

CASE STUDY

Internal business communication through social media: A case study of a university specialized in business education

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Abstract: In present era, usage of social media is very common. This study used interview questionnaire to explore employees' behaviors and beliefs towards usage of social media and further its role and importance as an internal communication tool in Zhejiang Gongshang University, Hangzhou, China. Ten employees of university from different departments were interviewed about their views regarding different factors related to use of social media and further its role as an internal communication tool. It was found that the most frequently used social media were WeChat and QQ. ZJGSU University employees believed that social media were convenient, instant medium for communication (sharing pictures and videos) and they may enhance flow and effectiveness of internal communication in ZJGSU. The study found that although employees generally have a good perception about social media but there is need for improvement for either adopting a proper enterprise social media or proper utilization of WeChat for effective internal communication. As the sample size in this study was small so it limits generalization and external validity of the findings, yet its focus on the different factors and benefits of using social media integrates to its originality with the thought that social media may help enhance the flow and effectiveness of internal communication in an organization.

Keywords: social media, internal communication, social response

1 Introduction

With modernization, the way of communication is moving to new direction due to the new social media platforms. It was observed in a study that social media can afford users ability to easily "consume (read, listen, watch, download, search, buy), create (personalize, aggregate, contribute), share (publish, upload) facilitate (tag, recommend) and communicate (send, post comments, chat, rate)"^[1].

Last few years have seen a rapid growth in the use of social media. Yearly survey of the McKinsey Global Institute (2013)^[2] regarding embracing and using social technology within enterprises revealed that organizations' usage of Web 2.0 Technologies like live video calling and sharing, blogs and micro-blogging and social networking during 2007 and 2013 has been increased from 50 percent to 68 percent.

Above literature clarifies the need and importance of

communication and it also highlights that use of social media in organizations is increasing day by day particularly for internal communication. Internal communication in general is defined as a flow of communication among people within the organization. The platforms provided by social medias make employees communicate within the organization regardless of time and space and hierarchy. A study^[3] in this regard has given a broader definition of such social media which make workers to: (1) convey or share messages to anyone and anytime in the organization; (2) adding, editing and organizing texts and files linked with them or others; (3) see the conversations, files and messages sent, modified and organized by any member of the organization regardless of time and space.

Social media like Youtube, Facebook, Twitter, Myspace and LinkedIn are extensively used in higher education for internal as well as external communication. Studies have explained that lecturers more frequently use Youtube and Facebook among the various social medias^[4]. Exploring the use of social media and further its role and importance for internal communication in university like Zhejiang Gongshang University (ZJGSU) may be useful.

The main objective of this study is to explore the usage of social media in Zhejiang Gongshang University and further its role and importance for internal communica-

Received: May 7, 2019 Accepted: May 21, 2019 Published: May 23, 2019

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Citation: Salem HA. Internal business communication through social media: A case study of a university specialized in business education. *Adv Dev Educ Psychol*, 2019, 1(1): 67-71.

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tion. Different sub-objectives are as under: (1) To find out the different factors related to usage of social media; (2) To identify the benefits of using social media; (3) To find out how employees of ZJGSU use social media for internal communication; (4) To find out if ZJGSU employees believe that social media usage can help enhancing flow and effectiveness of internal communication

As more and more people are using social media in their daily lives, it is important to look at these tools as an internal communication tool as well. As researchers of a study believes that people will demand the more the same benefits and features inside of the organization which they experience from the use of social media in their lives outside of the organization^[5].

It is really important for this study as researchers will look for the university employees' perception about usage of social media and further its role and importance for internal communication. With all the benefits of social media tools available for communication, researchers are particularly interested in how employees can use these tools effectively to enhance internal communication with other employees within the organizations.

2 Review of literature

For the understanding on as how the usage of social media tools in the organization in the form of internal communication work, review of existing literature is necessary. Two theories are available related to development of purpose of my study.

First one is social information processing theory of computer mediated communication developed by Joseph Welters. This theory compares computer-mediated communication with face-to-face communication. Face to face communication is important for developing an interpersonal relationship and computer mediated communication also has power to establish this relation but only difference is that it requires more time to develop interpersonal relationship as compared to face to face communication^[6].

