

# Responsibilities and Challenges of Social Media Managers

Christian Meske and Stefan Stieglitz

University of Muenster, Department of Information Systems  
Muenster, Germany

{christian.meske, stefan.stieglitz}@uni-muenster.de

**Abstract.** Within the last years enterprises massively began to adapt social media for internal usage. They do so in order to increase their knowledge management as well as to make collaboration and communication more efficient. However, until now, very little is known about employees who are responsible for adaption processes and the management of the internal social media. In our study we conducted 15 interviews with “social media managers“ of 15 large German enterprises. We found that the role of a social media manager is faced with enormous challenges (e.g. providing information about the added value of social media) while on the other hand they lack the power to make decisions (e.g. regarding staff and budget).

**Keywords:** social media, manager, Mintzberg, manager roles.

## 1 Introduction

Due to the increasing importance of internationalization, project work, and expert knowledge in enterprises the demands on company-internal communication and collaboration processes grows as well. Companies have recognized the potentials of social media applications and started to use inter- and intranet-based social media such as e.g. microblogging and wikis [1, 2]. While the introduction of social media in the past was rather decentralized – on departmental level (e.g. introduction of a wiki) - companies are now striving for the implementation of company-wide solutions. Technology suppliers like IBM or Microsoft react by supplying new social media applications (such as Lotus Connections or Jive) or extending existing products with respective features (e.g. Microsoft SharePoint).

A targeted use of this so-called social business software, which comprises components such as wikis, discussion rooms, and profile pages (similar to social networking sites), can facilitate the externalization of expert knowledge, make experts more easily identifiable and approachable, and support the creation of social capital [3, 4]. The emergence of “Social Business Software” (e.g. Jive, Lotus Connections, Microsoft SharePoint) has been a noticeable driver for this. At the same time, the company-wide introduction and usage bears new challenges for companies. The internal use of social media does not only lead to a series of legal, technical, and socio-cultural obstacles,

but also faces a high pressure for justification since the “return on investment“ in the context of the traditional cost-benefit-analysis is difficult to measure [5, 6]. So far these new challenges on management level of companies have only received marginal attention. The emergence of social business software suggests a strategic control of the introduction and usage processes by the higher management levels. Yet, very little is known about social media managers who take responsibility for those processes. Throughout the course of this article we therefore explore the role of social media managers based on a series of interviews. A special focus lies on the findings about the organizational positioning as well as the responsibilities and rights of social media managers. As a first step we analyzed current literature and discuss the state-of-the-art of research on this matter. We then continue by introducing a role model for the evaluation of our study. Afterwards the results are presented and discussed before we end with a conclusion and an outlook for further research.

## 2 Related Work

### 2.1 Social Media Managers

The phenomenon of social media has been an intensively discussed subject of the academic world within the last years. Kaplan and Haenlein [7] provided a frequently used definition of social media. According to them “*social media is a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of user generated content*”. In this sense, social networking sites (SNS), file sharing platforms, wikis, and blogs are understood as social media. Most studies focus on the use of a certain type of web 2.0-technology in companies such as e.g. blogs or microblogs [8-11], wikis [2, 4, 12], social bookmarking [13, 14] or social networks [15, 16]. Wenger, White and Smith [17] discussed how to organize the creation of virtual communities. Based on their work, life cycle approaches were used to describe different stages of community building and how managers could support the success of those communities. However, his work does not reflect the role of social media managers. Montalvo [18] focuses on the impacts of social media on the corporate landscape. According to him, “*social media management, at a business enterprise level, is the collaborative process of using Web 2.0 platforms and tools to accomplish desired organizational objectives*”. Following him, social media management influences several core areas of companies such as brand awareness, brand reputation, strategy development, analytics, creativity, and collaboration. He does however not explicitly discuss the role of the manager but rather the range of activities of social media management. Furthermore, he does not differentiate between the internal tasks (addressing the employees) and the external tasks (addressing the customers).

