Introduction

THE STRATEGIC ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA: EMERGING TRENDS AND OPEN RESEARCH

In the emerging domain of social media use by organisations, key questions are raised for future research consideration. Though achieving a wide reach in public and private sector alike, social platforms are still a novelty from an academic perspective. We explore whether the emerging questions brought about by the proliferation of social platforms in organisational settings are fundamentally different from those arising in other contexts. We further consider whether social media platforms offer unique strengths and opportunities for firms’ growth and productivity. We also open a discussion on the changes in methodology required for gaining a better academic understanding of the social networking phenomenon in the business domain.

It would be virtually impossible to attend a business fair, listen to news, or open an academic publication, and not to come across a reference to social networks. What is going on in the world is often mirrored in social media and ideas currently trending become the trendsetters of tomorrow. The use of social media for business is no exception. It may be presumptuous to say that social platforms are possibly the most significant descriptive technology in business over the current decade and also the next big step in the development of the digital economy. However, what does this big change mean to organisations? This is particularly important in light of the advent of big data and new unprecedented levels of business intelligence analytics (Agarwal & Dhar, 2014). Rather than relying on our interpretation of the social media phenomenon in business settings, we invited prominent researchers and practitioners in the field to contribute to this conversation. As the debate flourished, five questions surfaced which helped us frame our thinking on the domain:

1. Is the adoption of social networks by organisations a new way of doing old things or, rather, old wine in new bottles?
2. In what new areas in the workplace — both with respect to the public and private sectors — are social media applications emerging?
3. What strengths does the use of social media in professional settings bring to the enterprise and does it lead to a competitive advantage over rivals?
4. What significant developments have taken place in the development of the metrics of ‘success’, ‘business benefits’ and ‘effectiveness’ with regard to social media?
5. As academics (editors and reviewers) what methodological changes are needed with respect to evaluative assessments and methods of inquiry in this emerging domain?
Introduction

While working on this book and constructing our world view of social media developments in organisational settings, we came across a vast array of transformational ways in which social media are used in today’s professional world. The manner in which firms interact with their external stakeholders, including consumers, has seen tremendous changes. As noted in Blanchard’s influential work, social media ROI is hard to compute; a much greater challenge in this context, however, is harnessing control of social media organisational channels and managing brands and organisational reputation (Blanchard, 2011). The public sector is no exception and, in this regard, governmental information flow relies largely on social media channels to increase its reach to citizens. Current research highlights the new ways the public sector has enhanced efficiency and productivity in government service delivery, spawning new labels for social media interactions such as “Citizen Sourcing,” “Government as a Platform,” and “Do-It-Yourself Government” (Linders, 2012). Other researchers draw attention to the contrasting nature of the impact that social media creates in personal and professional settings (Benson & Morgan, 2015).

This book intends to provide an overview of the emerging trends in social media and other technologies having an impact on growth and productivity of firms. The world is embracing new technologies in anticipation of further revenue opportunities, while a range of important issues surrounding the organizational implications of technology remains rather under-explored.

Up until a few years ago, very few general managers outside of the IT industry deemed themselves social media strategists. As social networking media seized the focal point on the business scene, the majority of companies embraced the new technology, seeking to leverage it for competition or revenue. Although the popularity of corporate Facebook and Twitter accounts has levelled off in recent years, most businesses have not sought to disengage from virtual communities. The gap between the early aficionados of social networking and those waiting to take the social strategy to the next level has actually widened.

The advances in IT and in online social networking in particular have had a significant impact on how people communicate and work. The shift towards ubiquitous technologies, facilitated by the proliferation of mobile devices, has transformed personal, organizational and industrial relations. Social technology is changing the way people work and the ways in which firms are developing and growing. The impact of the use by employees of social networking tools for communication is undoubtedly changing organizations. Transformations of industrial networks and the ways in which firms interact, establish competitive differentiation, and pursue positioning strategies, now involve social technologies. This is especially relevant for firms which compete using information and communication technology. A great potential for social technology monetization is largely underexplored by the current literature.

Research in the area of social technology strategy in organizational settings is thriving and we hope to open the debate for further exploration of this challenging topic.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Chapters in this book addressing a series of issues on the application of networking and social media to organisations raise important issues of organizational adoption of social media in the private and public sectors. The topic is very fresh and has recently become a subject of intense academic debate. We envisage a great interest in this publication from various areas. Through an in-depth discussion of a range of issues touching on the impact of social media and technologies on organizations, we hope to create a rich account of how firms leverage social networking as well as provide an excellent reference point on the subject for policy makers, academics, and public and private sector firms.
REFERENCES


