

SOCIAL MEDIA DOCUMENTS IN INSTITUTIONS
OF HIGHER EDUCATION: A CONTENT ANALYSIS

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BY

STEPHEN JENDRASZAK

DR. DUSTIN SUPA—ADVISOR

BALL STATE UNIVERSITY

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The emergence and increasing prominence of social media present public relations opportunities and risks for all types of organizations. Corporations, nonprofits, and media outlets are developing documents to set expectations and boundaries regarding behavior in social media for their employees and other constituents and to educate members of their organization about the attendant opportunities and dangers. Institutions of higher education, too, have developed such documents, but the multitude of audiences which they must address, including students, faculty members, staff, and alumni, along with the decision-making structures unique to higher education, make them a special case.

This study seeks to understand the types of documents institutions of higher education employ for those purposes; which governance bodies, offices, or departments are involved in drafting and enforcing such documents; and which potential issues are addressed. It uses content analysis to examine the 26 social media documents belonging to English-speaking higher education institutions cataloged by Council for the Advancement and Support of Education (CASE) as of January 22, 2011.

Answering these questions demonstrates the extent which public relations professionals at such institutions are taking a leadership role in social media, as well as

what commonalities or differences exist in the approaches the first institutions to tackle these issues have taken. From among the thousands of universities, colleges, and junior colleges that exist in the English-speaking world, CASE has cataloged just 26 social media documents. These institutions are pioneers in the space; where they concur, best practices may begin to emerge, and where they diverge in approach or address issues not considered by others, there may exist opportunities for each to learn from the others.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Social media may be quite young as a topic of study in communications—young enough, as we will see, that even terminology and definition remain fuzzy—but great interest in the area has ensured a proliferation of academic literature regarding their impact on professional communicators, the risks and benefits of using such platforms for public relations and marketing, and the documents organizations of all types have begun to develop to educate their stakeholders about the dangers of social media—and how best to take advantage of the opportunities. At the same time, decision-making in higher education, and particularly the faculty governance approach, has been the focus of significant academic scrutiny since the turn of the century.

Social Media

Social media—also known as Web 2.0—constitute a phenomenon new enough that disagreements over terminology and definition remain. Few would disagree that “socialness” is the defining characteristic of these new communication platforms—interaction among individuals and between publishers and their audiences (Bulik, 2006). Internet sites in this category feature (increasingly curated) user-generated content in wikis, blogs, and other spaces in which the community is largely responsible for ensuring

quality (Wales & Weckerle, 2009). The use of the word “media,” however, remains controversial.

Media is something that media companies control, and media is overwhelmingly one-way. The online social world is about as two-way, multi-way, any-way as it can be. Nobody controls it, not even Facebook, which found it can't even change its own terms of service. (Bernoff, 2009, p. 17)

For this reason, Bernoff prefers “social Web” or “social Internet.” Nevertheless, “social media” is the most common label applied, both in the literature and common usage, to describe interactive online platforms and communities. Bulik (2008) considers “social media” an overarching term, incorporating social *networks* such as Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and Myspace, in addition to other forms of interactive platforms such as blogs, wikis, and photo- and video-sharing services like Flickr and YouTube. Blogs are Web sites that are easily (and often freely) created and updated, allowing anyone with an Internet connection the opportunity to publish content (Bolt et al., 2007). The appeal of social networks is establishing connections among users by keeping in touch with existing friends and making new acquaintances through self-presentation profiles (Ancu & Cozma, 2009).

Pisani (2005) would add to Bulik’s list of social media forms podcasting, which further democratizes the production of content through easy tools for the creation and distribution of audio and video broadcasts over the Internet; social bookmarking, which allows users to promote content they find interesting or relevant; and Real Simple Syndication (RSS) feeds, which allow users to compile information from a variety of online sources into a single news experience akin to a custom newspaper.

