

**Social Media in the Workplace:  
Exploring the Viability of Promoting an Organization  
via Its Employees' Social Networks**

By

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**Abstract**

This research explores the viability of rank and file employees using their personal social media networks to promote their organizations and engage clients. This research is motivated by the recent proliferation of social media and its adoption by both organizations and individuals alike. Organizations have tended to perceive the use of social media by rank and file employees as a liability with both internal (decreased productivity and increased workplace harassment and discrimination) and external (negative publicity) consequences. Considering that social media has the potential of improving an organization's marketing and communications, this research is interested in answering the following research questions: a) should organizations allow employees to use their personal social media networks to promote their organizations and engage with clients? b) If so, how can the risks associated with such use be mitigated? To answer these questions, this study engaged six communications professionals in the Edmonton area. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews and then analyzed using Structuration Theory and other academic literature. The results of this study demonstrate that organizations should allow their employees to use their personal networks. Instead of focusing their attention on trying to bar employees from using social media, organizations would be better served by accepting that such use is bound to occur, and by developing appropriate user guidelines, while investing in employee training and evaluating the respective risks and benefits of different social media channels.

**Keywords:** *social media, personal networks, Structuration Theory, employee empowerment, rank and file employees, risk management, risk mitigation.*

## **I Introduction and Definition of the Problem**

The emergence of social media since the early 2000s has had wide-reaching economic and social implications. Although there may be debate about whether social media has had a positive or a negative impact, it is clear that modern society is undergoing a change and that it “will be differently cohesive from the one we know” (Veenhof *et al.*, 2008). One noticeable aspect of this transformation is that social media and the internet can foster participation with community members and enhance relationships. As such, it is not surprising that many organizations – businesses and governments alike – have incorporated social media into their marketing and public-engagement strategies (Dewing, 2010). In fact, recent studies have demonstrated that the rate of social media adoption by organizations has been on the rise, with 73% of Fortune 500 companies having official corporate Twitter accounts in 2012 (up from 62% in 2011) and 66% having corporate Facebook pages (up from 58%) (Garibian, 2012). Not only is social media becoming more widespread in organizations, but it is increasingly seen as an effective and essential tool for a company’s success in today’s online world (Barnes, 2010).

To illustrate how social media can be used effectively by an organization, consider the case of WestJet. On December 8, 2013, WestJet released a Christmas video on its YouTube channel, showing WestJet employees granting their customers’ Christmas wishes. The video became viral overnight, generating over 35 million views within a week. According to WestJet’s vice president, Richard Bartrem, following the release of the video and in the 14 days leading up to Christmas, WestJet’s website traffic increased by 100%, bookings increased by 77%, and revenues rose by 86% compared to the previous year (“WestJet’s social Christmas campaign”, 2014). In other words, by launching a successful social media campaign, WestJet was able to generate more sales while also improving its image.

Despite the marketing benefits of using social media, its widespread adoption in society is a concern for some organizations. Some organizations fear that the use of social media at work by rank and file employees will not only have internal consequences, such as decreased productivity and increased workplace harassment and discrimination, but also external impacts that affect an organization's public relations (Handman, 2013). To counteract these threats, some organizations may try to limit or prohibit their rank and file employees, who are not part of a dedicated social media team, from using their personal social media channels. The goal is to ensure that internally employees do not waste their time at work by checking and updating their social media channels. Moreover, this approach attempts to counteract the external threats by prohibiting employees from using social media for work-related purposes, such as promoting products, interacting with potential clients, or maintaining relationships with existing ones. Some organizations believe that having such rules will result in a consistent message to the public, helping to minimize the risk of negative publicity.

The approach of limiting social media use, however, may not necessarily be effective nor achieve the desired result. Not only is there some evidence to indicate that restrictive social media policies are ineffective (O'Connor, 2014) and potentially harmful (Majeed, 2014), but more importantly such policies may disregard the extent to which social media is already being used by employees at work. In fact, a recent survey of the United States workforce has found that 33% of employees "use social media for at least an hour a day at work", and 25% "would not take a job if access to social media at work was cut off" (Handman, 2013). In Canada, these numbers could be comparable considering that 82% of Canadians already use social media in their daily activities ("We are social", 2014). In addition to this, attempts at restricting employee social media use are inconsistent with the notion of employee empowerment and they ignore the

potential for rank and file employees to use their personal networks to promote their organizations. Considering that such a high proportion of the population uses social media, and insists on using it at work, there is an opportunity for organizations to leverage these networks by letting employees use them to engage clients and promote their organizations. Such an approach would be in line with other employee empowerment initiatives, where businesses increasingly use their employees in marketing campaigns and expect their workers to demonstrate loyalty to the brand, along with greater initiative and creativity at work (Bulik, 2010).

From the above, it appears that organizations have a dilemma; on the one hand, they would like to benefit from the use of social media and to minimize risk. On the other hand, they are faced with a situation where, they may find it difficult to curb social media use among rank and file employees, because such use may be widespread and it goes hand in hand with notions of employee empowerment. Considering this problem, the following research aims to explore how organizations can mitigate the external risks posed by employees who use social media for work-related purposes. More specifically, this research is interested in answering the following research questions: a) should organizations allow employees to use their personal social media networks to promote the organization and engage with clients? b) If so, how can the risks associated with such use be mitigated?

In order to answer these questions, the following paper is divided into several chapters. Chapter 2 provides a review of pertinent literature to this research. This includes a discussion of Structuration Theory, which serves as a theoretical framework for the research and is essential to answering the research questions. Relying on the work of Giddens (1984) and Wanda Orlikowski (1992), Structuration Theory demonstrates how the three variables of organizations, employees, and social media can be analyzed in a holistic manner. The chapter also includes a review of

literature on employee empowerment, paying close attention to literature that evaluates the risks and benefits of employee empowerment initiatives. The last part of the chapter devotes considerable attention to literature on social media application in the workplace. More precisely, this section looks at research that evaluates the viability of using social media as a promotional tool. Together these three sections of the chapter combine to provide a context and a lens through which the research question can be answered.