Following Bottles and Sherlock [19], it is a crucial task to implement a social media manager in order to lead the effective and appropriate use of social media (see also [20]). Furthermore, they highlight that an organization can eliminate potential obstacles by taking responsibility for the (social media) strategy. They suggest that this is independent from specific departments, as employees are going to be using

social media as part of their jobs. Regarding the role of the social media manager, Bottles and Sherlock [19] suggest that it should not be located in the IT department, because technical matters do not cause the main challenges. Instead, social media managers should report directly to senior management. However, Ter Chian Tan and Vasa [20] found that in contrast to this, the responsibility of a social media strategy often falls largely in the hands of the owners (for small firms) and the marketing departments (for medium and large firms). Literature also mentions that a major problem of social media managers is to prove that social media brings any benefits to the enterprise. Therefore CEOs ask them to measure the return on investment (RoI). Following Stieglitz et al. [5], measuring the RoI of virtual communities and other collaboration tools is a difficult task since costs can be easily measured while benefits can hardly be operationalized and monetized.

## 2.2 Management Roles

In the context of managerial work there has been a variety of normative studies that investigate the conception of managerial behavior and coherent activities that are aligned to managerial effectiveness [21]. In detail they describe idealistic objectives in connection with prerequisite actions that require effective and efficient allocation of resources that will lead to the best output [22]. In contrast, inductive studies in this scope of research focus on accurate descriptions of what managers actually do, identifying characteristics, work patterns, and tasks that constitute managerial work by conducting empirical investigations [23]. Both approaches, normative as well as the inductive one, have been widely discussed in respect to their capability of giving comprehensive insight into managerial work [22, 24, 25]. The choice of the inductive approach seems to be appropriate for our study as it is based on empirical methods and sees the managers as “*affected by such realities of organizational life as politics, the actual distribution of power and authority, the pressures which managers face to manage conflict and limits on human rationality (...)*” [22]. In this context, Mintzberg [26] conducted an empirical study of managerial roles. Based on this he identified three different categories, comprising ten different manager roles that each person in a leadership position more or less adheres to [26]. The respective roles can be described as follows:

**Interpersonal Category.** *Figurehead:* The manager in this case is the symbolic head of the organization or department, having representational duties of legal and social kind (e.g. sign legal documents or host receptions). *Leader:* Leading is one of the most important tasks of managers. Their main tasks lie in the motivation and guidance of employees as well as their allocation and personal development. *Liaison:* Here the establishing and maintenance of internal and external contacts is of importance, which can develop formally as well as informally. This can be realized through horizontal and vertical communication.

**Informational Category.** *Monitor:* The goal of the manager is to increase the understanding of the company’s operations and field of work by seeking and acquiring

related information. *Disseminator*: The manager is responsible for the passing of internal and external information towards the members of the organization.

*Spokesman*: As a spokesperson, the manager keeps influential and other interested groups of people informed about the performance, policies and plans of his organization, department or team.

**Decisional Category.** *Entrepreneur*: As an entrepreneur, the manager acts as initiator and designer of a major part of the controlled change within the organization. He is responsible for finding useful innovations or the change of impulses, and the initialization of related optimization processes. *Problem Solver*: While the manager handles voluntary changes in his role as an entrepreneur, as a problem solver he is responsible for handling unforeseen crisis situations. The center of this function is defined by coping with unexpected and important disturbances in the company's business processes. *Resource Allocator*: The manager has to make decisions about the allocation of monetary resources, staff or organizational units. Beyond this, he is charged with the control of interrelationships of different decisions. *Negotiator*: The last role describes the manager as a participant in negotiating activities. This can also comprise company-internal negotiations like e.g. setting work standards.

### 3 Empirical Study

#### 3.1 Methodology

In this research paper our goal is to exploratively investigate social media managers' roles. We therefore conducted a series of interviews with social media managers in companies, which are listed in the DAX30 (German stock exchange index of the 30 largest companies regarding the market capitalization). Altogether 15 people have been interviewed, which, according to the companies, manage the internal social media processes. The interviews have been conducted between October 2011 and April 2012. Each interview took between 60 and 90 minutes. The majority of questions have been open-ended questions following a previously developed interview guide. We based the guide development on the theoretical work of Mintzberg. In the interviews we therefore addressed the topic of the formal position in the company as well as the roles and responsibilities allocated to a social media manager. The majority of interviews have been recorded (if agreed by the interviewee) and subsequently transcribed and analyzed by the open coding method.

