adoption in Hotel Organizations

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Abstract—By adopting social media, many organizations try to exploit new forms of marketing, interaction, relationship, and knowledge sharing. The usage of knowledge management in organizations is changing with the development of Information Technology (IT), like social media, that support the processes of knowledge sharing and knowledge creation. Information and knowledge has become an important competitive asset for hotel organizations, and the usage of social media in order to spread and gain knowledge has affected the hotel organizational structure, strategy and management. The study focuses on hotel organizations and seeks to understand how the adoption of social media supports the management of personal and collective knowledge in hotels. Results show that the hotels has employees with individual knowledge of social media but it is not spread throughout the organizations, lacking to create collective knowledge.

Index Terms—knowledge management, knowledge, individual knowledge, collective knowledge, knowledge sharing, social media, adoption, hotel organizations

I. INTRODUCTION

By adopting social media, many organizations try to exploit new forms of marketing, interaction, relationship, and knowledge sharing [1] [2]. Social media has become a way to gain more organizational knowledge but new knowledge is also needed to understand and use social media [2]. The new ways of communicating through social media has changed how the hotel organizations market themselves but also how they communicate with hotel guests and stakeholders [3] [4]. By using social media, hotel organizations are discovering new ways to share and collect knowledge with and from their customers, stakeholders, not just inside the organization but also outside organizational boundaries [5]. One of the biggest challenges for organizations is to manage its knowledge assets [6]. The management of knowledge in organizations is often referred to as Knowledge Management (KM) and it is argued to be one of the most important strategic tools for organizations when it comes to creating organizational competitiveness. KM is defined as a process where knowledge within the organization is captured and shared [7]. Researchers underline the

differences between individual and collective knowledge in relation to KM. [8] defines the individual knowledge as interpretations of information being collected and experienced by individuals. The collective knowledge is defined as knowledge that has been shared by individuals in the organization in order to understand organizational tasks.

By adopting social media, hotels are in need for new knowledge on using social media that must to be captured, learned and managed. Knowledge capturing is the process of gathering and identifying useful information and spreading it through the whole organization. Knowledge capturing includes a fundamental portion of both knowledge management and organizational learning [9].

Hotel organizations are the empirical focus of this study. Information is argued to be the essence of the tourism and hospitality industry, therefore hotel organizations has to manage information and knowledge [4]. The hotel industry is sensitive to trends and has an exceptionally high competition. The hotel customers are very flexible, and the hotels often have a high employee turnover. The usage of social media has become an important part of hotels marketing strategy, which in turn effects the hotel organizational structure, strategy and management [10] [11] [3]. This article seeks to investigate how the adoption of social media affects the management of individual and collective knowledge in hotel organizations.

The usage of KM in organizations is changing with the development of Information Technology (IT) like social media that support the processes of knowledge sharing and knowledge creation [12]. The sharing of knowledge focuses a lot on the individuals in organizations. Reference [13] argues that knowledge is a product of individuals, and that individuals play an important role in implementing KM strategies and structure. Previous attitudes towards the purpose of knowledge management involved centrally managed knowledge depositories often with structured and controlled access [12]. KM is also highly connected with organizational structure that describes work roles, control mechanism and work activities.

Many organizations have experienced a change in the organizational structure, from hierarchical structures,

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towards a greater reliance on decentralized leadership and teamwork where both collective and individual knowledge is crucial [14]. The trend and approach towards KM today focus more and more on social media that has made it possible to provide knowledge openly and inexpensively. It has also become more personalized and more focused on meeting individual needs [12]. Social media has changed how knowledge is spread within the organization, making it possible to perform KM activities outside the organization but also in new ways, e.g. in social media channels [3] [4]. The traditional KM model that is based on a top down approach is changing by the usage of social media.

The initial user of social media in organizations is often an individual enthusiasts and therefore is the introduction of social media in organizations often seen as a grass root initiative, or a bottom-up initiative [15] [16]. These factors make the KM of social media different from other knowledge management systems [16] [2]. A tension can occur between social media and KM since there is a need to redefine earlier conventional organizational structures like roles, responsibilities, planning, control and hierarchy, in order to fully be able to embrace the benefits of social media [17] [16].

Researchers like Reference [16] [2] [3] argue that there is no question that the use of social media in organizations is increasing, but how it is used within the organization and how the knowledge concerning it is managed remains uncertain. Therefore, new knowledge is needed for the hotel organizations to be able to build up competitive advantage by using social media. The hotel organizations are becoming more and more knowledge-intensive as a result of severe use of technology and in the creation of its core product – service, which is based on interaction between hotel employees and the hotel guests. The social media are of importance for KM, knowledge-building purposes and organizational learning, this due to their ability of enabling a new form of interaction between individual and collective knowledge processes [18].