Although the literature adds much needed perspective, it is insufficient to answer the research questions in full. This is because there is little to no literature that evaluates the prospects of rank and file employees using social media at work. As a result, it was necessary to reinforce the literature with additional data that was gathered by interviewing six marketing and communications professionals from various organizations. As will be elaborated in Chapter 3, these individuals were selected because of their professional experience in the field of communications, and their familiarity with the different marketing channels that organizations use, as well as the social media policies and regulations that organizations have in place. In addition to this, Chapter 3 describes the methodology of this research, explaining why it applied the cross-sectional qualitative research design, and how data was gathered through semi-structured interviews. It also elaborates on the sampling method, the interviews and the ethical considerations, as well as the stages of data analysis.

Chapter 4 presents the findings from the interviews, examining them in the context of Structuration Theory and the literature. This chapter seeks to synthesize all previous sections to answer the research questions. The last chapter provides a conclusion by reflecting on the implications of the research and suggesting directions for future research in this area.

Before turning the attention to Chapter 2, it is important to discuss the significance of this

study and its limitations. As was mentioned previously, this study is significant in that it departs from previous research into the application of social media at work by considering the role that individual employees have to play in this context. As Chapter 2 will demonstrate, previous literature has tended to look at how organizations as a whole interact with social media. Little to no attention has been given to how rank and file employees fit into this dynamic. As such, this paper seeks to start this discussion by contributing a different perspective.

In trying to chart a new area of research, this study has some limitations. For instance, this research utilizes a relatively small sample size, which means that findings cannot be generalized to a larger population. This, however, does not mean that the research holds no value. In fact, quite the opposite is true. As an exploratory study, this research does not seek to produce generalizable findings to a particular group. Instead, it aims to formulate the problem, identify key issues and variables, and form a hypothesis (Sue & Ritter, 2012; “Research Methods”, 2015). This approach results in a study that is broad in focus, which does not permit the researcher to consider more subtle variations in the variables and their impact. To illustrate, this study looked at organizations, social media, and employees in broad terms. As such, the research did not look at a specific economic sector, a particular social media channel, and did not select participants based on their age, sex, or other criteria. Notwithstanding this shortcoming, this study prepares the way for additional research by providing theoretical generalizations that can be used as a foundation in future research to study how the changes in the above variables affect the overall findings.

## **II Literature Review**

### **2.0) Introduction**

As the name of this chapter suggest, the focus of the discussion that follows will be to

review literature as it pertains to the research at hand. The goal of this review is to situate this qualitative research in an academic context that would help interpret the interview responses of the participants who agreed to take part in this study. The choice of literature to be reviewed was informed by the research questions of this research. To reiterate, this study seeks to answer two questions: a) should organizations allow rank and file employees to use their personal social media networks to promote their organizations and engage with clients? b) If so, how can the risks associated with such use be mitigated? In other words, these questions seek to examine how the following three variables interact and how they are interlinked: personal social media networks, organizations, and rank and file employees. Considering these variables, the following discussion will be divided into several parts. Section 2.1 discusses the methodology behind identifying and selecting pertinent literature. Section 2.2 provides a theoretical context to the discussion, detailing the extensive work that has been done on the Theory of Structuration in the context of introducing new technologies into organizations. Sections 2.3 and 2.4 of this paper depart from the theoretical context and focus more directly on the practical aspects of this research; section 2.3 examines past and present literature on the subject of employee empowerment in the workplace while section 2.4 analyzes the literature on the impacts of introducing social media into the workplace. The final part of this chapter synthesizes and applies the literature to the research question.

### **2.1) How was literature identified**

Structuration Theory was chosen because it was deemed to enable the researcher to provide a holistic view that could marry the three variables of social media, organizations, and employees into a single framework, one where human agency, social structures, and technology are equally important and interlinked. The research into Structuration Theory began with a

reading of May & Mumby (2005). This book, which was a required reading for one of the classes in the Master of Arts in Communication and Technology program at the University of Alberta, provides concise overviews of multiple theories. Marshall Scott Poole and Robert McPhee's chapter (2005) on Structuration Theory proved extremely useful; it not only presented a clear explanation of the theory but also illustrated the various avenues of this theory's application. More importantly, this chapter provided a good starting point for further research, as it enumerated multiple academic sources in its reference list.

A more comprehensive understanding of the theory necessitated an examination of the writings of Anthony Giddens, one of the most esteemed sociologists of the 20th century and the founder of Structuration Theory. This next stage in the research involved reading Giddens's *Profiles and Critiques in Social Theory* and *The Constitution of Society* (Giddens 1982; & Giddens, 1984). Given Structuration Theory's abstract and multi-faceted nature, it was also imperative to read other scholars' views on the theory so as to provide a more critical understanding. Bryant & Jary (1991) proved essential in this regard.

The next stage in the research agenda was to narrow down the focus. As previously mentioned, Structuration Theory is rather abstract as it "operates at too high a level of generality" (Jones & Karsten, 2003). On the one hand, this means that some struggle to apply it in empirical research, on the other hand, it means that the number of potential applications is boundless (Poole & McPhee, 2005). One such application is the analysis of technology adoption by organizations. This field of study is dominated by the likes of Wanda Orlikowski (1992; 1996; 2000), Geoff Walsham (2002), Sundeep Sahay (1997), Gerardine DeSanctis and Marshall Scott Poole (1994). Their academic work was accessed by browsing a number of journals, such as *Organization Science*, and *MIS Quarterly*. Other articles were retrieved by consulting the

bibliographies of the above mentioned authors.