#### 3.2 Results

Based on the ten managerial roles described before, we present our findings in the following chapter.

**Interpersonal Roles.** *Figurehead*: The task of representation is usually appropriated to the higher or top level of management. Our interviews have shown that social media managers mostly belong to the line of middle management. Since social media is

used as a tool for communication, the responsible people have been from the area of internal communication in eight cases and in three cases from the human resources department. In four cases, the IT department has been involved in the contextual design and execution, while in the other cases it was mainly responsible for the commissioning of the systems. *“The responsible for our social media project is a double lead, composed of the department of internal communication and IT, where internal communication is the designer and IT the enabler.”* Only in one case a top manager (CIO) is the main responsible for social media. *Leader:* We obtained mixed results concerning this aspect. Social media managers are usually already members of existing teams in the areas of company communications, human resources (HR) or IT. The positions reported were amongst others “Head of Internal Communications“, “Assistant Team Leader of Internal Communications“, “Digital Media Manager“, “Enterprise Community Manager“, “Global Collaboration and Knowledge Manager“, “Social Director Collaboration Application” or “Senior Manager eCollaboration”. The interviews revealed that while the leaders of existing groups are now also responsible for the implementation of social media, additional positions are also being created to include social media experts in existing teams. Only in two cases an autonomous social media team has been implemented which in turn required a lead of its own. Altogether we can conclude that newly created social media positions are seldomly created in leading management positions, but rather existing department and team leaders gain social media expertise and hence take over new responsibilities. *Liaison:* All interviewees indicated that they have to communicate and coordinate both on a vertical and horizontal level. Other departments on the same hierarchy level are included in the organizing of the platform, such as e.g. the IT department participating in the commissioning of the systems. In addition to this, there are often several departments that want to use social media in their operations. *“Next to us [as internal communications] also the departments of HR, marketing and finances are interested in using social media.”* Furthermore, the workers council has often been included in the planning and implementation at an early stage to be able to consider e.g. legal questions concerning personnel. *“There is a responsibility to communicate with different institutions within the company like the workers council, the IT-Security or the division for data protection.”* Additionally, the communication with different user groups has a great influence for social media managers on supporting the adoption of social media. *“We used the knowledge of promoters and Early Adopters to configure our platform and to support the process of introduction.”* Besides that, the establishing of contacts on a vertical level is also of high relevance to promote the social media project internally and find supporters (e.g. the CIO). According to the case studies mentioned in section 2, one of the most important factors of success for the introduction and usage of social media is to convince the management to participate actively and act as role models. Therefore a certain influence of the social media manager on the higher levels of management seems to support that goal. *“The growth of our platform benefits from the promotion by the top management. With the participation of our CIO and other IT managers, the activity among the users of our platform increased rapidly.”*

**Informational Roles.** *Monitor:* Our interviews show that all social media managers are expected to have a solid understanding of the operations and field of work of their company. According to them this information is important since the implementation of social media is not comparable to that of conventional IT applications. *“I need to know about the subtleties of our corporate culture, the structure and organization of important business processes as well as the major aspects of our IT landscape.”* Outside the company the interviewees especially pay attention to the trend developments in the area of social media, monitor the legal situation concerning data protection, and educate themselves. Also the search for information about success factors and best practice scenarios is part of it since the use of social media is still a relatively young research topic. Furthermore, the monitoring of other companies is a common practice and is used as a benchmark for the success of internal social media activities. *“We compare our data with experience values from other companies, e.g. the percentage of active users, and exchange our experiences on conferences.”* *Disseminator:* This role only applies very rarely to social media managers. Although they gather information (refer to the role of monitor), this is not an essential part of their role according to 13 of the interviewed. *“The gathered information is mainly used for the improvement and development of our social media project and not to supply other parts of the company with it.”* *Spokesperson:* The interviewees stated that they represent this function especially towards three groups: the higher management, the users, and the (interested) public. Social media managers are, like other project leaders, obligated to keep the management up-to-date about the status quo, performance, development, problems, and further plans. This is also true for social media projects, since the added value for the company is often hard to measure and the use of social media is frequently associated with a “waste of time”. Interviewees stated *“The management defines writing of e-mails clearly as a natural part of working time. But to use social media to communicate with colleagues instead of writing an email is viewed skeptically.”* and *“We do not have the real support of the management, primarily because the added value is not visible.”* Towards the interest group of users, i.e. employees of the company, the social media managers also have the role of a spokesperson. *“We inform and educate our users about new guidelines, future plans, current measures and the reasons for those.”* Seven interviewees added that they contacted the public to inform it about their current project in the form of articles or presentations. The reason for this is often an intended exchange of knowledge and experiences with science as well as other companies. Furthermore in four cases a *“positive influence on the company image to be perceived as modern and progressive”* was expected.