Social networks are ascendant not because they invented user-generated content or sharing, but because they fit the spirit of our time (Skoler, 2009). The traditional source-message-channel-receiver (SMCR) model of mass media is fading with the advent of new media technologies that place the audience in a more active role (Metzgar & Maruggi, 2009). At this stage in the development of social media, their disruptive nature and value as a form of communication largely go without question, in part due to the significant and desirable audiences they draw (Bell, 2010; Bush, 2010; Crawford, 2009; Marken, 2007; Paine, 2009; Patel, 2010; Smith, 2010).

Social Media and Professional Communicators

The marketing sector experienced a significant downturn in 2009, along with the rest of the world economy. The public relations industry, however, has rebounded rapidly, outpacing both the recovery of the rest of the marketing sector and its own recovery from its most recent previous downturn, that brought about by the dot-com bust and the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks, and social media deserve a portion of the credit (Bush, 2010). Executives at public relations firms find clients turning to them, rather than marketers or advertising agencies, for social media strategies and tactics—and corporations sometimes are shifting budgets accordingly (Bush, 2010). As brands try to build followings, foster customer loyalty, and demonstrate their innovative natures, professionals from sales, marketing, research and development, customer service, and other management areas are needed, making coordination key (Patel, 2010). For that reason, social media have accelerated the shift toward integrated marketing communications, and at firms such as IBM, Intuit, and American Airlines, a single executive oversees both marketing and public relations/communications (Bush, 2009).

According to a survey of members of the Public Relations Society of American (PRSA) Hawaii chapter (Diga & Kelleher, 2009), public relations practitioners who make frequent use of social network sites such as Facebook report significant professional benefits from doing so. The practitioners indicated feeling empowered by the information they gain from using the sites, along with the expert power and prestige that accrues to them from the perceived expertise in using the tools, saying those factors can allow them to advance in their organizations (Diga & Kelleher, 2009). In addition, practitioners utilizing social media benefit from a variety of metrics that allow them to quantify the impact of their efforts, such as inbound links, comments, and listings on bookmark sharing sites such as Digg; “Never before has the sharing of content online been so clearly measurable (Krall, 2009, p. 394).”

Communications trade publications generally exhibit enthusiasm about social media and urge practitioners to learn the new tools and promote them within their organizations (e.g. Bush, 2010; Bulik, 2008; Paine, 2009). The vast majority of articles in the trade press assume a priori that social media are effective tools, leading Taylor and Kent (2010) to decry the lack of critical thinking and healthy skepticism exhibited therein.

Crescenzo (2010), however, urges practitioners to move slowly on introducing social media into their organization, taking into account executives’ fears of the platforms in their proposals and pointing out goals that can be achieved by social media and not other forms of communication, despite communicators’ personal affinity for the platforms. In a content analysis of articles about social media in PRSA’s *Public Relations Tactics*, Taylor and Kent (2010) found “the claims made might be summarized as

follows: social media allow you to extend the reach of your message, engage in two-way communication with publics, and listen to what your publics want (p. 211).” However, only 31% of articles cited specific evidence regarding the power or reach of social media; tactical suggestions for practitioners generally were anecdotal and came with no evidence of their effectiveness.

Risks of Social Media for Organizations

Vorvoreanu (2009) argues that the college students who first used Facebook set the norms and expectations that hold sway on the platform and conducted focus groups with members of that group to better describe the characteristics of that culture and how corporations might most effectively work within it. She found most students were saddened and annoyed that Facebook no longer is exclusive to individuals in their peer group. Participants sometimes become fans of products or brands because they wish to broadcast their preferences and identify with those organizations, but they prefer using other means to interact with corporations. They do not consider direct communication from corporations appropriate on Facebook. Perhaps most importantly to public relations practitioners, simply being present on Facebook did not confer on corporations any advantage in terms of perceptions of trustworthiness or likelihood that participants would engage in a commercial relationship with the firm (Vorvoreanu, 2009).

Further, establishing a presence in social media undermines organizations’ role as gatekeeper, limits time for securing appropriate approvals for communications before publication because of real-time expectations, and forces two-way symmetric communications on organizations that may not be ready for them (Crescenzo, 2010).