The methodology for sections 2.3 and 2.4 of this review – which deal with employee empowerment and social media application in the workforce, respectively – was initially done by consulting a number of databases, including JSTOR, Academic Search Complete, and Business Source Complete. The search involved the use of various keywords, including ‘social media’, ‘workplace’, and ‘employee empowerment’. In this initial step, particular attention was paid to articles that contained broad overviews of the literature (Hanold, 1997; Al Sada, 2003; Weigel, 2013). This step helped in identifying the main themes in the literature and the key studies, which were later retrieved to gain additional insight into the subject matter. Moreover, these key sources were also entered into the ‘Google Scholar’ search engine, which allowed me to see which articles cited these particular sources. This was another important step in expanding my list of academic sources.

Amid the sources that were identified, certain articles had to be left out of necessity, in order to keep the research focused on the research questions. When researching the employee empowerment literature, preference was given to articles that weighed the risks and benefits of such initiatives in the workplace. This direction was taken intentionally, as it was deemed to be in line with the research questions. Specific attention was given to case studies that highlighted the practical aspect of employee empowerment. Literature that focused on the theoretical aspects of empowerment (e.g. psychological vs. relational empowerment) or academic models of empowerment were not considered. The reason for this omission is due to this research’s interest to evaluate the potential of empowered employees to use social media channels, but not to assess empowerment initiatives currently in place or to propose that organizations follow certain models.

When it comes to the literature on social media in the workplace, there is a multitude of research categories. Some studies explore the impact of social media on the internal dynamics and work relationships in organizations that have adopted social media (Sanchez *et al.*, 2012; Friedl & Vercic, 2011), others evaluate the risks and benefits of such initiatives and the legal implications (Mainiero, *et al.*, 2013; Dennis, 2011; Salopek 2010), while others look at the impact of social media on employee recruitment and screening (Saunders, 2012; Brown *et al.*, 2011, Bohnert *et al.*, 2010). Since this research is mostly concerned with studying the impact of individual employees within an organization, especially their potential for promoting their respective organizations, sources that limited their analysis to studying the ‘organization–social media’ relationship (instead of the ‘organization–employee–social media’ relationship) were accorded less importance. As such, studies that focused on the role of social media in recruitment and screening, or on the success and failures of certain organizations to adopt particular social media channels had to be set aside. Instead, this research gave preference to studies that evaluated social media as a promotional tool for interacting with clients and promoting the organization, because this topic is directly related to the research question.

Having detailed the process by which studies were selected for this research, it is necessary to turn the attention to a discussion of the actual literature that was identified. Sections 2.2, 2.3, and 2.4 that follow provide overviews and highlights of these academic sources.

## **2.2) Theoretical Framework: Structuration Theory**

Structuration Theory is the product of Anthony Giddens’s effort to develop a theory where “neither subject (human agent) nor object (society, social institution) should be regarded as having primacy” (Giddens, 1984). The result is a multi-faceted, abstract, and complex theory that is difficult to concisely describe or conceptualize. This is largely due to the nature of

Giddens's work, which is not contained in one single book. Giddens started developing his theory in the early 1970s and continued to elaborate on his ideas through the 1990s. In the span of nearly 30 years, Giddens published more than 30 books. The sheer volume and density of his writing present a considerable challenge to those who wish to conceptualize the theory. Moreover, the passage in time has allowed Giddens to subtly re-state some of his arguments in response to critics of Structuration Theory, which has further complicated the theory.

Despite the complexity of the subject matter, careful reading of Giddens's work reveals a certain pattern to his writing. His earlier work is concerned with setting the stage for the theory. Thus, books like *Profiles and Critiques in Social Theory* are devoted largely to the analysis of the work of earlier social theorists, like Durkheim, Habermas, Marx, and Weber (Giddens, 1982). His discussion of earlier theorists displays his overall dissatisfaction with the then-ongoing debate between functionalist and structuralist theorists, on the one hand (who tended to overemphasize the constraining qualities of structure and its primacy over human agency), and interpretative sociologists on the other (who tended to adopt the other extreme, arguing that an individual's actions should be accorded primacy) (Giddens, 1982).

In his subsequent work, Giddens has focussed on elaborating the various components of the theory. As such, in *The Constitution of Society* he expounds on the concept of structuration; namely, the reciprocal interaction of humans and the social institutions within which they operate. According to Giddens, there is a duality of structure, since social structures both enable and constrain human actions, but are in themselves the result of such actions (Giddens, 1984). In pursuing this line of thought, Giddens further discusses and explains a number of related subjects, such as power, the meaning of human agency and knowledge, and the importance of time and space.

Apart from Giddens's own work, another prominent part of literature in the field of Structuration Theory has been the response by other sociologists to Giddens's propositions. Despite the encompassing nature of the theory, much attention has been devoted to pointing out its deficiencies. Some examples of this are Dallmayr (1982), Boyne (1991), and Poole & McPhee (2005). The most commonly voiced criticism of the theory is that its abstract nature, which can result in diverse and potentially contradictory interpretations, does not easily lend itself to empirical application. This is further exacerbated by the fact that Giddens has not developed a clear framework of research that would illustrate how to apply the theory. As such, some scholars have even suggested that without practical application in empirical research Structuration Theory is rather meaningless (Pozzebon & Pinsonneault, 2005). This has even been recognized by Giddens himself, who noted that the theory "will not be of much value if it does not help illuminate problems of empirical research" (Bryant & Jary, 1991). Given that the theory does not provide anything to test or explore, some scholars have proposed that Structuration Theory should be conceived as a meta-theory, as "a way of thinking about the world rather than as an empirically testable explanation of social behaviour" (Jones & Karsten, 2003).

Despite the difficulties of application, there has been extensive work in adapting the theory to various fields of study. One such field is that of organizational studies that looks at how organizations interact with information technology (IT) and information systems (IS). In this regard, Jones & Karsten (2003), point out that research in this field can be divided into three distinct strands. The first and the earliest is the use of Structuration Theory concepts – as elaborated by Giddens; namely, the duality of structure and the interaction between human agents and structures – in IT/IS research. The application of Structuration Theory to the IT/IS field was the result of a growing frustration with existing theoretical frameworks that viewed IS

development as largely a technical engineering process. This approach, however, failed to fully account for the systems development process, thereby necessitating a social action perspective (Hirschheim, Klein & Newman, 1987). Another gap in earlier approaches was that organizations were seen as being composed of distinct levels, arranged in a hierarchical manner, thus resulting in IS strategy formation and implementation being studied as a top-down process, consisting of separate stages. Since this approach failed to account for variations in IS implementation across organizations, Structuration Theory was advanced as an alternative theoretical framework. With Structuration Theory placing emphasis on the way in which various levels in a structure were interlinked and constituted by each other, this approach permitted scholars to consider the broader social context that constrained and enabled action (Walsham & Han, 1993).

