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The impact of social media for business

Abstract: *Social media affect the way organizations do business and communicate externally and internally. There are no longer clear boundaries of inside and outside organization life, and we need to explore how new social media can bring value for businesses in new ways. 'Value' in a strong economic sense is challenged by social media as a door opener for influence that the organizations should take seriously. Can social media increase 'value', as in strengthened brand and reputation based on the market's influence and trust, and in the end bring economic benefit for the business and organization? The virtual market isn't a huge collection of passive consumers; it is represented by networks of people having meaningful dialogues and interaction with both each other and the businesses as such, and represents new ways of market power. Social media tools open up for rethinking value in new innovative ways – and it is interesting to examine whether different organizational cultures will make different valuable outcomes, values in social, reputational, knowledgeable and networked capital senses. This is the relation I want to discuss in this article.*

Keywords*:* Social media, network, community, identity, meaning, corporate identity, reputation, value, interaction, enterprise 2.0, knowledge, communication strategy,

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Introduction

> *"The ethnographer must understand the context of people's behavior. An isolated outrigger canoe had no meaning without knowing who built it, who had the right to sail it, and who performed the necessary magical spells employed during its use. The cardinal field work rule, therefore, should be to see reality from "the natives point of view"* (Weiner 1988:4)

In what sense do social media applications encourage meaningful interaction and knowledge sharing processes between employees across departments within the organization, and in what sense does different internal communication strategies impact and meet both internal and external "2.0 expectations", such as openness, dialog, and expectations of influence? Can social media tools/applications contribute to strengthen corporate identity and in that case, in what sense can social media provide value for the company as such? By including internal communication in relation with external communication, this article will capture the synergy between the two. By focusing on different internal communication strategies (top-down, bottom-up, hybrids of the two) close with social media applications, we will explore how communication 2.0 strategies can impact value for businesses. Value considered in a broad sense: *social*, *economic*, *knowledge*, *reputation*. The market is a part of individual and collective projects where emotions and identities are expressed, and can therefore not be defined by monetary values alone (Olsen 2003). By mapping different social media applications that are used for interaction we will receive great insight of benefits from different social media tools, technology as such and give important knowledge of how social media can be used by companies and organizations for innovation. There are weekly bulletins in media of speculations on social media effect[1] for work capacity[2], market power[3], the importance of listening to the

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customer[4], to mention a few. There are several ongoing research projects about social media in Norway and on an international basis, especially about the citizen's perspective of democracy, digital childhood, privacy and more[5]. Despite several anthropological work done on social media, work by Dana Boyd (2008) who examined American teens in networked publics in her dissertation and anthropologist Jenny Ryan that spent five years observing social network sites, which she describes in terms of virtual campfire (2008) we need more cross disciplinary contribution to this field. Ulf Hannerz (1992) calls for anthropological studies of the information society and Culcom[6] states straight forward that we need to bring in a Wikipedia mindset to the academic field. A variety of cross disciplinary research is conducted, such that of Eduardo Navaro that discusses the blogger as a producer[7], the anthropology of file sharing, consuming napster as a gift (Giesler and Pohlman 2003) or the work of Jonathan Harris that combines computer science, anthropology, storytelling and visual arts[8] - but we still have a great potential for contribution where the outcome can be of wide inter disciplinary interest. Research done on non-profit organizations states that social media has become an important part of these organization's communication strategies, and states that they "have found a new and exciting way to win the hearts (and maybe dollars) of potential donors (Barnes and Mattson 2009:9)". The Norwegian company Stormberg experience broad media coverage these days on how they use people's response to improve their services, but especially how they're use of social media strategically[9]. However, we don't know what *effect* Stromberg's use of twitter, blog and more has for business as such. We need more research of the innovative aspect of social media, of whether social media can stimulate *actual value* for businesses, and if they can, in what sense. We need to have several lenses in our glasses when we examine phenomenon such as social media. This is one contribution down this alley.