Neff (2009) asserts that myths spread rapidly in social media and can cause

headaches for brand managers and public relations practitioners, but true controversies that cut to the core of a brand, such as the (now former) Dominos employees seen adulterating food in the restaurant on YouTube, are potentially critically damaging and deserve a response. However, even in such cases, responding too quickly can give life to a controversy that otherwise would quickly die out.

Parekh and Lee (2010) argue that acknowledging mistakes and adopting a personal tone are critical to responding to a social media firestorm. They base this assertion on a case study of an incident in which the son of a popular blogger sent Boeing a drawing of an airplane, and the company (for legal reasons) responded with a tersely worded form letter. The authors also cite the case of Amazon.com removing gay- and lesbian-themed books from its store and taking nearly 48 hours to respond to the ensuing social media conversation in recommending never remaining silent, even if only to say that the company does not yet have an answer.

Smith (2010) suggests that organizations' desire for control of their messages may be for naught as a new model of public relations emerges on social media platforms. The technology shifts the power of communication from public relations practitioners to users who have no formal relationship to the organization but nevertheless share messages on its behalf (Smith, 2010). Smith conducted a qualitative analysis of Twitter posts ("tweets") regarding relief efforts in Haiti following the 2010 earthquake in that country. He found in the posts use of public relations relationship cultivation strategies such as communicated relational commitment, conversational human voice, dialogic feedback loops, positivity, and openness. This points, he argues, to a "socially distributed model of public relations, in which individuals with little recognized stake in an organization

initiate and fulfill public relations responsibilities through online interactivity (Smith, 2010).” In this world, public relations practitioners become resources that provide access to information, helping publics sort through the information clutter to find the data they need, and measurers of the impact their distributed networks of supporters are having.

Social Media Policies and Guidelines

In an attempt to experience the presumed benefits of social media involvement while limiting potential risks, major media outlets such as the *Wall Street Journal*, the *New York Times*, the Associated Press, and others have developed guidelines for their employees’ individual activities in social media to address issues such as how to avoid revealing political or religious bias, whether to “friend” sources, and even to forbid reporters from breaking news on their personal sites (Podger, 2009).

Likewise, institutions of higher education have developed such policies or guidelines for their offices and departments, employees, and even students as large numbers of their constituents come to rely on the services. A survey of first-year students at a university in the United Kingdom found that only 27% of respondents felt that Facebook had not been important in helping them to form friendships at the institution (Madge, Meek, Wellens & Hooley, 2009). Therefore, institutions are working to handle the information technology security and reputation implications of the services (McClure, 2010).

Policy-Setting in Higher Education

Decision and policymaking authority at institutions of higher education is often invested in a shared governance approach, in which the faculty or a representative faculty body is responsible for policies for admitting students, curriculum, student instruction,

standards of student competence conduct, maintaining a suitable learning environment, and standards of faculty competence and conduct (including appointments, promotions, and status), while administrators are responsible for the business of the institution (Hamilton, 2000). The particulars of this division are obviously complex, and vary widely from institution to institution (Johnston, 2003); however, Kaplan's 2004 student found "only a moderate relationship between institutional decisions and the assignment of authority for those decisions. Faculties with significant authority appeared to be no more likely than administrators with significant authority to make self-interested decisions. The research also found little relationship between governance structures—such as faculty senates, academic senates, faculty advisory councils, and others—and the decisions that institutions subsequently implemented (p. 31)."

Much recent literature is extremely critical of the faculty governance approach (Johnston, 2003; Kezar, 2004; Kezar, 2005), an argument put most perhaps most clearly by Benjamin and Carroll (1996) of the Rand Corporation, who suggest that the structures and processes of academic governance create a system that is both ineffective and inefficient. Hamilton (2000), however, fiercely defends the importance of faculty governance.

This study seeks to supplement the literature on social media, their impact on organizations' public relations efforts and reputations, and decision-making in higher education by answering the following questions:

Research Questions

RQ1. What do higher education institutions consider "social media" for the purpose of inclusion in official documents?

RQ2. What types of official documents do institutions of higher education employ in an effort to control the risks inherent in social media and promote their use to their fullest potential?

RQ3. Which governance bodies, offices, and departments (including public relations functions and/or central communications offices) are involved in setting and implementing standard operating procedures surrounding social media, according to the documents?