Some examples of Structuration Theory application in the study of IT/IS include Lyytinen & Ngwenyama's (1992) application of Structuration Theory to the analysis of Computer Supported Cooperative Work (CSCW). Given the absence of a definition of what constitutes CSCW applications, the authors propose to use Structuration Theory to develop a definition. They define CSCW applications as being open structures that embed organizational and linguistic rules, and that facilitate cooperative interactions. This definition helps to situate CSCW applications as social structures that constrain and are reproduced by cooperative interaction. Using this perspective, Lyytinen and Ngwenyama set out a conceptual framework for further research into CSCW, including the study of interactions between organizational structures and CSCW use processes. Other examples of applying Structuration Theory in IT/IS research are the analysis by Walsham (2002) of cross-cultural software production and use, and Boland & Greenberg's (1992) research of language use by system analysts.

The application of Structuration Theory in empirical research has not always been

concerned with Giddens's meta-theoretical writings, as exemplified in *The Constitution of Society*. Some scholars prefer to focus on his later writings, where he elaborates on the main principles of the theory and attempts to reconcile them with the broader processes of globalization and modernity. This is the case of Nicholson & Sahay (2001), who apply Giddens's theoretical writings to the study of the political and cultural issues in global software outsourcing. This approach permits the authors to analyze various structural forces that emerge as the process of software development is increasingly outsourced to developing countries. Barrett & Walsham's (1999) research into the link between IT and work transformation is another example of this approach. Other works in this category also include research that, instead of exploring Giddens's original formulations of Structuration Theory, relies on the interpretation of the theory by other academics. As such, Laurence Brooks (1997), in his analysis of organizationally situated computer-aided design, draws on Structuration Theory as formulated by Wanda Orlikowski and Daniel Robey. The works of Sahay (1997), Ngwenyama (1998), and Olesen & Myers (1999) are additional examples of this approach.

The second strand in Structuration Theory literature is marked by a development of perspectives unique to the fields of IT and IS. Given that Giddens's formulation of the theory does not speak specifically to IT or IS, some have attempted to develop an IT/IS-specific version of the theory. As such, Gerardine DeSanctis and Marshall Scott Poole (1994) developed the Adaptive Structuration Theory, which aims to analyze the mutual impact of technology and social processes. This theory attempts to answer the question of how identical technologies can lead to similar dynamics but different structural outcomes by providing "a detailed account of both the structure of advanced technologies as well as the unfolding of social interaction as these technologies are used" (DeSanctis & Poole, 1994). The literature applying this approach is quite

diverse. For example, Martha Maznevski and Katherine Chudoba (2000) use this theoretical framework to study global virtual team dynamics. Another example is that of Ann Majchrzak *et al.* (2000) who study how an inter-organizational virtual team has adapted the use of collaborative technology to successfully create a highly innovative product over a 10-month period.

Apart from Adaptive Structuration Theory, another approach to applying Structuration Theory to the IT/IS context is the Structuration Model of Technology developed by Wanda Orlikowski. This model's premise is the duality of technology, that "technology is created and changed by human action, yet it is also used by humans to accomplish action" (Orlikowski, 1992). This, in turn, causes technology to be interpretively flexible, meaning that the "interaction of technology and organizations is a function of the different actors and socio-historical context implicated in its development and use" (Orlikowski, 1992). The literature that is concerned with this model is dominated by Wanda Orlikowski, who has elaborated on the subject in a number of subsequent publications (Orlikowski 1996; Orlikowski, 2000; Orlikowski & Hoffman, 1997).

The final strand in structuration research, as related to IT/IS, involves critical reflection on Structuration Theory. This particular thread has focused on the potential of applying Structuration Theory in IT/IS research, the existing gaps of such application, and how these shortcomings can be remedied by incorporating other theories into the analysis. Thus, for example, Marlei Pozzebon and Alain Pinsonneault (2005), being cognizant of the inherent difficulties of applying Structuration Theory, argue that the theory remains a valuable framework, and propose several strategies to improve the theory's application. One such strategy is to collect and analyze data by introducing narrative bracketing "to increase the ability to follow sequences of subtle changes of structural properties," and temporal bracketing "to

recognize when and how changes are triggered.” Another illustration is Geoff Walsham and Sundeep Sahay’s (1999) attempt to incorporate actor-network theory into structural analysis.

The discussion above demonstrates that despite its complexity, Structuration Theory can serve as a theoretical framework for the analysis of how human agents interact with and within various structures. When it comes to IT/IS research, there are several avenues of applying Structuration Theory by: a) using Giddens’s and other scholars’ reflection on the theory to situate IT/IS research and analysis; b) developing IT/IS-specific versions of the theory, as exemplified by Adaptive Structuration Theory and Structuration Model of Technology; and c) evaluating the existing gaps of such application and recommending strategies of how to successfully incorporate the theory into IT/IS research. When reflecting on the direction and approach of the research at hand, it can be said that it fits under the second strand. As will be demonstrated in the discussion chapter, Orlikowski’s Structuration Model of Technology will be applied to examine the impact that the introduction of social media into organizations has on the process of structuration. Despite its merits, Structuration Theory is not the only aspect that needs to be considered in this analysis. As such, it is important to switch the attention to the issue of employee empowerment.