A. Earlier Research

Research on technology adoption in the hospitality industry has drawn a great amount of attention from researchers. It has mainly focused on two fields, first, the consumer perspective, that is, how consumers are using social media in relation to the organization and secondly, research that has focused on the tourism and hospitality industry's use of social media marketing and the effects and return on investment [3]. The research on adoption of social media in hotel organizations is quite thin. However, the knowledge of social media adoption is in its early stages and there is little knowledge and research of the social media adoption behavior in hotel organizations [4]. Knowledge management in the hospitality industry is gaining more interest among researchers, but there are still limitations in the research field [19].

Tourism and hospitality researchers argue that KM is limited in both research and practice in the tourism and hospitality industry [20] [4]. Many of the studies of the

hotel industry concentrate on technology adoption are out-of-date. The majority of these studies are using quantitative methodology.

II. AIM AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This article seeks to investigate how the adoption of social media supports the management of individual and collective knowledge in hotel organizations. The following research questions are addressed: *How is the individual vs. collective knowledge on social media managed in the hotel organizations?*

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In order to examine how the adoption of social media supports the management of personal and collective knowledge in hotel organizations, a qualitative, explorative approach has been chosen. Researchers encourage qualitative research approaches when studying technology adoption [21] Qualitative research methods can also create insights in the research questions [22]. Furthermore, case studies can be appropriate in studies that intend to answer questions like "why" and "how" and are descriptive in nature). It can also contribute with exposure of crucial patterns and behaviors [23].

A. Case Study

The study is a part of a PhD- thesis and focus on 14 hotel organizations within an international hotel chain. The hotels are located in seven different European countries (Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Finland, Italy, Netherlands and France) and a total of 22 semi-structured interviews with hotel managers and marketers have been conducted during the period of May 2014 to December 2014. Each interview lasted about an hour and was recorded and then transcribed [23]. The interviews were focused on the usage of social media marketing in the hotel organizations e.g. how the process of using social media has been performed, what social media channels the hotels use and how the social media strategy has been developed. Follow-up questions were also asked, to embrace individual understandings and knowledge from the different managers being interviewed. A qualitative analysis has been used.

IV. THEORETICAL FRAMWORK

A. Social Media in Organizations

Social media, or social software, includes a wide collection of communication tools, based on Internet Technologies (IT) [1] and is based upon the technological fundamentals of Web 2.0, that can be described as a platform for social interaction where the user-generated content is in focus [24] [1]. During the last decade, a large number of organizations has implemented social media channels such as social networks like Facebook and wikipedias with the purpose of marketing, increase customer service or/and enabling knowledge exchange between employees within the organization. The increased use of social media by organizations has opened the organizational boundaries towards the outside,

including stakeholders and customers [6]. The use of social media marketing as a marketing tool in organizations is increasing [25]. Marketing in social media differs from traditional marketing due to the possibilities of creating two way communication [26]. It can also be used to create consisting relationships with customers. The new technology has created new challenges for marketers and other employees both on understanding the new technology and knowing what kind of material to publish in social media channels [4].

Earlier research show that social media can contribute to knowledge exchange in the organizational context [27]. Researchers argue that social media tools do not automatically implement themselves and that the biggest barrier to overcome is to make the employees use the social media tools [3]. The study of social media marketing in spa hotels shows that the organization of the social media activities is difficult to manage and that the hotels tend to be too dependent on one or a few enthusiasts among the employees [15].

B. Knowledge Management

KM is a way of control and develop organizations internal knowledge resources and has been considered as the key for organizations to capture and control the knowledge assets [9].

Knowledge can be incorporated in the organizations technology, infrastructure, standards, routines and methods [28]. It is created through an intertwining of the various forms of knowledge: tacit, explicit, individual and collective [9]. Explicit knowledge is often visible and easy to identify, can be easily coded, stored and transmitted [12]. By contrast, tacit knowledge is not easily visible and expressible, but is highly personal, hard to formalize and difficult to codify and store. It is distributed between individuals through various forms of learning experiences, that includes knowledge translation [9][20]. Tacit knowledge, is normally developed from practice and experience, and shared through very interactive communication [9].

Individual knowledge that is not passed on and shared to other members of the organizations can be looked upon as invisible "orphan knowledge" and can be knowledge loss to the organization [9]. Individuals in organization also collect knowledge and learn by looking at other organizations and imitate their behavior.