RQ4. Under whose authority are social media standard operating procedures enforced, according to the documents?

RQ5. Do institutions promote taking advantage of available metrics to measure the effectiveness of social media programs in their social media standard operating procedure documents?

RQ6. What kinds of issues and potential risks of interaction in social media are institutions addressing in their policy or other documents?

CHAPTER 3

METHOD

The Council for the Advancement and Support of Education (CASE) listed 26 social media documents belonging to 26 English-speaking institutions of higher education as of January 22, 2011. (Two additional documents listed by CASE, belonging to secondary and/or primary educational institutions, are not addressed here as they fall outside the scope of the research questions. It is presumed that the risks and opportunities such institutions encounter in social media, along with their decision-making structures, are substantially different from those of institutions of higher education.) This study consists of a systematic and objective content analysis of both manifest and latent content in that complete population (see Appendix A, Codebook). About two-thirds (17, or 65%) of the institutions whose documents are listed are public, rather than private, institutions.

According to Babbie (1995), content analysis is applicable to the study of almost any communications vehicle. This study employed both qualitative and quantitative content analyses, but the preponderance of the variables were quantitative, consisting of the coding on a structured coding sheet of nominal or ratio variables such as the presence or absence of certain indicators in the document. However, the coding sheet also allowed for observational comments from the coder; this generally was employed to note special

features on a particular document that would not otherwise have been reflected on the coding sheet.

Because of the small sample, a single coder (the study author) completed the analyses within a 1-week period, obviating the need for coder training, inter-coder reliability testing, or intra-coder reliability testing.

Coding Procedures

Many of the documents in question in turn refer to secondary social media documents belonging to the same institution (how-to guides, for example); those documents also were analyzed, although they may or may not share the same “weight” or authority as the primary document in which they are referenced. If only one date was listed on a document, it was coded as the “effective” date and not the “revised” date unless otherwise explicitly stated. If an item was addressed in both the primary document and a secondary document, it was coded as being addressed in the primary document.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

The coder was able to access and analyze all 26 primary documents in the population and all referenced or linked secondary social media documents belonging to the institutions in question.

RQ1. What do higher education institutions consider “social media” for the purpose of inclusion in official documents?

Twenty-two institutions (85%) list the purpose of their social media document, and 92% (n=24) more refer to specific social media platforms such as Facebook, MySpace, or Twitter. Seventeen (65%) specifically included blogs as social media, and none explicitly excluded them.

RQ2. What types of official documents do institutions of higher education employ in an effort to control the risks inherent in social media and promote their use to their fullest potential?

Fifteen (58%) documents are described in titles or subtitles as guidelines or best practices. Another 27% (n=7) are named as policies. The remaining four documents (15%) are named uniquely—one is a “handbook,” for example, and another a “position paper.” Thirty-one percent (n=8) of the documents apply only to institutional sites; 27% (n=7) apply to institutional and employee sites; one applies to student and employee sites;

15% (n=4) apply to institutional, employee, and student sites; while 23% (n=6) aren't clear regarding to whom they apply.

RQ3. Which governance bodies, offices, and departments (including public relations functions and/or central communications offices) are involved in setting and implementing standard operating procedures surrounding social media, according to the documents?

Half of the documents (n=13) are administered by marketing, communications, public affairs, or university relations departments. Of those that remain, three (12%) are administered by information technology or services, one (4%) by a university governance body, three (12%) by a cross-campus task force, and two (8%) by another unit. For four institutions (16%), the administering body is not listed or unclear.

RQ4. Under whose authority are social media standard operating procedures enforced, according to the documents?

Likewise, the largest number of documents (n=10, or 38%) were originally authorized (regardless of who later handles day-to-day implementation) by a communications department, however such as department might be named. Almost as many, 35% (n=9), lack any clear authority at all. No other basis of authority (such as university governance, the president's or chancellor's cabinet, etc.) was listed for more than two documents in the population.