**Decisional Roles.** *Entrepreneur:* The majority of the interviewees stated that social media can not only change the way to communicate within a company, but also workflow processes and the corporate culture. Social media managers, in their role as entrepreneurs, design and conduct such social media projects and are constantly looking for new possibilities for adding value. *“One of the main reasons for the introduction of social media within our company is that we constantly need to simplify our processes and have to bring our new products faster to the market.”* Here they are

supported by the above-mentioned information that is gathered inside and outside the company due to their monitor role. Yet in 12 cases it was mentioned that it is impossible to dictate the potential and value adding changes that are expected by the use of social media. This is why the extent of organizational change, that is associated with the entrepreneurial role, can only be controlled with very difficulty. *“Due to the often found bottom-up-processes in social media it is very difficult to implement our ideas in a controlled manner.”* This makes the role of the entrepreneur even harder for the social media manager since it lies in the tension field between innovation, the difficult steering and control as well as justification towards the top-management.

**Problem Solver:** Our interviews indicate that the traditional role of a crisis manager only applies very slightly to the social media managers. Yet in social media new disturbances may also emerge, such as the occurrence of a “social crisis”, such as a massive and immediate surfacing of negative customer critique [27].

**Resource Allocator:** 13 participants of our interviews stated to control a social media related budget, which is usually approved by the higher management level, e.g. the CIO. In three cases we found a sponsorship by the departments of HR and internal communication. *“Basically the budget is used for software procurement, customizing or consultancy.”*

**Negotiator:** In three cases the interviewees were part of the IT department and in leading positions, due to which they also acted in their function as a negotiator. The remaining interviewees indicated that they are *“acting in a consulting function but [are] not actively participating in the negotiation processes“*. One person stated that due to changes in the workflows and the topical sensitivity regarding data security and legal employee matters, such close coordination with the employee representation has been necessary, *“that it could actually be called negotiation”*.

## 4 Discussion

Based on the interviews and the role model of Mintzberg, we were able to analyze responsibilities and challenges that social media managers are confronted with. At the same time we could also identify problems that social media managers face.

**Positioning:** Social media managers are mostly located in the internal communications department. Therefore, social media managers are seen as coordinators of communication and collaboration systems. At the same time this raises the problem that the internal communication department, in contrast to HR and e.g. Knowledge Management, has so far rather been considered as a “soft” support function, which did not directly contribute to the value of the company. In some companies it could be observed that the social media manager has been repositioned and e.g. been migrated from the internal communication to the HR department. According to the respective companies, this led to an increased acceptance of the responsible. *“[it is an] essential success factor, that they are not part of internal communications, so that they are taken more seriously“*. Often the social media responsible reports directly to the top management.

The position of the social media managers itself is either created as an enrichment to an existing or as a completely new position in the middle management level. Our interviews show that social media managers have a greater impact on the internal development of a company than other managers on the same hierarchical level, and also than originally anticipated by the higher management. The reason for this lies in the profound change possibilities which the social media manager has on the communication and collaboration in the company, through which e.g. knowledge management, collaboration, search for experts, creation of social capital, and a common corporate culture are reinforced.