Social media and Enterprise 2.0

Social media, or web 2.0, is used as a common term representing a range of new internet services (Storsul et al 2008). The term refers to the ability for people to interact, share and contribute on the web, often within networks of network. In this sense the media is named *social*. This represents a substantial step from previous web 1.0 that was recognized in the internet's earliest days which was more based on a one-way 'sender – receiver' premise, with minimum ability for users to effect or respond actively to content or to accomplish any dialog with the sender (Qualman 2009). Social media challenges traditional communication, both for the web and marketing as such, but also for traditional organizations and businesses often characterized with a top down strategy, and with communication advisors having all content contributed from the business or organization checked for its quality and policy (Brønn og Ihlen 2009). Social media represents a bottom up approach for communication – both for the technology and software used to accomplish dialog, sharing and collaboration, but also for organizations and business as such; employees will distribute, collaborate and share with a *lack of control* mechanism. The traditional web- and intranets editor role is shifting from typically publishing content on behalf of employees, toward roles that stimulate and encourage employees to establish solid internal opportunities for bridge-builders between employees, and between employees and external actors (Martin and Hetrick 2006). Social-, reputation- and network capital represent value in new senses. At the same time we observe several new communication roles flourish, for

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[4] http://blogs.gartner.com/michael_maoz/2009/05/07/why-your-twitter-and-social-crm-efforts-will-fail/
[5] See Sintef for an short overview; http://www.sintef.no/Informasjons--og-kommunikasjonsteknologi-IKT/Samvirkende-og-tiltrodde-systemer----/Faggrupper/Human-Computer-Interaction-HCI/Sosiale-Medier/
[6] http://www.culcom.uio.no/nyheter/2009/kompleksitet.html
[7] http://www.netartreview.net/monthly/0305.3.html
[8] http://www.number27.org/bio.html
[9] http://www.dagbladet.no/2009/10/22/kultur/tekno/data_og_teknologi/twitter/steinar_j_olsen/8685391/

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instance professional bloggers, "Twitters and Facebookers" that work solely on cultivating new communication canals, interacting with people, supervisors, and new marketing services as Online Reputation Management (ORM) that work solely on monitoring and search engine optimization[10].

Social media uses subjective and personal narratives in storytelling by its nature; openness, involvement, identification and interaction. Subjective storytelling seems to represent a high degree of identification with the content by the viewer/ user/reader. In this perspective social media involves the user in ways we have earlier seen within communication fields, documentary genres and other media that aim to represent reality in authentic ways (Nicols 1991, Pettersen 2000). *The Obama effect* can be seen as an interesting example of how social media was used in a variety of all together 16 ways to involve different groups of people, all represented by tools recognized with subjective narratives from Obama to the people, speaking directly to them[11]. "*What Obama did so successfully is that he went to where his customer base was*" (Blogger Rich Brooks 19.01.09[12]). By using a range of different social media applications (Twitter, Facebook, MySpace, YouTube,a personal blog, but also by addressing specific ethnic communities as Black Planet (African-Americans) and more), Barack Obama used personal storytelling to accomplish involvement of users by *distributing a message of hope*. We are registering tendencies within social media technologies that we can call *application synergy*. For instance some of the latest features for X-box 360 are that the player can easily share scores and snap shots from his game to other social media applications and in this way communicate with his network as he plays. Other features are to sync with your music account at last.fm so you can listen to your favorite music while playing or watching a film. The news about X-Box 360's new features were posted on YouTube October 14th this year, and was viewed by 37 170 people and had 1021comments in less than two weeks[13].