### **2.3) Employee Empowerment**

The examination of the viability of letting employees market their companies through their respective social media channels, as proposed in this research, recognizes the importance and potential of human agency and the ability of employees to shape the structures within which they operate. As such, it is appropriate to accord some attention to the academic work that examines employee empowerment in the workplace. Since it involves both individual and

organizational dimensions, empowerment can mean different things to different people depending on variations in both of these variables. As a result, empowerment has been examined through a variety of lenses, such as autonomy on the job, teamwork, and control of one's own work. The earliest literature on subjects such as job enrichment, job autonomy, leadership, power sharing, and employee participation started to emerge in the 1950s and 1960s (Lewin, 1951; Herzberg, 1968). Nevertheless, it was not until the 1990s when the number of articles focusing on the notion of employee empowerment really expanded. The growth in the body of research can be attributed to the fact that 'employee empowerment' emerged as the all-inclusive term that unified research on the above mentioned subjects that previously were studied separately (Honold, 1997).

Some of the more recent literature focuses on tracing the transformation in employee roles in the past decades. Donald J. Campbell (2000), a professor of management at the United States Military Academy, notes that in recent decades there has been a trend of expanding the role of employees. He argues that on top of the usual requirements of job and task competence, interpersonal effectiveness, and organizational orientation, employees are increasingly asked to demonstrate enterprising qualities and initiative. Chris Argyris (1998) adds to this by noting that the change in employee responsibilities goes hand-in-hand with attempts by management to develop empowered employees through various means, such as applying theories of internal motivation, change management, reengineering and continuous improvement.

The literature that traces this transformation is complemented by other scholars, whose prime concern is to evoke the benefits of empowering employees. Employee empowerment holds great potential, as demonstrated by Bradley Kirkman and Benson Rosen (1999), both from the University of North Carolina. Their analysis of 111 work teams in four organizations

demonstrates that employee empowerment has rather positive consequences, contributing to greater team productivity and proactivity, improved customer service, and greater job satisfaction and organizational commitment (Kirkman & Rosen, 1999). The work by Kirkman and Rosen is quite characteristic of the literature on the subject that emerged in the 1990s, when “businesses appeared to be taking significant, observable steps toward liberating the creating and innovative energies of employees” (Hardy & Leiba-O’Sullivan, 1998). Further examples of similar works that highlight the benefits of employee empowerment are Gandz (1990), Conger & Kanungo (1988), Bowen & Lawler (1992), and Ford & Fottler (1995).

The literature of the early 1990s that views employee empowerment in an exclusively positive light can be contrasted with a more sober assessment of the subject, as practical implementation of empowerment in the workplace presents serious challenges. The frequent failure of empowerment programs has prompted scholars to explore the reasons for the lack of success and to propose remedies. Gretchen Spreitzer *et al.* (1997) surveyed mid-level employees from Fortune 500 companies and lower-level employees from an insurance company to conclude that to effectively empower employees

organizations must create more complex empowerment interventions; in addition to providing decision-making autonomy to facilitate self-determination, organizations must create a supportive organizational culture, design jobs that are meaningful to employees, provide training and development to enhance feelings of competence, and allow employees to have impact in their work unit through involvement in strategic goal setting and shared governance.

Other papers that focus on successful implementation of empowerment projects include Hardy & Leiba-O’Sullivan (1998) and Argyris (1998).

Given Spreitzer *et al.*’s and others’ insight into making empowerment initiatives successful, it is not surprising that more recent literature on the subject has documented a

noticeable shift in how organizations approach their relationship with employees. Crain (2010), for example, documents how companies increasingly implement internal branding programs that target employees with the goal of “re-align[ing] employees’ self-interest with that of the firm...inducing employees to view their employment as a personal relationship akin to a family tie, imbuing the economic transaction with emotional significance.” Further to this, Berry (1995) notes that internal marketing can create an atmosphere where the needs of employees are met, which in turn improves the attitudes of frontline employees and raises their emotional investment in the organization.

On a more practical note, the impact of internal marketing has been shown to be rather effective. Yao (2013) surveyed 617 employees of a petrochemical company in China. Her findings reveal that internal marketing has significantly and positively influenced psychological empowerment, contributing to a reinforced sense of loyalty among employees and improved task performance. Moreover, Bulik (2010) demonstrates how some companies, such as Kraft Foods, Pizza Hut, and Southwest Airlines, use their employees in branding and marketing operations to not only empower them, but to also use their expertise for promoting their companies’ products. According to Bulik’s interviews with the CEOs of the above-mentioned companies, there is a growing recognition that empowered employees can effectively promote their companies’ brands, since they have a sense of loyalty and commitment to the organization they work for.

The above discussion has demonstrated the shifts in the literature that concerns employee empowerment. Emerging to a large extent during the ‘empowerment era’ of the 1990s, the literature was mostly concerned with analyzing the steps taken by organizations to empower their employees. Literature that emerged later on, focused on examining the failure of many empowerment initiatives, and recommending remedies to ensure the success of such initiatives.

Despite the challenges associated with employee empowerment, the literature demonstrates that the notion of empowering employees is still relevant, as companies continue to recognize the potential in trusting employees while expanding their roles and responsibilities. This literature is critical in situating the discussion on social media in the workplace and the potential role that employees can play in such an environment.

#### **2.4) Social Media in the Workplace**

With the recent emergence of social media as a viable communication tool, there has been a substantial amount of research to explore the impacts of social media in the workplace. Section 2.2 of this chapter already discussed the major research categories in this field, as well as the reasons for selecting only a few of them for closer examination in this review. It is, therefore, fitting to continue the discussion by first examining how social media has been applied as a promotional tool in the workplace to interact with clients, and then reviewing the challenges and risk factors associated with social media use in this context.

##### **2.4.1) Social Media as a Promotional Tool in the Workplace**

One approach in researching social media in the workplace is to study it as a promotional tool. This body of research is interested in uncovering how the introduction of social media into the workplace affects interactions between organizations and their clients. Although this field is relatively new and as a result does not have as many scholarly publications as other social media-related research topics, the academic debate on this topic can be rather polarized, with some scholars giving greater emphasis to the merits of social media as a promotional tool, while others attempt to balance the discussion by analyzing the risk factors.

