Social Media against the Backdrop of Socioeconomic Changes

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Abstract

The ongoing development of technology made it possible to use Social Media (SM) in the work world. The intensification of the incorporation process of Social Media into work culture caused diverse socioeconomic changes. The goal in this paper is to highlight drastic changes and tendencies that have occurred and to provide an analysis of these changes. The strategy in this paper is to provide a theoretical basis along with analysis, providing statistics and explanations. The paper is organised as follows. Section 2 describes new ways of working that have recently appeared in work culture. The increasing loyalty to private and professional responsibility takes place of hierarchy that used to be a classic model of working in previous years. Section 3 explains how new forms of communication change working habits and shows the change of users' nature - from pure consumers to co-creators. Section 4 discusses the tendency of sharing personal information on the Web and probable risks of revealing so much information. Section 5 provides information on the anonymity and its role in communication. Finally, the last section presents findings and conclusions.

Keywords: social media, working, communication, use of data, anonymity and roles

1. Introduction

Increasingly open global trade is intensifying price competition between global companies. In the global economy, resources / flows of trade, capital, labour, products and services are increasingly under competitive mobility pressure. Increased deregulation due to a decrease in government regulations as well as new suppliers penetrating existing markets have been intensifying the competitive environment that established companies are exposed to (Bilir, 2014).

In addition to growing competition, technological development is accelerating and thus the overall innovation pressure is rising due to shrinking product life cycles, which have been reduced to less than 50% of their original scope in the 50 years after 1940. In the course of this development, the operating profits of providers have been affected because the product profit margin and life cycle are directly proportional. The competitive pressure compels providers to accelerate the launch of current products in order to avoid disadvantages (Seifert et al., 2016).

New product development requires additional costs and also correlates with increased innovation pressure from customers or resulting brand infidelity (Kreutzer & Merkle, 2007, 114th). Personnel, logistics, know-how and capital capacity in SMEs are therefore often put under strain in light of these requirements, while large enterprises and globally operating companies can more adequately meet these requirements due to their greater available resources.

2. New Ways of Working

Changes in both the economy as well as in company work culture have been evinced in the form of new ideas of value and career in recent years in the Western world. Hierarchical positions in very limited decision-making environments are increasingly rejected (Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2015, p. 42 ff.), and instead private and professional responsibility, independence and individuality are embraced. Individual tasks are becoming less important, while those involving the organisation as a whole are taking on more significance, which promotes a reformed work culture with more creative focus and enhanced self-realisation. Remuneration, status and security are, by contrast, increasingly less in focus (Creative Work, 2007).

Such global structural changes in values are causing a broad rethink of the work world to an extent that has not

occurred since the 19th century. According to study results of the IAB Zukunftsinstitut, by around 2050, permanent employment contracts will fall by half, while conversely, the number of self-employed and freelancers will double (Ackermann, 2007). The independent forms of employment and spatiotemporal separation of workers requires stronger web-based communications and data exchange activities, including SM services. Through SM, communication and communication culture are becoming an integral part of professional and private life.

3. New Forms of Communication

New demands on communication channels are based not least on increasingly globalised markets and more individualised work models that are increasingly organised via Internet, e-mail or SM-apps. In both the internal as well as in the B2B communications of many companies, internationalisation also requires increased mobility requirements and more frequent internal job changes. These are often realised through the mobile Internet (Giordano, 2005, p. 29), which makes remote work increasingly possible today.

Web-enabled devices like smartphones and notebooks allow for these increasingly project-related activities with high mobility and autonomous workflows modelled on the basis of many freelancers, whereby leisure time and work come into conflict or increasingly overlap (Schrape, 2015, p. 201 ff). This improves the flexibility of individual time management, in which trust-based working hours or flexitime models allow greater maintenance of social relationships and contacts. The latter is also conducted more and more via Internet and SM. International and remote maintenance of contacts are growing by means of virtual networking in view of technological progress in this field, which is also a continual development in the private sphere and simultaneously demands increasingly unrestricted accessibility. The latter is influenced in part by communication control and self-determination sentiments.

Communication consequences and times are subject to their own whims, not least to allow Internet-based communications and content to be ignored when necessary, which may make them less annoying (Zuberbühler, 2006, p. 178). Time-delayed or parallel communications with several contact partners are also not a problem, which even includes anonymous contacts. Flat rates for stationary and mobile online access make costly equipment increasingly irrelevant. Thus, contact distance, length and frequency of SM communication is becoming financially insignificant. The only relevant barriers in international communication are increasingly caused by language barriers and censorship regulations, whereas cultural and territorial borders can be easily overcome. Written communication is predominant. Emoticons can be used in the process to pictorially illustrate vocal, gestural or mimic channels. Therefore, web-based conversation is also frequently regarded as rather superficial in comparison to a vis-à-vis conversation, as is the opinion of 64% of Germans over 14-years-old (Allensbach Institute, 2010, p. 22). Less than 3% of respondents are convinced the opposite is true.

Parallel communication is considered a possible reason for this: 59% of online users engage in communication online in parallel to other activities, with 53% of them perceiving this as contemporary or modern. SM platforms such as Myspace, various wikis, Facebook or YouTube allow active participation in user events and participation in creating user generated content (UGC) (Völtz, 2011, p. 3). Active participation and a broad data access of users are critical to success (Helbing, 2015). This allows users a simple means to be creative and to digitally contribute to the production of varied content, published content that is often regarded as non-professional and creative contributions according to OECD criteria. UGC is provided by numerous web-based services, especially Wikipedia or YouTube, where users make videos or wiki entries available free of charge. UGC of this type is enjoying increasing popularity and dissemination. Thus in 2014 in the USA, 52% of online users were involved in the creation of photo or video UGC (Statista, 2016).