The basic idea of social media is that people together create content and in this way together build a collective knowledge, such as Wikipedia, where anyone can write or edit the content. The consequences are a more democratic way of contributing to balanced representations of reality. Idealistically we all have the ability to affect and contribute content in different directions and make change, but it also has several ethical, economical and ideological concerns. Petter Bae Brandtzæg comments that the main contributors of content in Wikipedia are young men between 15 and 30 years of age[14]. This is an example of how the ideal that lies behind collaboration and contribution of content reflects a certain segment of society's perspective. *The incubator lie* is perhaps the most known example of the importance of including several points of views in representing reality[15]. At the same time we see the importance of Twitter during turbulence in Iraq. May Thorseth (2005) shows how the internet provided an open forum for Arab women in Saudia Arabia and this is an example of how the internet can be a place for empowerment of underprivileged groups of society. A newly published report of the consequences of the Norwegian government's use of social media concludes

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[10] http://www.labconfidential.dk/index.php/fa-renset-dit-navn-pa-nettet/
[11] http://scottmeis.com/2008/08/31/analyzing-barack-obamas-social-media-strategy/
[12] http://www.fastcompany.com/blog/rich-brooks/social-media-strategies-small-business/what-businesses-can learn-barack-obamas-soci
[13] http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UlWG4u0JG8k
[14] From his presentation *Delingskulturen - et paradigmeskifte for offentlig virksomhet* held at the Nokios conferance at Trondheim october 14.th 2009.
[15] http://whatreallyhappened.com/WRHARTICLES/incubatorlie.html

that if social media is used in right ways, it will contribute to a better democracy. The report stresses that different content should be distributed in different social media arenas[16].

We are standing at the starting line of realities of how social media will influence us as citizens and workers on one hand, and ways organizations and businesses communicate with their target groups on the other. Because social media software applications rely on people's use to accomplish in some way a goal, social media is closely interwoven with a range of other disciplines, such as social science, human-machine interaction, organizational theory, communication studies, human relations, management strategy and so forth. Within *knowledge management[17]* employees are viewed as carriers of knowledge where knowledge sharing is a main goal for the organization as such. Network theory is an example of an hyphen from this perspective, with its focus on how actors within society influence and affect each other. Actors in network theory include both people and non-people, and are therefore an often used theory for studying socio-technical networks and systems[18]. Tian Sørhaug refers to both Barth and Goffman when he stresses a need to focus on *inter*action more than action, and further on processes more than structures[19]. Our attention should therefore be drawn to meetings and interaction, more than actors. When focusing on interaction one can capture patterns. Interaction brings out meaning, and knowledge is *relational,* stresses Sørhaug. The concept of social network is an interesting parallel: "*The reason Twitter is useful is because all your friends are there. If it was just you, it would be as useful as a piece of paper you write notes to yourself on[20]*".

 When we refer to enterprise 2.0 there are many similarities to knowledge management. Stenmark underlines that enterprise 2.0 is based on *trust* for people's ability to self govern (2008). The Association for Information and Image Management (AIIM) define enterprise 2.0 as "*a system of web-based technologies that provide rapid and agile collaboration, information sharing, emergence and integration capabilities in the extended enterprise*"[21].

Business strategist and enterprise architect Dion Hinchcliffe draws up a map of opportunity for business achievements by using social media in the field of innovation, growth, transformation and cost reduction[22]. He also states challenges related to risk, cost, disruption, and what he refers to as cultural "chasm". It is the network that creates value according to Hinchcliffe, who further states that this is also one of the biggest challenges: "(…) *a people problem: The biggest challenge is in changing our thinking*" [23]. One can say that social media represents a shift from a *technology driven perspective* to, what social anthropologist Anna Kirah would call, a *people-centric approach*[24] at technology as such. Hylland Eriksen comments that all technology has side effects (2001). If one get more out of a given type of technology, it is not necessary transferable to *more of the same result* if you push more of the same technology. It might as well be something totally different. Eriksen uses the expansion of Norwegian television channels as an example to