Six documents (23%) refer to or credit documents of other institutions, but 22 (85%) refer to other policies/guidelines of their own, such as information technology policies, branding policies, or policies related to the personal conduct of students, faculty, and staff. Half of the documents (n=13) list an effective date. (If only one date is listed,

the coder assumes it is the “effective” date and not the revised date unless otherwise explicitly stated.) Of those that do, 54% (n=7) went into effect in 2009. Revision dates are not listed in the majority of documents (n=21, or 81%), but the five documents that do (20%) all were last revised in 2009 or 10. (If only one date is listed, the coder assumes it is the “effective” date and not the revised date unless otherwise explicitly stated.)

RQ5. Do institutions promote taking advantage of available metrics to measure the effectiveness of social media programs in their social media standard operating procedure documents?

A majority (54%, n=14) of documents reference the appropriate regularity or frequency of posting. The purpose of institutional sites is referenced in 39% of documents (n=10); six (23%) discuss how to measure the effectiveness of social media tools employed. Thirty-nine percent (n=10) include a list of endorsed social media sites belonging to campus units, half (n=5) of whom place said list in a secondary document.

RQ6. What kinds of issues and potential risks of interaction in social media are institutions addressing in their policy or other documents?

More than half of documents (n=14, 54%) do not include how-to information (specific, tactical instructions on the use of a particular tool or platform, often presented step-by-step). Of those that do, most (n=7, 27% overall) place this information in a separate document. Likewise, most (n=20, 77%) do not include a glossary of terms, and half of those that do put this information in a secondary document (n=3, 12% overall). About 66% (n=17) of documents do refer to information specific to a single social media platform, however.

Confidentiality of proprietary information is addressed in 62% of documents (n=16). FERPA, however, is addressed in less than one-third of documents (31%, n=8), and HIPAA is addressed in three documents, or 12%. NCAA regulations are addressed by two institutions (8%). All who reference confidentiality or any of these laws or regulations do so in the primary document. Of note: three institutions analyzed are in Canada or the United Kingdom, so FERPA, HIPAA, and NCAA regulations do not apply. However, if specific national laws related to the privacy of educational or health information were referenced, the FERPA or HIPAA items, as appropriate, were coded as “present” for those institutions.

Half of the documents (n=13) analyzed referenced copyright or intellectual property issues, and more than one-third (35%, n=9) addressed endorsement of products or political issues or candidates. Six (23%) address the appropriate use of institutional time and resources. Eight documents (31%) include obeying the terms of service of any social media platforms employed, with two institutions doing so in a secondary document. Four institutions (15%) addressed advertising on social media sites.

Sixty-five percent (n=17) discuss respect, accuracy, and/or tone used in posts on social media sites. Half (n=13) analyzed note the permanence of content posted to social media sites in a primary or secondary document. The same number addressed the “brand” of the author institution in a primary or secondary document, and likewise half include the importance of communication planning and strategy, six in a secondary document. By contrast, 77% (n=20) address tactical considerations related to visual style, and 58% (n=15) address naming conventions for pages. Forty-two percent (n=11) address profile

images and avatars specifically. For 15% (n=4), this item was listed in a secondary document.

Sixty-two percent of documents (n=16) reference identifying the views one posts as one's own, all but one of those in a primary document. Six documents (23%) address photography rights or permissions, and three (12%) refer to appropriate photo selection or sizing. A single institution addressed protecting the authority of the institutional voice. Nineteen percent (n=5) address the procedural details of submitting content for publication on institution-level social media sites.

Twelve documents (46%) call for registering institutional sites with central office, and nine (35%) address identifying administrators for institutional social media sites. Fifty-four percent (n=14) address when to censor posts on institutional social media sites, if at all. Forty-two percent (n=11) discuss the topic in a primary document, while 12% (n=3) do so in a secondary document. Half of institutions (n=13) include reference to the privacy and safety of users.

A majority (54%, n=14) include links to other institutional policies or guidelines. Three documents (12%) link to the policies or other documents of other institutions. Regarding emerging concerns of particular interest in the social media space: whom to friend or follow in social media is addressed by five documents (20%), while spam and phishing are addressed by seven (27%). A single institution addresses promotions or contests on social media sites (in a secondary document). The effect posts on social media sites can have on professional reputations is addressed by 10 institutions (39%).

