

The core role of leaders in the development of social media strategies

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Abstract: *Social media has become an indispensable factor in the professional life of every individual, from leaders to workers in today's society. With the rapid development of the digital environment, the opportunities and challenges posed by social media require a deep understanding of its importance and influence. In this context, leaders and managers must possess critical roles and competencies to adapt to and leverage the potential of communication. They must have excellent communication and leadership skills and a profound understanding of communication strategies and how to apply them flexibly and effectively. This article presents some key roles and capabilities that leaders and managers need to possess from a strategic perspective.*

Keywords: *Social media; strategy; leadership tools; communication skills; leaders, role.*

1. Introduction

Social media is becoming a powerful leadership tool for generations of leaders in terms of collaboration, openness, and connection with employees and other stakeholders through posting on personal pages. Leaders leverage social media to attract attention, promote program cooperation, and introduce the organization's functions, missions, and collaborative capabilities. This is part of the methods and approaches of leaders and managers with advanced thinking. Although the algorithms of social media platforms

may change, the fundamental principles of planning and mindset for developing strategies remain unchanged.

2. The concept of communication, social media, communication strategy, and social media strategy

2.1. The concept of communication and social media

Communication emerged simultaneously with human awareness of social interaction around 5,000 years ago, initially through oral communication, followed by cave drawings depicting stories. The subsequent forms of

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development were characters (hieroglyphs), which were believed to describe more significant concepts. The invention of writing occurred during the Bronze and Neolithic ages, around the 4th millennium BCE. Many scientists believe that humanity's first complete writing system emerged in Mesopotamia at the end of the 3rd millennium BCE. Over many centuries of development, communication now encompasses the most basic forms of communication (speech, writing) to more complex methods, such as printing techniques, television, radio, telephone, computer, and the Internet.

McLuhan (1964) asserted that "The medium is the message", suggesting that the medium of communication is the message because it profoundly influences how we perceive and interact with information. Meanwhile, Herman & Chomsky (1988), famous for the concept of "manufacturing consent" argued that the media was often used to control and persuade public opinion by framing and presenting specific contexts to shape people's views. According to Jurgen Habermas (1962), the terms "public sphere" and "media" play crucial roles in creating a public space where people can discuss and exchange opinions on social and political issues.

Thus, communication is crucial in forming awareness, creating understanding, and fostering social interaction. Communication is also a method of interaction, describing the process of conveying or exchanging information. The goal of communication is to establish trust and collaboration between the sender and the receiver of information.

Communication can be divided into various groups based on different criteria:

(1) By communication medium, communication includes traditional media (newspapers, television, radio, and

magazines) and digital media (Internet, email, websites, social media, podcasts, and online videos).

(2) By purpose, communication is categorized into commercial communication (used to advertise products, services, and brands) and public communication (used to convey messages about social and political issues and important events).

(3) By the target audience, communication includes internal communication (activities within an organization or enterprise) and external communication (activities targeting customers, partners, and the public outside the organization).

(4) By geographical scope, communication is divided into international communication (used to convey messages or advertisements globally or between countries) and local communication (focused on conveying messages or advertisements to specific communities or regions).

Each communication group has its characteristics and objectives, and understanding and applying them effectively can help optimize communication for specific purposes.

The term "social media" emerged and became popular in the early 21st century when the Internet and social media platforms began to thrive. Websites such as Friendster (2002), MySpace (2003), Facebook (2004), Twitter (2006), and YouTube (2005) are the most popular social media platforms that played a significant role in popularizing this term. As social media became an inseparable part of daily life and online communication, the term "social media" became increasingly popular and widely used in communication and marketing.

According to Clay Shirky (2008), social media is a technology and a social media

revolution with profound impacts on how we interact and form communities. Meanwhile, Nancy K. Baym (2010) asserts that social media is a digital system where users can interact with each other publicly or privately by creating and sharing content through online platforms. Howard Rheingold (2002) further adds that social media is not just about technology but also about community thinking and how we interact in digital spaces.

Social media is considered one of the modern communication trends, strongly linking two sides: the first is society; the second is technology and the Internet (Rimskii, 2011). Nowadays, it is impossible to find any marketing activity or communication campaign without significant and effective participation of social media platforms. Customer service, internal communication, and market research are innovated and become more efficient through social media, achieving financial benefits with the highest efficiency and the lowest costs.

Many open, transparent, and honest online information websites and forums have emerged in the public sector. Social media technology is also essential in removing internal organizational barriers, encouraging collaboration, and creating a new form of "social media business." Social media networks and social media technologies are incredibly diverse. The commonality lies in the technological infrastructure that allows people to communicate, collaborate, share, and contribute. Many technologies serve different purposes for different users. For example, Facebook is a platform for sharing with friends and family, a community bulletin board, a news aggregator site, an alternative entertainment channel, or the world's most powerful advertising channel. YouTube is famous for its videos and is the world's second most popular search engine after Google.