In her doctoral thesis in Business Administration, Caroline Wilcox-Ugurlu (2011), for instance, examines the transformative impacts of social media on individuals and businesses. Her

study, which spanned nearly four years and included scholarly research as well as participant observation and interviews, focuses on how consumer behaviour and marketing environments have changed due to social media. Wilcox-Ugurlu argues that society is on the verge of a new reality where consumers and businesses can interact simultaneously in 'real time' via social media channels. This means that relationships between businesses and customers will grow closer, as both will be able to engage in instantaneous two-way communication with each other.

Despite this outlook, Maria Vernuccio (2014) has slightly different conclusions about the state of social media utilization by businesses. She finds that although more and more organizations rely on social media for promoting their corporate brands, a third of all companies use social media cautiously. This leads Vernuccio to conclude that companies should be more proactive in expanding the reach of their social media channels, so as to involve a broad range of stakeholders. This is an interesting conclusion in light of Wilcox-Ugurlu's research. Although both authors agree on the potential of social media and the need for businesses to adopt it, Vernuccio's study demonstrates that the shift in business-to-customer relationships, proposed by Wilcox-Ugurlu, is not an imminent reality.

In addition to the above general overviews of the topic, Waralak Siricharoen (2012), for example, takes a highly practical approach of presenting case studies of successful applications of social media as a promotional tool, and providing recommendations for using social networks efficiently. Siricharoen illustrates that social media, when not applied correctly, can be harmful. Depending on the nature of a business and its customers, an organization can actually overuse social media by getting too personal or too off-topic, resulting in a loss of customers. This conclusion is in stark contrast to that of Wilcox-Ugurlu or Vernuccio, who seem to view social media in an entirely positive light. Siricharoen presents a sobering analysis of the pitfalls

associated with using social media as a promotional tool, emphasizing that there can be no 'one-size-fits-all' approach, and that what is right for one business may ruin its counterpart.

Outside of the debate about the merits of social media, it is also important to keep in mind that the discussion is not restricted to just businesses, as governments are starting to increasingly rely on this communication platform to reach out to their citizens. As such, four scholars from the Heinrich Heine University in Germany conducted an empirical study of 31 major metropolises around the world to gauge their reliance on social media. This overview is important, because it presents a variety of factors that can determine the popularity of social media among governments, and its usage intensity (Mainka *et al.*, 2014).

Although governments as a whole are starting to embrace social media, its policies remain rather restrictive when it comes to the issue of employee social media use. An illustration of that can be found in Ben O'Connor's (2014) overview of some of Australia's public sector agencies. Through the approach of action-research, O'Connor provides an ethnographic account of how social media use is restricted or prohibited in some public agencies. More importantly, his research demonstrates the lacking efficacy of restrictive policies. Through his observations, O'Connor found that even when social media use was discouraged, employees found ways to circumvent the restrictions. O'Connor's observations lead him to recommend that instead of limiting social media use governments should a) educate their employees on how to use it appropriately, b) provide reasonable access, and c) embrace collaboration that comes with social media use. O'Connor is not the only one to recommend how governments can successfully adopt social media, as Mergel & Bretschneider's (2013) propose a three-stage process for adopting social media in government.

In addition to the literature that examines the viability of social media as a promotional

tool for both governments and businesses, there is also ongoing research into the impact of social media on communication within organizations. In this light, Xiongfei Cao *et al.* (2012) proposes that social media can enhance employee performance and trust, while providing a communication channel for both explicit and implicit knowledge. Their study of 105 Chinese software professionals demonstrated the potential of social media to enhance trust among employees, which in turn contributed to greater knowledge exchange and transfer in the workplace.

Some publications in this field of research provide lessons learned so as to help organizations reach successful implementation. Dan Atkinson, for instance, provides a concise overview of the unsuccessful attempts by some businesses to adopt social media (Atkinson, 2014). Moreover, Huy & Shipilov (2012) explore why some companies avoid using social media, while others use it, but fail to make it work. Based on case studies and interviews, the authors conclude that how employees feel about their organizations is one of the most important factors that can determine whether social media will succeed or fail. This finding is important in the context of this proposed research as it highlights that oftentimes restrictive social media policies in a given organization may not be due to the unwillingness to adapt to modern trends, but rather the result of the inability to manage dissatisfied employees.

Even when employee attitudes are favourable, some employers are concerned that access to social media at the work place would decrease productivity, as workers would be inclined to check their personal channels. With this problem in mind, Bala Iyer *et al.* (2011) concluded that if a company were to create its own business-oriented social networking site, it could mitigate those concerns. This paper is of particular interest to this research as it demonstrates that the introduction of social media to the workplace does not necessarily mean that a company must

use Facebook, Twitter, or any other popular channel. Iyer *et al.* indicates that social media is flexible enough to allow businesses to develop their own channels, which can be used for both communication within the organization and with outside clients.

#### **2.4.2) Challenges and Risk Management**

Any mention of social media in the workplace cannot be divorced from a discussion concerning risks. This is quite evident in the literature, where a significant amount of work has been devoted to enumerating the potential pitfalls associated with social media, and suggesting possible remedies. As such, Maineiro & Jones (2013) examine how the increase in social media usage in the workplace can carry numerous risks associated with personal and professional connectivity, privacy, and intimacy. They advocate for clear policy to set concrete boundaries around workplace romance and sexual harassment. Similarly, Hall & Lewis (2014) point out that employers have been slow to address the rise in workplace bullying and the role played by social media in this trend. Their paper describes the extent of this problem and provides practical management strategies.