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[16] http://depsosialemedier.files.wordpress.com/2009/09/regjeringsbruksosmedier.pdf
[17] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Knowledge_management
[18] For instance Lars Risan and his anthropological study of Artificial life…, see http://www.anthrobase.com/Txt/R/Risan_L_05.htm
[19] From his presentation *Delingskulturen - et paradigmeskifte for offentlig virksomhet* held at the Nokios conferance at Trondheim october 14.th 2009.
[20] Sean Bonner quoted in Brian Braikers column in Newsweek aug.4th 2008
[21] www.aiim.org
[22] Page 9 in handout from Dion Hinchcliffe during Enterprise 2.0 Master class at Bouvet Oslo 21 of September 2009.
[23] Page 10 in handout from Dion Hinchcliffe during Enterprise 2.0 Master class at Bouvet Oslo 21 of September 2009.
[24] During her presentation *From observation to co-creation* at the conference Antronettkonferansen In Oslo october2009

illustrate. From having a few channels that had a unifying effect for Norwegians, the opposite happened when the numbers of channels were extended; it had a divisive function. Sørhaug states that we no longer can divide production from consumption, because it is difficult to separate the person and the product. In these *online times* we all are dependent on our reputation (Sørhaug 2001).

Shifts within organizational perspectives towards meaning and interaction

Organizational tendencies are heading towards a direction of informal networks of people across organizational borders, and this leads to blurred organizational internal and external boundaries (Andersen 2001, Horizon report 2009 Economic development edition).

Earlier perspectives as *scientific management*[25] that viewed organizations as rational and closed systems are today challenged by perspectives that have a more open view of organizations (Andersen 2002, Brønn og Ihlen 2009). To have any value, knowledge needs to be shared, says Tian Søraug (2003). But are internal and external networks transferable to knowledge sharing? Sørhaug believes we no longer can distinguish between productivity and consumption, and uses open source and its basic premise for trust to exemplify this[26]. Hylland Eriksen illuminates modern technologies nonlinear and fragmented way of communicating to reveal the effect it has on working conditions in the new economy, changes in family life and, ultimately, personal identity (2001). Fred Sigve Andersen states that belonging to a place and a locality has less value these days, because *place* does not have the same connective function as earlier (Andersen 2001). What we could call a type of nomadization within organizations has signs of multilocality, where people move after their tasks and work from a range of different contexts and localities.

> "Employees increasingly expect to be able to work flexible hours and to work from locations other than an office building. In today's global market place, colleagues and customers may be located anywhere in the world, and round-the-clock service is a requirement for any international organizations. A central office is not necessary in many industries; knowledge workers simply require reliable internet access and a computer"(Horizon report 2009 economic development edition: p. 3)

Networks could represent the glue between employees in times when the significance of 'the office' and locality is changing. Employee networks are often cross-boundary, including people within and without the organization and company's borders. Are the employee *knowledge-agents* travelling virtually on the rails of their networks? Or does their dialogue confirm their communities more than generate discussion and knowledge as Hjelseths wonders? (2009). I believe these cannot be separated, but seen as two important wheels on the same car. Changes in work patterns are further closely interwoven with globalization;

> "Increasing globalization continues to affect the way we work, collaborate, and communicate. (…) the flattering world is changing business practice. Similarly, globalization is altering our interactions at every level: communication with friends, family, coworkers, and clients, the ways we collaborate with others; and the ways we manage our personal workflow" (Ibid p. 4)

Benedict Anderson (1991) introduced the concept imagined communities during his nationalism studies, a concept which is relevant when studying social networks. An imagined community is not based on everyday face-to-face interaction between its members. Instead, members hold in their minds a mental image of their

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[25] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scientific_management
[26] During his presentation *Antropologi i kunnskapsøkonomien* at the conference Antronettkonferansen In Oslo october2009

affinity. Christopher Kelty takes Anderson's ideas further and shows how his informants use the internet as a community that defines their group belonging across geographical, national, organizational and cultural borders (Kelty 2005). Culture can be defined as ways of doing things. Clifford Geertz introduces meaning as an aspect in his definition of culture;

> "(…) man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun, I take culture to be those webs, and the analysis of it to be therefore not an experimental science in search of law but an interpretative one in search of meaning" (1973:5)