Users are therefore changing more and more from pure consumers to active co-creators—a paradigmatic reorientation of use premises as part of the increasingly popular Web 2.0 or the so-called interactive web, which has been for years determined to a large extent by SM and is enlivened by user communication and UGC. The lower the age of the user, the higher their willingness typically is to participate as users in UGC creation. Younger people generally use the Internet and SM more intensively than older people. Only 12% of Internet users age 60 or older participate in Web 2.0. In the age group of 14–19-year-olds, meanwhile, 35% are actively involved, whereby a difference in gender does not play a significant role. One does observe, however, that wikis and video portals tend to be visited by men, while communities or photo sites attract more women (Busemann & Gscheidle, 2010, p. 364).

4. Changes in the Use of Data

Older users also demonstrate different behaviour in regard to data use than younger users, which not only includes active Internet and SM use as such. SM networks such as Facebook, Twitter, Google+ and YouTube

allow for creating diverse personal user profile data concerning the interests and priorities of each user to represent oneself in the digital community. Following corresponding needs, mostly personal data are stored here. 12 to 19-year-olds reveal an excessive amount of detail about themselves in social networks (Madden, 2013, p. 4), while data sharing can mostly be controlled by users. But without active changes made by the user, his or her data are by default completely available publicly, which is why young people must consciously learn what is advisable or permissible and what is not in terms of their private information in this context, because careless handling of data transparency can translate into real risks. These include the hacking of personal (banking) information, credit card numbers or passwords, which can be used by criminals for fraudulent purposes (Immler, 2007, p. 425). This can extend to problems with future employers, since recruiters today also search social networks (SN) for information about candidates, which is certainly made easier through existing professional SNs. LinkedIn or XING should be mentioned in this context, as they can work to the advantage of individuals and may also facilitate entering the labour market, since candidates can present themselves effectively and enhance their positioning to optimise their external presentation to prospective employers. Advertisers primarily see economic advantages in the publishing of private data.

Targeted data mining allows them to tailor advertising to potential customers via e-mail, post or in an SM account (Verbraucherzentrale Hessen, 2009, p. 1). This minimises wastage and also increases the attractiveness of promotions due to the specific product or topic selection—taken from the preferences of individuals published in SNs. Open data handling thus has both advantages and disadvantages for the user, while advertisers and companies mainly can profit from its use, which must always be conducted within the framework of existing laws and legal requirements.

5. Anonymity and Roles

Immediate and easy online contact is possible in an area protected by SM-apps, since anonymous logins or pseudonyms are typically used in chat rooms, forums or social communities, while gender, religion as well as social status and other characteristics are not evident in contact and identity cannot be checked in any way. Even nicknames, or user pseudonyms, are used here for contacts and sometimes are falsified to engage in role reversal, impersonation or living out entirely fictional personalities. The actual social status and roles in real life disappear on the Internet or lose importance. The latter also applies to user profile data without hierarchical order, which can co-exist on the same level and nevertheless does not support the creation of a unified standard culture, because the Internet provides numerous subcultures a space for social development. They differ in terms of the interests of members (Bennett, 2014, p. 94). The so-called avatar is commonly used: with a visually designable avatar personality, online users can change their social background, including gender. Communication rules apply here that may differ from those in real life (IRL). Avatar behaviour and choice also affect the in-game vis-à-vis communication. The physical appearance of the avatar often rejects IRL conventions in terms of attractiveness, self-confidence, aggressiveness, etc. (Döring, 2010, p. 171). The online world is also the realm of avatars who are administrators, bloggers, chatters, moderators or wiki authors (Döring, 2010, p. 171), complemented by profiles as activists, trendsetters and others in the SM.

The prevailing anonymity thus promotes a more intense and more open, empathetic exchange compared to real encounters. Anonymity is however not always welcome or permitted and some users deliberately register with their real names to be found more easily (XING, etc.), since their name can be used as a search term. Role and identity aspects of a person in this connection are lived out and represented in their online lives by means of different profiles in different communities or SNs. These role threads are nevertheless easy to trace back to the source person through a plain name search in different forums, which may not be in their interests (Kuttler, 2008). Professional and private SN roles are increasingly mixing these days, which is why the respective boundaries between the two (also real) worlds are becoming more and more blurred.

6. Findings and Conclusion

The new globalising world requires means increased mobility, intensified the competitive environment on the global market, innovation pressure that drives the economic development and influence brands' fidelity. In this backdrop Social Media plays an important role. It has led to several significant changes in the main fields of work culture - ways of working, communication, the use of data, and the role of anonymity. Under the influence of SM the whole culture has been rethought. Now the collective responsibility is welcomed, but hierarchical decision-making positions decreasing. The work culture has become more creative and more exposed to self-realisation. The current tendency is growing number of freelancers and self-employed people. Through SM, communication and communication culture are becoming an integral part of professional and private life. This caused the conflict between leisure time and work. This also improves the flexibility of individual time

management. Users are therefore changing more and more from pure consumers to active co-creators. That is what led to changes in recruiter's work. The information about a candidate on SM can be either her advantage or disadvantage. While advertisers and companies mainly can profit from open data handling, which must always be conducted within the framework of existing laws and legal requirements. Targeted data mining allows them to tailor advertising to potential customers via e-mail, post or in an SM account. The role of anonymity increased, since people have become more active users. People feel more secure, because the actual social status and real positions lose importance on the Internet. Communication rules on the Web differ from those used in real life. The world of the SM has become another world with its rules, which influences the real world and shapes its agenda, particularly in the work world.

The overlapping of two worlds is an interesting field of research, which is relatively new and thus remains unstudied what opens wide perspectives for further research.

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