Considering that much of this literature comprises of advice for various organizations, it is not uncommon for lawyers to discuss the legal implications of social media use at work. This is the case of Pitts & Aylott (2012), both lawyers specializing in compliance matters. As lawyers, they examine the issue from a legalistic perspective. Their analysis leads them to conclude that despite the risks, social media use in the workplace is inevitable and even necessary, which makes it imperative for companies to “implement appropriate, robust governance processes that are both proactive and capable of the rapid identification of, and response to, emerging threats.” Another legalistic perspective is provided by Michele B. Miller (2013), who examines the risks for employers, and how far they can go in regulating and managing social media use. Some of

the risks discussed by Miller include sexual harassment, bullying, defamation, discrimination, and disclosure of sensitive company information. She recommends several strategies for avoiding those risks, including that employers educate their employees about intellectual property and confidentiality, and require employees to obtain permission to conduct business via social media on behalf of the company. All in all, Miller views social media as a serious threat that employers need to be wary of by instituting various policies and guidelines to protect their business and legal interests.

The idea of drafting clear guidelines recurs quite frequently in the literature. Royce Fichtner *et al.* (2013), from Drake University, present a legal analysis of the issue of employees using their employer's computers for non-work related computing. The authors emphasize the need to have clear guidelines and policies so that employers can protect themselves from paying terminated employees unemployment benefits, when the latter are let go for using work computers inappropriately.

Another attorney, Bethany Whitfield (2014), makes the case for creating social media policies and guidelines quite convincing. In her article in the *Arkansas Law Review*, she notes that the courts have tended to play catch-up in legal matters concerning social media use, which means that there is little clear-cut legal authority on a variety of questions, such as: who owns a social media channel and who can reap its benefits? What happens when an employer fires an employee over a message posted on the latter's social media channel? If an employee's social media channel attracts clients, who has the right to those clients? With these questions in mind, Whitfield draws on key cases, statutes, and administrative decisions to address the intricate employment, contract, privacy, and ownership rights associated with social media. She concludes by providing step-by-step instructions for drafting social media policy.

The above discussion has focused on detailing the research that has been done in two particular areas: the use of social media as a promotional tool and the risks associated with such use. As was pointed out earlier, the literature that concerns social media in the workplace is much more diverse than these two strands may suggest. Nevertheless, these two areas of research are directly linked to the research question and thus provide the necessary context to situate the research at hand.

### **2.5) Academic Literature and the Research at Hand**

Having examined the literature, it is now necessary to reflect on how it fits into this research. Overall, the literature helps to set the context and to provide a general perspective on how organizations, technology, and individuals interact, how employees can go beyond their job descriptions to enrich their own working experiences and to benefit their respective organizations, and how social media can serve as a reliable promotional tool to organizations. Nevertheless, there is a considerable gap in the literature when it comes to exploring the role that rank and file employees can play in using social media at work. When social media is discussed as a promotional tool, it is usually viewed as a tool to be used by an organization's communications team, but not by its employees. This is especially noticeable when discussion turns to the impact of social media on the relationship between clients and organizations. There is little discussion, in this context, of the role that individuals can play. It seems that the only time that individuals are mentioned is when the discussion turns to the analysis of risks and challenges. This demonstrates that employees are seen to a large extent as a potential liability, rather than an asset. As such, there is a direct contrast between these views and those expressed in the literature on employee empowerment.

Considering these shortcomings, the research at hand seeks to bridge these gaps by

extending the discussion on employee empowerment into the social media realm by examining whether organizations should allow rank and file employees to use their personal networks to promote their organizations and engage with clients. This question implicitly recognizes that rank and file employees have an important role to play in shaping the organizations they work for, and that this role needs to be better understood. This paper proposes that this new research direction can be started by conducting a qualitative study of communications professionals from a variety of organizations. The intent is not to necessarily provide definitive and authoritative answers, because such a goal would be impossible with the sample size conceived for this research, but to rather serve as a starting point for additional future research on the subject. With this in mind, it is pertinent to devote the next chapter to the discussion of how this study was designed and administered.

### **III Research Design and Methodology**

#### **3.0) Introduction**

The chapter that follows aims to provide the reader with a detailed description of how the research was conceived and conducted. The goal of providing this information is to describe how the approach taken in this research is ultimately linked to the need to answer the research question of this study. As was previously noted, this study sees the potential for rank and file employees to use their personal networks to promote their respective organizations. Despite the possible benefits of such use, the risks and challenges associated with the use of social media are numerous and varied. Considering this context, this research ponders whether organizations should allow their employees to use social media at work, and, if so, how to manage the associated risks. The preceding chapter's review of existing literature demonstrated that despite efforts by some scholars to evaluate employee empowerment and social media use, such studies

tend to be focused solely on one of these subjects, without considering the role of individual employees in using social media. Considering the nature of the research question, this study departs from the existing literature by attempting to join these two disciplines by evaluating the potential for social media to produce empowered employees. Since this is a new avenue of research, the identified literature is not sufficient to answer the research question and needs to be supplemented by gathering additional data. With this in mind, the purpose of this chapter then is to illustrate how this additional data was identified, collected, and analyzed. To this end, the chapter is divided into the following sections; section 3.1 discusses the research method and study design, explaining why this research followed the cross-sectional qualitative research design. Section 3.2, expounds on semi-structured interviews as the data gathering method for this study. Section 3.3 illustrates how the study population was identified and discusses the non-random purposive sampling method that was used in this research. Section 3.4 discusses the interview process. Section 3.5 examines the ethical considerations of this study. Section 3.6 presents how data was analyzed and interpreted using Braun and Clarke's stages of thematic analysis. Lastly, section 3.7 provides a synthesis of the presented information.

### **3.1) Research Method**

Prior to choosing an appropriate research method for this study, it was first important to clearly distinguish between qualitative and quantitative research methods and to evaluate their respective strengths and weaknesses. To this end, a number of academic sources were consulted, including Maggetti *et al.* (2013), Creswell (2003), Marshall & Rossman (1995), Saldana (2009), Miles & Huberman (1994), and Mayan (2009).

