Social Media Infrastructure: Supporting Communication Practices from Behind the Scenes
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ABSTRACT
In this poster, I propose a design for a communication infrastructure to support social media practices in businesses and organizations. Many professional social media efforts are poorly conceived and executed due to a limited understanding of how social media should function for professional purposes. Yet, through a simple model that begins with the development of policies and strategic plans, and includes audit, legal considerations, and style, many of the risks and uncertainties of social media can be mitigated. The poster presented here outlines key areas for this communication infrastructure and seeks input as to how the model could be expanded.

Categories and Subject Descriptors
H.5.3 [Information Interfaces and Presentation]: Group and Organization Interfaces; H.3.4 [Information Storage and Retrieval]: Systems and Software

Keywords
Social media, communication infrastructure.

1. INTRODUCTION
Effective professional communication with social media requires a social business model and a solid social communication infrastructure; yet, for most companies, this communication model is non-existent. Rather, in the rush to become a social business and engage with the online community and dynamic conversations, many organizations jumped on the social media bandwagon with little thought as to the critical connections social media must make to not only business goals, but also the overall corporate communication ecosystem. Because of this lack of connectivity, it is often the case that social media practices of communication become an improvisation rather than part of a strategic plan that reduces risk, capitalizes on opportunity, and aligns to business goals and objectives [2, 4, 5, 6].

The dangers of an unstructured social media presence are many. The number of users on any social network site (SNS) and the virality of their communications are powerful. The social clout of this digital vox populi is not to be discounted—corporate reputations today are made or broken via the Enter key. As a result, this necessitates that companies have a model to support their communication efforts with social media rather than relying on an ad hoc adaptation of personal, informal social media use. By designing a substantive model for social media communication, an organization can not only mitigate risk, manage reputation, and maximize brand messages; it can provide a way to harness unexpected and unbridled successes in social media campaigns [3, 5].

2. UNDERSTANDING SOCIAL MEDIA
Scholarly studies of social media are growing, yet the identification and development of an effective corporate social media infrastructure remains elusive in the research. Most current academic work centers on the myriad technologies available or studies of social ties and interactions within a social media ecosphere.

However, research on determining what the design of an effective social media infrastructure could look like, how it could support communication, and how it could manage what Jacka and Scott call the “reputational, strategic, and governance risks” in social media requires investigation [5]. Thus, it is the goal of this poster to propose an early idea of what an effective social media infrastructure should include and how this infrastructure could support research related to the design of communication.

3. MODELLING AN INFRASTRUCTURE
In order for social media communication to be effective—whether in a business-to-customer (B2C) or business-to-business (B2B) capacity—it must be supported by an infrastructure that forms a dynamic and iterative feedback loop as shown in Figure 1. Below are topics the poster will explore as starting points for building a comprehensive social media infrastructure.

3.1 Policies
Social media policy documents perform multiple roles in an organization. Typically, these are single charters that guide employees on their personal use of social media in the workplace. This charter may include policies on workplace access to personal accounts and circumscribe what employees can say about their employer. However, such a document is insufficient when employees become part of the social sphere on behalf of their employer. Thorough social media policies guide communication conventions on corporate any SNS; as well, these policies define workflow processes and approvals. Such policies govern how/when/if new social tools will be selected and incorporated. Crisis communication plans and risk management form a significant part of this expanded document set [4, 5].
3.2 Strategic Planning
According to Jacka and Scott, most organizations are at risk due to lack of a strategy or inadequate strategy for social media [5]. Strategic documents make the critical alignments between social media efforts and business objectives and goals; they also form a linkage to measuring return-on-investment [2, 6]. Therefore, developing a comprehensive social media plan must include adequate strategy and define how it will be implemented.

3.3 Audit and Compliance
Even with communication policies and strategic plans in place, many organizations skip the important step of audit and compliance. The question of social media activities complying with the outlined policies and strategic plans is critical for success. Audits can help identify areas of risk/opportunity and close gaps; additionally, as the poster will convey, audits can help iteratively shape policies for the communicative situation [5].

3.4 Legal/Regulatory
Accidental disclosures, Federal Trade Commission requirements, and labor law violations are only some of the pressing legal issues surrounding social media. Unless the communication infrastructure has been designed with these in mind, social media activities can result in a maelstrom of lawsuits and court cases [4, 7].

3.5 Style
Communication policies ensure consistent messaging aligned with corporate philosophies and goals; however, style guides rarely consider how to reflect how the “voice” of a company in social media. Thus, the role of voice and how it informs the design of communication can be viewed as a significant component of an overall social media presence [1].

4. CONCLUSIONS
For social media to be effective, it requires a significant infrastructure. This poster presents a model for the infrastructure an organization should implement if it wishes to capitalize on the benefits social media can offer while reducing many of the risks. As an exploratory piece, the poster is designed to start a conversation about professional social media practices and the design of communication in this arena.

5. REFERENCES