Culture is learned and can be captured within shared patterns (Jordan 2002). Brønn and Ihlen describe an organization's culture as "how we do things" (2009:30). Because organizations are complex it can be difficult to express what is unique (whether it is ideology, culture, management strategy and so on) for one specific organization. The key, according to Brønn and Ihlen, is to grasp what are the differences from one organization to another (Ibid) and they introduce the term "corporate identity" as a useful approach for this (2009:25). Brønn and Ihlen define *corporate identity* as "who or what we tell others that we are" (Ibid)**.** They believe it is appropriate to distinguish between *corporate identity*, which says something about the profile of the organization, the values the organization communicates and the employee's view of this, *image*, which is the immediate impression the surroundings have of the organization and lastly, *reputation*, which are the opinions the surroundings have of the organization over time. Brønn and Ihlen believe the key to a well established reputation lies in business behavior, but also within communication and its ability to establish strong relations to the outside world. Employees are the company's most important *boundary spanners*, and it is important that employees understand the company's values and identity (Ibid.). Sørhaug addresses personal reputation, and states that a part of your product is your reputation[27]. In social media we can recognize how highly respected bloggers receive respect from others. In parallel to honor cultures, where public reputation is more important than one's self esteem, bloggers achieve huge respect within their community (Pettersen 2009). Anette Weiner showed in her studies of the Trobriand people how transaction of the kula (a type of shell) with people's kula network didn't have a solely economic value, but that knowledge, high status, and even sorcery help kula players claim success and circulate their fame (Weiner 1988:156).

A transaction model of communication is represented by Wood (2008). In this model communication is seen as having two equally parts within the communication dialog and communication is therefore approached as a shared process, it is *we-oriented*. Within this perspective corporate identity has great impact on building a strong reputation. Van Ruler and Versic (in brønn and Ihlen 2009) stress that communication is about making meaning, and therefore represents "soft" values for strengthening a company's reputation. According to Edelmans Trust barometer[28] consumers/users find it easier to identify with employees they can identify themselves with. Trust should be based on a personal approach, as a conversation or a dialog. Employee's network could be an arena for strengthen corporate identity and companies should update their communication strategies to meet societal tendencies. The discussion above shows that there are several striking similarities between building a strong reputation, meaningful networks, social media and enterprise 2.0. Openness, personal storytelling, interacting equally, bottom-up communication model, collaboration and sharing are all key words they have in common.

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[27] During his presentation *Antropologi i kunnskapsøkonomien* at the conference Antronettkonferansen In Oslo october2009

[28] http://www.edelman.com/trust/2009/

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The love affair of intranet and internet, of internal and external communication

As with future expectations for organizational development, intranets and internets are likely to slowly change their traditional forms. Serena software for instance, with 800 employees, uses Facebook as the company's intranet[29]. *Cloud computing* is another example that represents a turning point in the way we view storage, processing and applications;
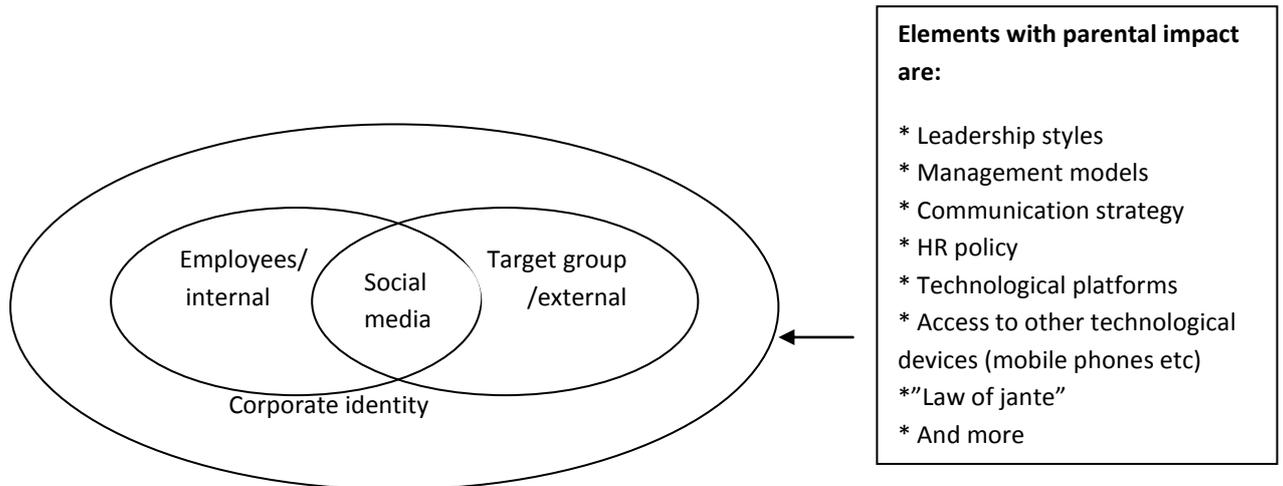
> "With cloud computing, applications and files are stores elsewhere and are accessible from any computer on the Internet. (…) Content hosted on cloud systems can be addressed by multiple users, facilitating collaboration and document sharing (…) Cloud computing are currently used for a variety of purposes, including social networking (think twitter or Facebook), shared productivity software (think Google Apps or Microsoft Office Web)(…)" (Horizon report 2009 economic development edition: p. 8)