Two institutions (8%) address criticism of competing institutions. The same two address the discussion of controversial topics. Sixty-six percent (n=17) list a contact for

further information or answers to questions. At least one document is an incomplete draft—for example, the coder noted that document includes an entry on Facebook that reads “Need some text about Facebook and why it is a great social media tool.”

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

Crafting a social media document at a institution of higher education can serve multiple purposes: 1) setting expectations and boundaries regarding behavior in social media for the university community; 2) educating the campus community regarding the opportunities and dangers presented by social media; 3) developing a framework for future conversations; and 4) creating consensus among decision-makers and document authors. Less than one-third (27%) of the documents analyzed are titled or subtitled as a “policy.” The majority of documents are described as “guidelines” or “best practices,” but still others are called “handbook,” “position paper,” or by other names. These various names may be intended to imply that the documents in question, unlike policies, are not proscriptive or enforceable.

A majority of documents (54%) either apply to institutional sites only or are not clear regarding to whom they apply. Documents that are unenforceable or that do not apply to employee social media sites fail to address a significant vulnerability. For example, in 2009 a tenured associate professor at Dartmouth College posted to her Facebook profile that she was preparing for lectures using the online encyclopedia Wikipedia (Young, 2009). Other posts were disparaging about colleagues in the religion department at the institution. These posts became public and caused embarrassment for

both the employee and Dartmouth. More seriously, in 2010, a sociology professor at East Stroudsburg University was suspended for writing Facebook posts that made tongue-in-cheek references to killing students shortly after an incident in which a faculty member at University of Alabama-Huntsville allegedly shot several colleagues after failing to achieve tenure; Inside Higher Ed specifically noted that ESU was unable to point a policy the professor had violated by making the posts (Stripling, 2010).

Half of the documents are administered by a central communications office, which is likely appropriate given that many of the risks of social media concern the institution's brand or reputation. However, 38% of documents are not just administered by a central communications office, but were originally authorized by them as well. At many institutions, such offices may not have the authority to approve enforceable regulations, and the lack of involvement of other institutional authorities may signal a missed opportunity to develop a shared understanding and philosophy of social media. For 35% of documents, there is no question that enforcement would be a challenge: no clear authorizing body is listed at all. However, most documents (85%) do reference other policies of the authoring institution, which may lend additional authority to at least particular provisions of the documents.

The majority of documents (54%) address the appropriate regularity of posts, and more than a third (39%) address the purpose of institutional social media sites. If institutions are to employ social media in a strategic way, rather than becoming mired in tactical thinking, it is critical to address to what end social media are used. However, less than a quarter of social media documents take the next step and address how to measure the effectiveness of the social media platforms employed in meeting those goals.

Although two-thirds of the documents analyzed do contain information specific to a single social media platform, another sign that institutions are, at least to a certain extent, avoiding getting lost in the weeds of tactical concerns is that the vast majority of institutions do not address “how-to” information or a glossary of social media terms in their primary documents. This is also important from a sound policymaking standpoint; social media constitute a rapidly changing landscape, and so documents that address a philosophy of how social media should be treated and sound principles that apply across platforms are easier to maintain and enforce than those that become overly specific.

Sixty-five percent of documents include blogs in their definitions of social media (none explicitly exclude them). This will make it easier for those institutions to construe their documents as applying to emerging platforms such as Tumblr and Posterous, which blend a blog-like presentation and posting mechanism with the “following”/“friending” concept popularized by previous social media platforms.

When it comes to which issues/risks of social media are worthy of inclusion in a document, there is a shockingly small amount of agreement among institutions. A single issue—the appropriate visual style for graphic elements on institutional social media sites—was referenced in 77% of the documents analyzed. No other single issue was referenced in more than two-thirds of the documents analyzed. This lack of consensus may indicate that professionals and faculty at institutions of higher education are not yet sharing with one another their thinking on these issues or the concerns that have arisen in their experiences; conventional wisdom has yet to solidify. This lack of collegial interaction is further indicated by the fact that only six documents (23%) refer to or credit social media documents of other institutions.