Above theory focuses on the need of bonding and desire of connection with others always or still present at that time when communicating through computer-mediated communication like face to face communication^[6]. This theory is important to my study to provide the base because every social media requires some tools or computer mediated communication to understand.

Second, communicative action theory developed by Habermas (1984) can also help better understand present study^[7]. Habermas (1984) communicative action theory is "the inter-action of at least two subjects capable of

speech and action who establish interpersonal relations (whether by verbal or by extra-verbal means)". Habermas's theory of communicative action is to get conclusion by developing the mutual understanding and discussion between two or more people^[8].

More suitability of this theory is that it is more focused on the employees' communication and helps to know perception of the employees towards social media as a tool of internal communication. The reason is the assumption that social media usage as form of tool may enhance the communication at the workplace and it is also the need of employees in current era of technological and revolutionary world.

2.1 Social media at workplace

First social networking site, sixdegrees.com, was started in 1997 by Boyd & Ellison.^[9] There are huge number of accessible social media sites and tools for users in which some of them are very famous social media sites like Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter, Skype, LinkedIn, Bebo, Friendster, etc.^[10] The basic purpose of these sites is to enhance the communication by providing different features and platform without physical presence of users.

The study of Prescient Digital media indicates the interest of social media tool in an organization and as per result 90 percent organizations are using, Blogs, Wikis, Status Updates, Comments and ranking as social media tool. As per, now a day's social media is used to integrate and cooperate in an organization between the business experts as a form of communication and also involves in professional decision making process. Most reliable information attained by experts from online networks because of social media interaction.

Steve Crescenzo (2009)^[11] describes in his article that social medias have remarkable impact on commutation efficiency in an organization. Social media and advancement of technologies reduce the barriers of communication between one and another. You can communicate and get the information from any of person of the world without waiting their return call or their physical presence.

2.2 Importance of social media in internal business communication

Usage of social media is not subject to only chatting and general communication. Internal communication is very important for smooth functioning of any organization whether you talk about the communication between management and employees or just between the co-workers of your organization. The effective communication among employees increases the chances of suc-

cess and performance of the organization as well^[12]. At the same time, prior to launching any move of such communication for the effectiveness, corporate business aspects are required to be considered. For instance, the cultural dimensions of corporate social responsibility are of paramount importance for crafting business strategies.^[13]

Gray and Robertson (2005)^[14] define effective communication as “how well we all successfully connect with and engage others every day, taking them on our personal journey of ideas”. If a company is using the social media as a form of internal communication it can enjoy the remarkable benefits as most of the users of social media are aware of its features and tools, so there is no need to spend more time to learn and create something new in it. One can also make the group and create online forum of co-workers and share and get up to date information without need of their physical presence or arranging conference meeting.^[5]

Specifically, it is found that the success of high performing organizations is “due to the increased productivity generated by effectively communicating business goals to employees, strategically linking rewards to job performance, and making employees feel connected to their organization and its goals and values”.^[12] The next important need is the implementation of internal e-commerce which is experienced in service delivery firms of China^[15], but has not yet witnessed in education sector. Behavior is learnt through education. The morale, behavior and commitment of the employee move towards positive direction, when the performance of the companies is compared who have strong effective communication system as compared to low profile companies.

3 Methodology and data analysis

This study was completed in 17 days of short time period. Population of the study was employees of ZJGSU of China based in Hangzhou city. Sample of ten employees of ZJGSU was selected by convenience sampling due to short time period. A self-administered open ended interview questionnaire comprising of ten questions was used for collection of information and data particularly related to usage of social media and its role and importance for internal communication in ZJGSU.

Data was collected from ten employees of universities working in different departments by a personal interview. Responses of the interviewees were noted and recorded. Interviews were converted into transcripts and were further coded into ten themes according to interview questionnaire. Responses were further calculated percentage

wise and interpreted accordingly.^[17]

4 Results

Interview questionnaire was comprised of 10 questions as already mentioned in Methodology section. 60% of the respondents were females whereas 40% of the respondents were males. 50% of the respondents were in the age bracket of 20-30 years, 40% of the respondents were in the age bracket of 35-50 years and 10% of respondents were in the age bracket of 55-60 years. Responses as recorded and noted are described below as per interview questionnaire.