The boundaries between companies' intranets and internet portals are slowly erased in an increased degree and open up for interaction and dialog between people inside and outside organizational walls both through social media applications internally, and social networks externally. Traditional intranets are mostly seen as a place to present company news and to ensure the company's strategy is being maintained, but intranet concepts are changing in the direction of an internal working tool, with social media and other technology as shared workspace and wikis etc. IBM is an example of "tearing down the silo-thinking" by letting their employees blog externally of the company as long as they are open with their identity (Brønn og Ihlen 2009). Within the information industry we see a shift from building internal technology around documents towards building solutions around people's needs and people's networks.

As mentioned earlier, social media represent a fundamental shift from traditional communication with its top down top-down model. Social media 2.0 involves a high degree of trust and openness. By tearing down strict boundaries between organizations inside and outside, represented through internal communication within organizations, and external communication between employees and customers/users/external actors, one should expect organizations to improve their reputation. Research shows that there are several advantages for companies and organizations that have strong and good reputations (Ihlen og Brønn 2009:16). The E. coli bacteria in Gilde products I Norway is an example of how a company managed well despite this challenge. Strong reputation opens the ability to price products higher, having lower purchase price, ensure correct recruitments, customer loyalty, attract investors, strengthen employers' morale and achieve positive media reviews. A strong reputation will lead to maintaining the company's legitimacy or, what Brønn and Ihlen refer to as "license to operate" (Ibid, s. 17). With internal use of social media one could possibly add values such as higher identification with your coworkers and the company and a higher sense of having a meaningful part of one's company through the ability to participate and having an influence that matters.

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[29] http://www.forbes.com/2009/03/20/facebook-intranet-serena-entrepreneurs-technology-facebook.html

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A model of how I see social media as closely interwoven with organization, strategy and communication:

Elements with parental impact are:

* Leadership styles
* Management models
* Communication strategy
* HR policy
* Technological platforms
* Access to other technological devices (mobile phones etc)
*"Law of jante"
* And more

Conclusion

Social media represents a shift from a *technology driven perspective* to, what social anthropologist Anna Kirah would call, a *people-centric approach* at technology and we need to approach technological phenomenon in a inter disciplinary matter. I argue in this article that internal and external communication interplay and needs to be viewed together in a strategic manner. Inter disciplinary work also represent innovation in Gregory Bateson's terms, as a difference that makes a difference. Because social media software applications rely on people's use to accomplish in some way a goal, it is closely interwoven with a range of other disciplines. And when knowing it was anthropologists that worked out both MSN and X-box live this makes sense. Technology interplay in a holistic sense with organizations, people, culture, market and other overall societal tendencies.

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