A handful of items were referenced in a significant majority (more than 60%) of documents, indicating that a consensus may be forming regarding their importance: information regarding whom to contact for more information or with questions about the document; the importance of maintaining the confidentiality of privileged information; maintaining an appropriate, respectful tone and prioritizing accuracy in posts to social media; and identifying one's views as one's own. This emerging consensus is simultaneously encouraging and discouraging; after all, this means fully one-third of documents in the population *do not* indicate whom to contact with concerns or questions or for more information.

Another five risks/issues are referenced in at least a majority of documents: when (if ever) to censor content on institutional social media sites, protection copyright and intellectual property, the permanence of content posted in social media, protection of the institution's brand, and the importance of communications planning and strategy in launching an institutional social media site. Again, this is mixed news. Each of these issues is critical, and regarding each, half (or nearly so) of the documents analyzed have nothing to say.

Finally, there are a number of important issues addressed in only a minority of documents, including compliance with national privacy laws, avoiding endorsing products or political views/candidates on behalf of the institution, the appropriate use of work time and institutional resources, obeying the terms of service of platforms employed, identifying administrators for institutional sites and registering them with a central office, whom to friend/follow on institutional sites, caution regarding phishing attempts, how to handle spam posts, and the risks posed by social media to professional

reputations. Perhaps most troubling: only two institutions address avoiding controversial topics or criticism of competing institutions on institutional sites and the importance of compliance with NCAA regulations.

There are indications that document authors remain focused on tactical issues to a concerning degree. As previously mentioned, 77% of documents address questions of visual style for institutional sites, by far the most significant consensus regarding addressing an issue. Likewise, 58% of documents address naming conventions for institutional sites, and 42% address profile images/avatars. In short, considerable opportunities remain for institutions to learn from one another's experience. No single institution addresses every important point, and more important considerations remain absent from a significant majority of social media documents.

Limitations

This study is limited by the comparatively small size of the population in question. Further, the perspective of the study author should be noted: he is a public relations professional at an institution of higher education (Ball State University) and in that capacity served as a principal author of one of the documents included in this population.

Areas for Future Research

There is considerable room for further public relations scholarship on the topic of higher education social media documents. Future content analysis studies should examine the relationships among the variables analyzed. For example, is a document described as a policy more likely than a document described as a set of guidelines to have a clear source of authority? Does the university entity which authored the document correlate to

the areas of concern that are addressed? Are institutions whose documents apply to employee personal sites more or less likely than those that do not to address particular potential risks?

Likewise, scholars should examine areas of concern addressed in documents in a qualitative, rather than nominal, fashion; future studies may examine not just *whether* a particular topic is addressed, but *what is said* about that topic. Among others, the questions considered could include what types of other institutional policies are most commonly linked to and whether lists of institutional social media sites are selective or inclusive. Moving beyond content analysis, scholars may use surveys or interviews of public relations practitioners and others at higher education institutions to learn how the social media documents are put into practice.

Other potentially fruitful areas for future research are related to how public relations practitioners and other higher education officials utilize social media themselves, rather than what they urge others on their campuses to practice through the documents analyzed here. For example, how do practitioners listen in social media, and how do those practices connect to the boundary-spanning function of public relations? How do practitioners plan to utilize social media for communications in the event of a crisis, if at all, and why?

Social media remains relatively young as a topic of scholarship, and therefore the remaining opportunities for research are plentiful.

Conclusions

The public relations professionals at institutions of higher education must do more to take an active leadership role in shaping their organizations' approach to social media.

In this population of the industry's social media pioneers, only half of the documents are administered by the central communications office. However, it also is important that professional communicators not act alone; doing so may compromise the authority of the document and forfeit the opportunity to develop a shared understanding and philosophy of social media among institutional leaders and stakeholders. When practitioners are able to make their voices heard, they must question the conventional wisdom that assumes that social media are tools appropriate to use to achieve any goal (or, as is often the case, in the absence of any articulated goal at all). They have the necessary background to promote strategic use of social media within their institutions.