Pinterest is an "idea search tool," not a "social network."

In addition, other technologies are not considered "social" but have social elements, such as Spotify, the online music streaming, podcast, and video service, which has continuously added community and social aspects to its products, encouraging people to share music with friends; Spotify has also introduced its messaging feature. Messaging apps have undergone a particular development process, used by companies to provide complex services beyond traditional voice, text, and video, including customer service, personal banking, and online shopping. This has led to the emergence of a new type of social media, "commercial conversation," to describe the use of messaging apps for shopping - where buyers can chat with a real person or a chatbot, access reviews and product recommendations, and make purchases, all within one app.

A list of popular platforms or channels considered fitting the description of "social" would include mass social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Google+, and Pinterest; news and content aggregation platforms; and professional networking platforms like LinkedIn and Xing; websites that allow uploading, viewing, and sharing videos, such as YouTube and Vimeo; messaging apps like SnapChat, WhatsApp, Telegram, and Facebook Messenger; search and discovery apps like FourSquare; collaboration and internal communication platforms like Yammer, Workplace (by Facebook), Basecamp, Trello, and Slack; live video streaming apps like Facebook Live and Periscope; discussion forums and chat rooms; specialized apps, etc.

As seen, the scope of influence of social media is virtually limitless, and focusing on

the communication channels of stakeholders influences the behavior and attitudes of users. Therefore, the emergence of digital media networks and social networks can be summarized as follows (Mashry, 2012):

Firstly, clarity about interests. This occurs automatically because everyone wants to communicate with others, which requires declaring personal information clearly without lying or hiding it to avoid conflicting with registering on such websites.

Secondly, the aspect of invisible and eternal presence. Through text messages, images, and information, social networks provide a form of long-term communication between users without the need to meet each other at a specific time or place. From their fields of interest, others can respond in the same way. Moreover, social networks provide direct communication through text or voice chat.

Thirdly, interaction and engagement. Social networks offer interaction based on the free and smooth exchange of opinions, thoughts, and information, allowing everyone to exchange personal information, such as interests and passions in sports and the arts.

The technology landscape is constantly evolving. Therefore, the prominence of social media platforms such as Twitter and Facebook is noteworthy, as they symbolize the Web 2.0 environment where user-generated content predominates. Prominent examples of Web 2.0 platforms include social search engines like Google and Bing, extensive collaborative projects like Wikipedia, multimedia sharing services like YouTube and Flickr, and various blogging platforms like Edublog and Blogger. Although these platforms are often recognized for their entertainment value or role in disseminating information, their potential to create social value remains a topic worth exploring.

Using social media channels allows leaders to interact directly with stakeholders, avoiding reliance on traditional media to disseminate news. Furthermore, social media offers pathways to promote connections and nurture relationships between individuals.

2.2. Communication strategy and social media strategy

According to Edward Bernays (1928), communication strategy can be used to create influence and manage the image of an individual, organization, or product in society. He emphasizes the term "public relations" and the use of communication techniques to influence society. James Grunig is one of the first to propose a two-way communication model, where the relationship between the organization and the public is seen as a two-way interaction instead of a one-way one. Grunig (1992) suggests that communication strategy involves creating a two-way communication environment between the organization and the public, where information is exchanged and social interaction is created. Additionally, Michael Porter (1980) is famous for "competitive strategy" and the concept of "leverage" that organizations can use to enhance their position in the market. Porter argues that communication strategy can be seen as part of an organization's overall competitive strategy, where the message conveys information about the organization's value and competitive advantages to customers and the market.

The above analyses show that communication strategy is a plan, a method of organizing, managing, and implementing communication activities of an organization, company, or individual. It includes identifying the target audience, message, appropriate media, and communication channels to

create impact and strategic interactions with the intended audience or public to promote customer purchase/use of the company's or organization's products or services. Communication strategy is essential to building and managing image, social interaction, and information management in various contexts, from public relations to crisis management and market competition. Communication strategy is also viewed as a guiding handbook for all message dissemination activities of a brand to the community. The communication strategy objectives may include enhancing brand awareness, building a trustworthy image, boosting sales or service usage, establishing good customer relationships, or influencing public opinions and behaviors.