**Roles, Tasks, and Power of Decision Making:** According to the results of our empirical study the major roles of social media are those of the coordinator, spokesperson, entrepreneur, and monitor.

Social media managers take a strong liaison role between the different perspectives and departments of the company (e.g. workers council, board, internal communication, HR, IT). At the same time they are under pressure to justify that their projects contribute value to the company. Here, social media managers often meet their limits since on the one hand the board demands clear KPIs and operational measurements for the degree to which the goals are reached, but on the other hand barely any methods for community controlling and measurement are known. The interviews have further shown that the managers are aware of this tension field and intensively look for possibilities to quantify the added value of social media. Another way to increase and retain the acceptance of the CEO is e.g. to prove that competing or similar companies use company-wide social media strategies as well. *“Benchmarking with other companies is a means by which I argue towards my CEO that we have to further intensify our social media activities”.*

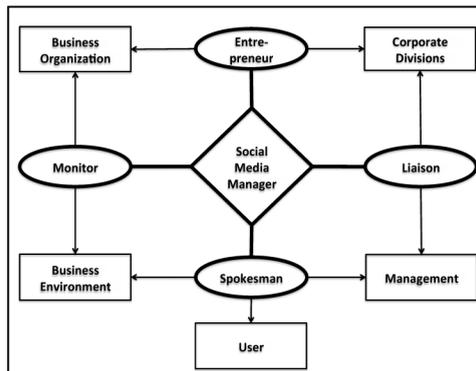


Fig. 1. Roles of Social Media Managers

## 5 Conclusion and Outlook

The interview series has shown that social media managers are often part of the middle management level and are either rooted in the internal communication or HR

department. The position titles vary significantly since the extension of responsibility of an existing position can be done formally but also informally.

Besides always having up-to-date knowledge about social media, they furthermore require knowledge about the company's organization, corporate culture as well as communication and organizational skills due to their often mediating and coordinating function. It has to be considered as a limitation of this study that the series of interviews did only include managers of German companies. It must also be noted that the companies are partially in very different stages of implementing social media internally in their companies.

This article represents a first important step to scientifically discuss the current, and possibly the future role of the social media manager in companies. Our conducted interviews served for a broad overview that helped in uncovering central problems. Furthermore, a contribution to practice is given, since companies can derive their own relative position and estimate the challenges of a social media manager better.

One of the main problems of social media managers is the imbalance of high expectations and relatively low discretionary power. Further research should therefore cover the aspect how social media managers can best face this tension field, and whether the discretionary power of the social media manager has to be redefined. Especially the lack of possibilities to evaluate projects and determine their success has been stated as a central problem by the interviewed. Concerning this, research should aim at developing a theoretical basis and provide empirical studies of best practices.

## References

1. Zhang, J., Qu, Y., Cody, J., Wu, Y.: A Case Study of Microblogging in the Enterprise: Use, Value, and Related Issues. In: Proceedings of the 28th International Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems, Atlanta, USA, pp. 123–132 (2010)
2. Stocker, A., Tochtermann, K.: Exploring the Value of Enterprise Wikis - A Multiple-Case Study. In: Proceedings of the International Conference on Knowledge Management and Information Sharing, Funchal (2009)
3. Saldanha, T.J., Krishnan, M.S.: Organizational Adoption of Web 2.0 Technologies: An Empirical Analysis. In: AMCIS, Proceedings, Paper 103 (2010), <http://aisel.aisnet.org/amcis2010/103drivingfactorsbehindadoptionofWeb2.0>
4. Mansour, O., Abusalah, M., Askenäs, L.: Wiki collaboration in organizations: an exploratory study. In: Proceedings of the 19th European Conference on Information Systems, Helsinki, Finland, pp. 9–12 (2011)
5. Stieglitz, S., Lattemann, C., vom Brocke, J., Sonnenberg, C.: Economics of Virtual Communities - A Financial Analysis of a Case Study at the Berlin Stock Exchange. In: Proceedings of the 21st Bled eConference (2008)
6. Stieglitz, S., Dang-Xuan, L.: Adoption and Use of Corporate Wikis in German Small and Medium-sized Enterprises. In: Proceedings of the 17th Americas Conference on Information Systems, USA, Detroit, Paper 235 (2011)
7. Kaplan, A., Haenlein, M.: Users of the world, unite! The challenges and opportunities of Social Media. *Business Horizons* 53(1), 59–68 (2010)