When it comes to the risks of social media worth documenting and the opportunities worth seizing, there is little consensus among these pioneers. Greater collaboration is required to solidify best practices in those few areas in which consensus is emerging, but more importantly to learn from one another's experiences so that each institution can address issues its document authors have not yet considered.

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Appendix A: Codebook

Name of institution

- 1) Public or private institution?
 1. Public
 2. Private
- 2) Document purpose listed?
 1. Yes
 2. No
- 3) Specific social media platforms referenced?
 1. Yes
 2. No
- 4) Blogs included as social media?
 1. Yes
 2. No
 3. Unclear
- 5) Type of document (as described in title or subtitle)?
 1. Policy
 2. Guidelines or Best Practices
 3. How-To
 4. More than one
 5. None of these
- 6) To whom does document apply?
 1. Institutional sites only
 2. Employee sites only
 3. Student sites only
 4. Institutional sites and employees' private sites
 5. Employee sites and student sites
 6. Institutional sites and student sites
 7. Institutional sites, employee sites, and student sites
 8. Unclear / other
- 7) Department responsible for administration of document?
 1. Communications, Marketing, University Relations, and/or Public Affairs
 2. Information Technology / Services
 3. Human Resources
 4. University Governance Committee or Subcommittee
 5. Cross-campus task force
 6. Other
 7. Multiple
 8. None
 9. Unclear
- 8) Authorizing body
 1. Communications, Marketing, University Relations, and/or Public Affairs
 2. Information Technology / Services

3. Human Resources
 4. University Governance Body
 5. Dedicated task force
 6. Office of the President/Chancellor
 7. Office of the Provost/ chief academic officer
 8. Cabinet
 9. Other
 10. Multiple
 11. None
 12. Unclear
- 9) Reference to documents of other institutions (credit or otherwise)
1. Yes
 2. No
- 10) Reference to other institutional policies or guidelines?
1. Yes
 2. No
- 11) Effective date
1. 2007
 2. 2008
 3. 2009
 4. 2010
 5. 2011
 6. Other
 7. Not listed/ applicable
- 12) Revision date
1. 2007
 2. 2008
 3. 2009
 4. 2010
 5. 2011
 6. Other
 7. Not listed/ applicable
- 13) "How to" information (specific, tactical instructions on the use of a particular tool or platform, often presented step-by-step)
1. Present
 2. Not present
 3. Exists in referenced separate document
- 14) Glossary of terms
1. Present
 2. Not present
 3. Exists in referenced separate document
- 15) Platform-specific information
1. Present
 2. Not present
 3. Exists in referenced separate document

Issues addressed? (same coding for each)

1. Present
2. Not present
3. Exists in referenced separate document

- 16) Confidentiality
- 17) FERPA
- 18) HIPAA
- 19) NCAA regulations
- 20) Copyright/intellectual property
- 21) Endorsements of products or political issues/candidates
- 22) Use of university time/resources
- 23) Terms of service of platforms used
- 24) Advertising
- 25) Respect, accuracy, and/or tone in posts
- 26) Permanence of content
- 27) Communications planning/strategy
- 28) Brand
- 29) Visual style
- 30) Naming conventions for pages
- 31) Identifying views as poster's own
- 32) Photography rights and/or permissions
- 33) Photo sizing and/or selection
- 34) Institutional voice
- 35) Submission of content for institutional sites
- 36) Profile Images/Avatars
- 37) Registering of sites with central office
- 38) Identifications of administrators
- 39) When to censor posts
- 40) Privacy/safety of users
- 41) Regularity/frequency of posting and responses
- 42) Purpose of institutional level sites
- 43) Measuring effectiveness
- 44) List of endorsed social media sites
- 45) Links to other institutional policies
- 46) Links to policies of other institutions
- 47) Whom to friend/follow
- 48) Spam and/or phishing
- 49) Promotions or contests
- 50) Effect on professional reputations
- 51) Discussion of controversial topics
- 52) Criticism of competitors
- 53) Whom to contact for assistance
- 54) "Click-wrap" agreements

55) Notes