(1) Use of social media: 90% of the respondents are using WeChat and QQ social medias for communication purposes whereas 10 percent are using emailing and phone with a very little use of QQ. No such respondent was found who abandoned the use of social media.

(2) Social media tools help enhance communication: 90% of the respondents were agreed that social media tools help enhance communication with others and 10% were not sure about it.

(3) Factors influencing to adopt social media: 80% of the respondents replied that convenience is the main influencing factor for adopting social media. Remaining related it with different factors like wide scope, group chat, easy access, functions of tool and to be familiar with technology.

(4) Factors influencing to continue to use the social media: 50% of the respondents were of the view that they will continue to use the social media because of convenience factor. 30% of the respondents mentioned easy communication and source of information as factors, 20% of the respondents referred sharing of life activities and experiences as a factor whereas 10% considered habit as a factor influencing to continue to use the social media.

(5) Functions of social media employees usually or normally use: 100% of the respondents use texting (chatting, chit chat or messaging) function of social media in normal routine. 30% of the respondents also reported sharing pictures and videos function, 20% of the respondents mentioned audio and video calling function as their normal usage in daily life.

(6) Benefit of use of social media: 40% of the respondents reported linkage with others (family, friends and co-workers) as an important benefit of using social media. 30% of the respondents mentioned convenience, 20% of the respondents mentioned instant communication as benefits of usage of social media.

(7) Method of internal communication in ZJGSU: 70% of the respondents are using WeChat as a method of

internal communication in ZJGSU. 50% of the respondents are also using email and 40% of the respondents are using phone for communicating with other employees in ZJGSU.

(8) Employees' satisfaction with the flow of internal communication in ZJGSU: 60% of the respondents were found to be averagely satisfied with the flow of internal communication in ZJGSU. 20% of the respondents were very satisfied whereas 10% of the respondents were not satisfied at all with flow of internal communication in ZJGSU.

(9) Social media tools may help enhance internal communication in ZJGSU: 90% of the respondents were agreed with the role of social media tool for enhancing internal communication in ZJGSU whereas 10% of the respondents were not sure about it.

(10) Social media tools may help enhance effectiveness of internal communication in ZJGSU: 80% of the respondents were agreed that social media tools will surely help enhance effectiveness of internal communication whereas 20% of the respondents were not sure about it.

5 Discussion

Present study was very helpful for understanding the role of social media in the daily activities of employees of ZJGSU with further focus on the communication within the organization. It provided an overview of not only about social media use in general but also about the important role of social media for internal communication in an organization. Organizations are focusing not only on internal communication but also on usage of technology with the advancement in robotics and sociotechnical solutions.^[18]

With the importance and consideration of corporate social responsibility in businesses^[19], I came up with interesting findings about social media. WeChat can be said as the main social media which the university employees mostly use for interacting with each other. Although, employees of ZJGSU have a good general perception about the social medias and their uses but researchers believe that most of the participants were not eager and motivated for using the social media as a proper tool for internal communication in ZJGSU.

Studies have already described different benefits of transparency in businesses^[18] and, usage of social media for internal communication like several features to interact and sharing of information and updates with no physical movement may also enhance transparency in the businesses. Further social media leads to effective communication system and ultimately generating increased

productivity.^[5,12] Most of the respondents are somewhat satisfied with the flow of internal communication in ZJGSU. However, researchers observed that some of the participants were not sure that social media may help enhance the flow and effectiveness of internal communication in ZJGSU even after they were briefed about the importance and uses of an enterprise social media.

6 Limitations, future research direction and conclusion

There are few limitations of this study. Seventeen days of short time period was the main limitation of the study. Detailed investigation could be carried out with the availability of more time which may further lead to more knowledge and more information by covering most of the aspects. Study surely may have different findings in case if more number of respondents from ZJGSU were interviewed. Due to small sample size, study lacks generalization and external validity of findings^[20].

Future research may be carried out to find out the development and training needs if any and reasons for lack of motivation and eagerness for using the social media as a proper tool for internal communication in ZJGSU. Same is also necessary due to the reason that some employees doubt that social media may help enhance the flow and effectiveness of internal communication in ZJGSU.

Despite of fact that time period for the study was really very short, study succeeded to find out the different factors and benefits of using social media and further integrating the same with the thought that role of social media is important towards enhancing the flow and effectiveness of internal communication in an organization.

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