8. Efimova, L., Grudin, J.: Crossing boundaries: A case study of employee blogging. In: 40th Annual Hawaii International Conference on System Sciences, pp. 86–96 (2007)
9. Riemer, K., Richter, A., Diederich, S., Scifleet, P.: Tweet Talking - Exploring The Nature Of Microblogging at Capgemini Yammer. Business Information Systems Working Paper-WP2011-02, University of Sydney, Australia Link (2011), <http://ses.library.usyd.edu.au/handle/2123/7226>
10. Yardi, S., Golder, S.A., Brzozowski, M.J.: Blogging at work and the corporate attention economy. In: Proceedings of the 27th international Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems, pp. 2071–2080 (2009)
11. Seebach, C.: Searching for Answers - Knowledge Exchange through Social Media in Organizations. In: Proceedings of the 45th Hawaii International Conference on System Sciences, pp. 3908–3917 (2012)
12. Hasan, H., Pfaff, C.C.: The Wiki: an environment to revolutionise employees' interaction with corporate knowledge. In: Proceedings of OZCHI 2006, pp. 377–380 (2006)
13. Laurie, E., Damianos, D.C., Griffith, J., Hirst, D.M., Smallwood, J.: Exploring the Adoption, Utility, and Social Influences of Social Bookmarking in a Corporate Environment. In: 40th Annual Hawaii International Conference on System Sciences (2007)
14. Millen, D.R., Yang, M., Whittaker, S., Feinberg, J.: Social bookmarking and exploratory search. In: ECSCW 2007, Limerick, Ireland, September 26-28 (2007)
15. Riemer, K., Overfeld, P., Scifleet, P., Richter, A.: Oh, SNEP! The Dynamics of Social Network Emergence - the case of Capgemini Yammer. Business Information Systems Working Paper-WP201201, University of Sydney, Australia. Link (2012), <http://ses.library.usyd.edu.au/handle/2123/8049>
16. DiMicco, J., Millen, D., Geyer, W., Dugan, C., Brownholtz, B., Muller, M.: Motivations for social networking at work. In: Proceedings of the ACM 2008 Conference on Computer Supported Cooperative Work, pp. 711–720 (2008)
17. Wenger, E., White, N., Smith, J.D.: Digital Habitats; stewarding technology for communities, Portland, CPsquare, p. 228 (2009)
18. Montalvo, R.E.: Social media management. *International Journal of Management and Information Systems* 15(3), 91–96 (2011)
19. Bottles, K., Sherlock, T.: Who Should Manage Your Social Media Strategy? *Physician Executive* 37(2), 68–72 (2011)
20. Ter Chian Tan, F., Vasa, R.: Toward a Social Media Usage Policy. In: Proceedings of ACIS 2011, Paper 72 (2011), <http://aisel.aisnet.org/acis2011/72>
21. Leslie, J.B., Dalton, M., Ernst, C., Deal, J.: *Managerial Effectiveness in a Global Context*. Greensboro, Center for Creative Leadership, NC (2002)
22. Burgaz, B.: Managerial roles approach and the prominent study of Henry Mintzberg and some empirical studies upon the principals work (1997)
23. Noordegraaf, M., Stewart, R.: Managerial behaviour research in private and public sectors: distinctiveness, disputes and directions. *Journal of Management Studies* 37(3), 427–443 (2000)
24. Hales, C.P.: What do managers do? A critical review of the evidence. *Journal of Management Studies* 23(1), 88–115 (1986)
25. Fondas, N., Stewart, R.: Enactment in Managerial Jobs: A Role Analysis. *Journal of Management Studies* 31(1), 83–103 (1994)
26. Mintzberg, H.: *The nature of managerial work*. Harper & Row, New York (1973)
27. Urban Dictionary, <http://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=shitstorm>