A social media communication strategy is a detailed plan and method of organizing the use of social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn, YouTube, and other platforms to achieve an organization's or individual's communication goals. A social media communication strategy typically includes the following steps:

Step 1: Defining objectives. Clearly define the specific objectives you want to achieve through social media communication activities. They may include increasing engagement, growing followers, raising brand awareness, or boosting sales.

Step 2: Analyzing the target audience. Understanding the target audience, including their interests, behaviors, and interactions on social media, will help create appropriate content and effective interactions.

Step 3: Selecting appropriate platforms. Identify social media platforms that are suitable for the target audience and goals. Each platform has its characteristics and target users, so careful selection is necessary.

Step 4: Creating high-quality content. Develop exciting and valuable content to share on social media platforms. Content may include blog posts, images, videos, infographics, and other types of content that align with your target audience and goals.

Step 5: Planning posting and interactions. Determine a schedule for posting and interacting on social media platforms. Ensure that you regularly engage with followers proactively and consistently.

Step 6: Measuring and evaluating effectiveness. Use analytics tools to measure and assess the effectiveness of your social media communication strategy. This helps understand user interactions, follower growth, and the effectiveness of communication campaigns.

In summary, a social media communication strategy is the method of organizing and implementing communication activities on social media platforms to achieve an organization's or individual's communication objectives.

2.3. Reasons for developing social media communication strategies

The development of human society and its outstanding accomplishments today are attributed to social communication and connectivity, which is essentially limitless collaboration. Communication has enabled humans to trust each other when doing complex group tasks. An efficient communication strategy is necessary to communicate effectively. Building a communication strategy in general, and a social media communication strategy in particular, is integral to managing the image and interaction of an organization or individual within society and the marketplace. Building a social media communication strategy is extremely important for

organizations and individuals for several reasons:

(1) Increasing brand awareness. A social media communication strategy helps enhance brand awareness. Sharing unique and engaging content on social media platforms makes it possible to attract the target audience's attention and build a positive brand image.

(2) Interacting with customers. Social media communication provides an excellent opportunity to interact directly with the target audience. Creating engaging content and participating in conversations on social media platforms can build good relationships and strengthen connections with customers.

(3) Building community. Social media communication allows for the creation and development of an online community of supporters and fans. By sharing quality content and actively interacting with the community, a unique environment can be created to attract participants.

(4) Increasing interaction and viral effects. Social media communication can help create unique campaigns and stimulate interaction and viral effects online. When content is shared and discussed on social media platforms, it can spread quickly and reach a large number of users.

(5) Gathering feedback and analyzing data. Social media communication provides powerful analytical tools for collecting community feedback and measuring communication strategies' effectiveness. This data can help us understand the target audience better and adjust strategies to meet their needs.

Constructing a social media communication strategy is essential for creating brand awareness, interacting with customers, building community, increasing

interaction and viral effects, gathering feedback, and analyzing data to continuously improve and adjust strategies.

3. The role of leaders in developing social media communication strategies

Social media is driving the actions of leaders from a strategic perspective. However, as a leader, accepting positive and negative communication/ interaction on social media platforms is necessary, viewing it as a natural part of modern life. Social media is a means to share an organization's overall goals and demonstrate the open-mindedness of leaders and managers to new and unique ideas. In modern society, as social media has an increasingly profound influence, the role of leaders is crucial in building and implementing social media communication strategies, as they not only define the direction but also ensure the effectiveness and continuous development of the organization in this field. The role of leaders in building social media communication strategies is vital and can be described as follows:

Firstly, setting goals and direction. Leaders must identify the organization's social media communication goals and specific directions for achieving those goals. They must also ensure that the strategy accurately reflects the organization's mission and core values.

Secondly, developing strategy and action plans. Leaders must develop a detailed strategy and action plan for social media communication. They must decide about platforms, content, schedules, and practical audience engagement approaches.

Thirdly, communication and training. Leaders must formally communicate the social media communication strategy to the organization and ensure that all employees understand and agree with the goals and action plans. They also need to provide

employees with training and guidance on implementing social media communication strategies.

Fourthly, support and encouragement. Leaders must support and encourage the social media team's creativity and innovation. They must create a supportive and encouraging work environment where the team can develop new ideas and implement effective strategies.

Fifthly, evaluation and adjustment. Leaders must regularly evaluate the effectiveness of the social media communication strategy and adjust as necessary to ensure that goals are achieved and the organization continues to improve in this area.

Sixthly, representation and brand protection. Finally, leaders must represent the organization on social media and protect the brand from risks and controversies. They must work to maintain and strengthen the organization's reputation and positive image on social media platforms.