Organizations imitate each other when being presented to new practices and products and it is a way to avoid not to fall behind other organizations development [29].

C. Individual vs. Collective Knowledge

There is a significant difference between individual knowledge and collective knowledge [8]. While individual knowledge is collected and interpreted by the individual, the collective knowledge is defined as knowledge that have been shared by individuals in the organization in order to understand organizational tasks [30] [8].

Collective knowledge also refers to knowledge that is common to all members of an organization and can be defined as knowledge that is unspoken or invisible [8]. It

is highly associated with organizational knowledge and with the organizational culture. Collective knowledge can be also defined as the result of persons contributing their personal knowledge to "best practices-lessons learned, repository-based" knowledge systems [31]. To summarize, these two types of knowledge can be said to add organizational competitiveness and affect the organizational performance. When discussing knowledge, it is difficult not to talk about learning, or in this case organizational learning, since they are interrelated and refers to a process where the members of the organization improves its knowledge and understanding [32]. Hence, organizational learning is a process of supporting organizations ability to transfer information to valued knowledge, which can be used as a competitive advantage.

Organizational learning can be separated from individual learning [32]. The first category is created first when staff members gain new knowledge and transfer it to other members of the organization, changing and developing ways of conducting service and other routines. If the new knowledge is not transferred to others, there has only been an individual learning process.

V. FINDINGS

A. The Strategy of Social Media Teams

The decision of implementing social media as a marketing tool in the hotel chain was a strategic decision taken by the hotel chain management. Before the decision was taken, none of the hotels were allowed to use social media. Many of the respondents describe that they would have liked to start using social media earlier, because of the benefits they ascribe the usage of social media but also because of customer demand. Yet, some of the respondents are critical against the big focus on implementing social media and says that they would like to focus on being hoteliers and give the hotel guests great service.

The hotel chain has provided the different hotels with social media guidelines and also offers training in how to use social media, although only a few of the hotels has taken the opportunity of using this training. Many of the hotels have created "social media teams", collecting employees from different department, that consists of marketing managers but also sales managers and employees from other departments that has the knowledge and interest in social media usage. All of respondents say that that adoption of social media takes a lot of time, and that they are expected to use and learn social media on top of their other work tasks.

"Well none of us has in our job description that we should be part of a social media team. So when I started, I went around and asked who was interested and was trying to get with those who were interested and came from different departments. The security manager is the one who is most interested and when you are interested, it is often better. He takes a lot of nice pictures and publishes them and we get a lot of likes." (Sales manager 2)

All of the hotels have a "control system" concerning who is allowed to post pictures and comments in social

media channels. Often, this responsibility lies on the marketing manager. Although, they are not always the ones with most experience and knowledge of social media usage.

B. Social Media Channels

All of the hotels in the study use Facebook as their main social media channel. They post pictures, campaigns, comment, and share other material handed to them by the hotel chain. Some of the hotels use Instagram and only a few uses Twitter. Many of the respondents says that the decisions on which social media channels to use is affected by their own knowledge and usage, e.g. several hotels does not use twitter due to the managers lack of knowledge about that specific social media channel. The hotels are not only active in their own social media accounts but also in social media channels that are produced by customers, so called User Generated Content (UGC) like Mytravel. The hotels use a software program that collect information on what is written about their hotel in social media, and other hotels. The information is presented daily and the managers get messages on their smartphones when their hotel is mentioned in social media.

“We have the tool from the hotel chain management, and it is calculating and scanning what people are talking about on blogs and so on. I look at it all the time, I have to because if I wouldn’t use it I would have to spend much more time on all the [social media] pages” (Marketing manager 3)

The respondents says that by keeping updated on what customers says about their and competitors, they can improve customer service.

C. Collecting Knowledge

What to post, and what pictures to share is of great concern to the respondents. They find it difficult to know what type of material produce and post to create interest and relations with their customers. Some of the hotels look outside of the hotel chain for knowledge, hiring PR-firms that both educate the hotel staff and help to produce marketing material meant to be used in social media. The term “learning by doing” is often used to describe how the hotels have adopted social media. Some respondents educate themselves by looking at how others, competitors and customers, use social media.