4. Essential skills and competencies for leaders in developing and implementing social media communication strategies

Very few leaders set clear strategic goals when using social media or technology platforms for interaction. Facebook pages, Twitter accounts, Instagram, and TikTok profiles are often created spontaneously without taking the time to identify the purpose of use and the benefits it will bring to stakeholders. A presence on social media is considered sufficient without caring about interaction, sharing information, and analysis. This also indicates that leaders using communication technology lack communication skills, technology does not bring effectiveness, and no strategic goals are set.

The issue becomes more serious when new economies underestimate strategic

planning, leading to rapid and more frequent failures for many people. Especially with algorithms, a solution can be provided within seconds, leading to the perception that planning is unnecessary. Many leaders in emerging economies also neglect to focus on planning, processes, and organizational management. This results in an unhealthy focus on strategies and technologies rather than strategic thinking.

Therefore, a quite large number of organizations lack the systems, processes, and resources to fully leverage media, leading to investment activities that are not aligned with organization's priorities or customer needs; the spontaneous combination of media channels and social media accounts without any scenario or strategy; the emergence of abandoned accounts, "orphans" with very few followers, whose owners do not post for months or years; inconsistent and difficult-to-measure outcomes; waste of money and time; unclear responsibilities and specific goals for each management team member; disputes over ownership of communication functions among different departments; valuable intelligence and information obtained from social media not being widely shared throughout the organization.

Many leaders and managers are still skeptical or indifferent to the value of social media, hence cautious when deciding to invest. This creates a vicious cycle, where skepticism leads to small and scattered investments and a lack of focus from leaders and managers, resulting in poor outcomes and even more skepticism. Agencies and organizations are inadvertently exposing themselves to unnecessary risks.

From the situation above, leaders must continuously improve their skills and capabilities to effectively lead organizations in building and implementing social media

communication strategies. These skills and competencies include:

Firstly, understanding of social media. Leaders need to understand how social media platforms operate deeply, the characteristics of each platform, and emerging trends in this field. In-depth knowledge of social media helps them develop appropriate and effective strategies.

Secondly, planning and strategy planning skills. Leaders need to be able to plan and develop strategic and sustainable social media communication strategies, including setting specific goals, identifying target audiences, and planning the implementation of communication activities.

Thirdly, creative skills. Creativity is essential in attracting attention and interaction on social media. Leaders need to be able to create new, engaging, and unique content to attract users and generate positive interactions.

Fourthly, communication and interaction skills. Effective communication is critical to building relationships with online communities. Leaders must communicate clearly, convey their messages effectively, and interact positively with users on social media.

Fifthly, analytical and evaluation skills. Analyzing data and evaluating the effectiveness of social media strategies is crucial. Leaders need to be able to use analytical tools to measure campaign performance and adjust their strategies based on collected data.

Sixthly, leadership and management. Lastly, leaders must be able to lead and manage the organization's social media communication strategy. They must inspire and engage employees and shape and promote the organization's goals and values through social media.

Therefore, leaders must develop various skills and competencies to successfully implement social media communication strategies, from understanding social media to creativity, communication, analysis, and leadership.

Additionally, leaders can mitigate risks when using social media by taking measures such as:

(1) Planning and preparation. First, it is essential to establish specific plans for using social media, including defining goals, target audiences, and appropriate content. Then, prepare clear guidelines and instructions for employees on using social media and managing information.

(2) Understanding relevant regulations. It is important to understand regulations related to financial disclosure and other legal regulations regarding communication and advertising on social media.

(3) Building support systems. Provide support and training for employees to use social media effectively and safely. Establish monitoring and control systems to ensure that all activities on social media comply with the organization's regulations and policies.

(4) Developing organizational culture. Promote organizational culture by creating a healthy environment and encouraging employees to participate actively in social media activities.

(5) Facing challenges. Recognize and confront current and potential social media challenges, including the risks of fake news, misinformation, and unauthorized use of information.

(6) Acting in solidarity. Leaders must encourage and support employees in seeking solutions, enhancing competitiveness, protecting copyrights, and dealing with fake news and malicious information.

In summary, leadership plays a crucial role in ensuring that an organization's use of social media is effective and safe and also plays a significant role in building a positive and responsible social media environment.

5. Conclusion

In the context of the Industrial Revolution 4.0, social media strategy has become an indispensable and crucial part of building and developing the brand of organizations and businesses. The article discusses the core role of leaders in formulating and implementing social media strategies. Leaders are not only the ones who shape and guide social media strategies but also pioneers, innovators, and motivators within the organization. To achieve this, they must develop a multidimensional set of capabilities, from communication skills to project management and effectiveness evaluation. Competent leaders help organizations achieve communication goals, enhance brand awareness, and interact with target audiences. They also help create a proactive and creative work environment and foster a cohesive and positive online community.

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