“My boss gave me the task to make a social media implementation plan so I’m in the process of it. So I was watching this video on YouTube om how companies market themselves and how businesses goes from tactics...the successful companies always goes from the core from the why and then to what.” (Sales manager 5)

Many of the respondents say that the lack of knowledge and experience on how to use and what to post in social media are restraining them in using social media. Several of them say that they do not use social media in their private lives and that they are not especially interested in using it. A couple of hotels has started what they call “scanning” social media channels, using different hashtags and collection information and analyzing customer needs, demands, and opinions. One

of the hotels uses this information when reaching out to corporate customers in order to sell hotel rooms and arranging conferences.

VI. DISCUSSION

A. Capturing Individual vs. Collective Knowledge

By creating “social media teams”, based on interest, enthusiasm and experience rather than formal knowledge, the hotel creates paths of knowledge transfer that crosses over both professional roles hierarchy [2][9][30]. The need for a control system reveals that the hotel organizations have a need of maintain an organizational structure, where some professional roles and responsibilities are preserved [2]. This, even though it seems to slow down the interaction and spontaneity that lies within the nature of social media.

Just like the result of Lagrosen and Grundén’s study [15] it is not necessarily the marketing managers that are most enthusiastic and skilled about the usage of social media, but people with other tasks within the hotel organization, but on the other hand, they might not be skilled in marketing. It seems like the real management and organizational challenge lies within the “unwrapping” and identification of individual knowledge and the transformation of individual knowledge into organizational or collective knowledge. The individuals in the hotel organizations describe how they look at other organizations usage of social media and imitate. They also look at and imitate [29] how customers act and use social media.

The explicit knowledge is difficult to identify in the empirical material. Very few hotels have documented routines for their social media usage and knowledge [12]. The empirical material shows that little conscious KM activities have been used when adopting social media in the hotel organizations. The guidelines, policies and training can be considered to be planned KM activates and are scarcely used by the hotels that expresses that they rely on individual’s knowledge in social media.

The tacit knowledge however can be argued to lie within the individual knowledge of the social media “enthusiast”, and is not documented or structured [9]. The tacit knowledge is clearly expressed in the employees “doing”. One could also argue that the hotel organizations gather tacit knowledge from others, by looking at how other hotels market themselves. The hotels collect knowledge by observing how others use social media in practice rather than using social media guidelines. By “scanning” the internet, collecting quantitative, and qualitative data and information, one could argue that the hotels are transforming information that later is being used in evaluation and can be transformed to knowledge when it is practiced.

B. Changes in Organizational Structure

The empirical material also shows that the organizational structures has been modified with the adoption of social media, from a “top- down” model to a “bottom-up”, creating new communication paths between different apartments, creating new collaboration and

crossing the traditional paths of roles and responsibilities [2]. The routines of social media activities are scarcely documented, if at all. Instead, the routines can be looked upon as tacit knowledge owned by few individuals at the hotel. The knowledge can therefore be said to be isolated to individuals and therefore be defined as individual knowledge. For the knowledge to be defined as collective knowledge, routines and “know how” should be documented, or spread to several individuals within the organizations.

The empirical material also reveals that since there are few individuals working with social media in the organizations, the social media usage is low when these individuals are working with other tasks. Since hotel organizations has a high frequency in employees, it could be argued that there is a high risk that the organizations loses important knowledge when employees leaves the organizations, if the knowledge is not transferred to other employees in the organization. This can also affect the organizations competitive advantage [28]. However, this requires an organization that supports the social media activities and knowledge management activities linked to them. This has been shown to be difficult for the studied organizations partly due to social media being so new and fast developing and the lack of time to practice them.

VII. CONCLUSIONS

Previous research has highlighted that traditional knowledge management models and organizational knowledge is based on a top - down approach is challenged by the usage of social media. The empirical material of this study shows that the hotel organizations structure has been challenged since the adoption and usage of social media.

Above all, new collaborations and paths of knowledge sharing has arisen when employees with different work tasks and from different departments has gathered in “social media teams”. Although, the hotels have not modified their organizational structures, making room for the social media activities. The empirical material also shows that employees look outside the organization for knowledge, using social media as tool. By watching and imitation other companies, stakeholders and experts, they experience that they learn how social media can be used within their organization. Although, this learning process and process of collecting knowledge could be documented, and structured and managed to a much higher degree in order to achieve both increased individual and organizational knowledge.

Results show that the hotels have employees with individual knowledge of social media but it is not spread throughout the organizations, lacking to create collective knowledge. Therefore, the result of the study suggest that the hotels need to document and spread the tacit, individual knowledge owned by employees in order not to lose the knowledge and be able to use it to gain competitive advantage. I suggest that future research could focus on how KM strategies of capturing and sharing knowledge can be structured.

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