Qualitative research may have different aims depending on the academic area of inquiry. However, it is generally concerned with finding an answer to questions of 'how' and 'why' a

specific event occurs or specific action is taken. These questions examine the influences and other factors that cause certain outcomes of people's actions (Isaacs, 2014 and Mayan, 2009). This approach has a number of benefits. First, qualitative research looks at specific situations and cases in time, allowing the researcher to analyze an issue at a greater depth. Second, it permits a researcher to consider the attitudes feelings, behaviours, and individual experiences of those participating in a study, factors that cannot be easily quantified. From a practical point of view, qualitative research does not require many participants, so it can be done on a tight budget. The flip side of this, however, is that a qualitative study may lack proper validity due to a low number of participants.

Conversely, quantitative research involves analyzing data by numbers, measuring it using statistical analysis, and/or identifying the cause and effect relationship (Merrigan *et al.*, 2012). The quantitative research method focuses on answering questions, such as 'how much', 'how many', and 'what is the cause and its effect'. Quantitate analysis is often used in research that involves repetitive measuring across time, and experiments with multiple variables (Creswell, 2003). Since this approach is largely concerned with the measurement of data, it produces results that have higher validity and statistical significance, which allows drawing more tangible conclusions about the cause and effect relationship between multiple variables. On the other hand, however, this method requires large numbers of participants, whose recruitment can be time-consuming and costly. Moreover, the analysis of large quantities of data may require specialized and expensive software to help sift through the collected data and generate comprehensible results.

This research utilized the qualitative research method. The choice of the qualitative approach was grounded in the nature of the research question of this study. To reiterate, the

present research sought to examine whether organizations should allow their rank and file employees to use social media as a promotional tool to engage clients, and how risks associated with such use could be mitigated. Considering the goal of this research, the qualitative approach was a more suitable method for this study, because answers to the above question were not based on a numerical analysis of data. Since the perception of risk and benefit are largely and inherently subjective, they are hard to quantify and measure. Therefore, a qualitative approach was more suitable as it allowed to factor into the analysis the opinions and personal experiences of communications professionals. This was extremely important, because given the variety of practices and approaches, this method enabled to better analyze the views of the participants and to evaluate the risks and benefits of social media in the workplace in general, and in their specific organizations in particular. A quantitative research design could have been contemplated, but it would have required a somewhat different focus and a research design that would have been beyond the scope of the current project, because the validity of results in a quantitative study hinges largely on the number of participants. Since this study does not contemplate to interview tens or hundreds of individuals, a qualitative approach is more suitable.

When it comes to the specific design of a qualitative research, there were a number of designs that had been considered. They included: cross-sectional research, longitudinal design, experimental design, case study design, comparative research design, evaluation research, and action research design (Merrigan, *et al.*, 2012; Trochim, 2006; Soy, 1997; Mills, van de Bunt, & de Bruijn, 2006; & Sagor, 2000). This research used the cross-sectional research design, which analyzes a variety of data gathered at one point in time (Merrigan, *et al.*, 2012). More specifically, this method focuses on groups of people that tend to share a common variable, while being different in all other respects (Roundy, 2014). In the following research, people who

held communication and marketing positions in various organizations were interviewed, thus providing a specific population at a particular moment in time. Despite the fact that those who were interviewed worked for different organizations and had different experiences, their common denominator was their roles in their organizations, the role of communications and marketing specialists.

### **3.2) Data Gathering Method**

The data was gathered through face-to-face semi-structured interviews with marketing and communication professionals. The face-to-face method was particularly useful as it allowed for a broader interpretation of interviewees' answers by looking at their body language and face expressions. In addition, it was easier to establish trust between the interviewee and the interviewer, as opposed to a phone interview. Face-to-face interviews also allowed the interviewer to see if an interviewee did not understand a question and needed clarification (Merrigan *et al.*, 2012).

The interview schedule followed the semi-structured method. Semi-structured interviews are those that have scheduled questions but at the same time allow for follow-up questions that are not on the schedule, or skipping some questions based on the flow of the interview (Merrigan *et al.*, 2012). This method was chosen with the consideration that the participants were from various social media policy environments, meaning that the interview schedule had to be flexible enough to accommodate the various experiences of the participants. Equally important, the interviewees were able to engage in a more fluid discussion in the absence of a rigid interview schedule.

Although this method has its benefits, one must be mindful of the challenges as well. One potential pitfall of semi-structured interviews is that a flexible schedule may lead to participants

going on a tangent and discussing unrelated topics. Similarly, participants may, in a way, ‘hijack’ the interview by ignoring the questions of the interviewer to discuss only what is on their mind. Ultimately, this can result in the interviewees providing data that is not relevant to the research, which in turn may complicate coding (Turner, 2010). Considering these challenges, it was important for the interviewer to ensure that the interview remained on topic. To aid in this, it was necessary to provide the participants ahead of time with a brief description of the research and a brief list of topics that the interview would cover.

### **3.3) Study Population and Sampling Method**

This research was conducted by interviewing six communications and marketing professionals from different organizations. This number was deemed to be sufficient for the scope of this study, since six participants would provide adequate qualitative data for the researcher to critically analyze the interviews in conjunction with the academic literature on the subject. Moreover, the researcher has consulted previous MACT projects that employed a similar data gathering method (Hall, 2013; Dyck, 2015; and Juchli, 2015). These studies demonstrated that six quality interviews yield ample information and data.

The small sample size is also linked to the sampling method chosen for this research, which relied on non-random purposive sampling. Unlike various probability sampling techniques, where participants are chosen randomly with the goal of making generalizations about a population segment, purposive sampling requires that a researcher be selective about the subjects chosen to participate in a study. Study participants are not randomly selected, because the goal of research that employs purposive sampling is to focus on particular characteristics of a population. This approach allows a researcher to interact with study participants that are directly implicated in the examined subject area without wasting resources on random participants who

may not necessary add value to the research (Merrigan, *et al.*, 2012). Since such research seeks participants with specific backgrounds, the sample size tends to be rather small (“Purposive sampling”, 2012).

With this in mind, this particular research sought participants who held communications and marketing positions in various organizations. The type of organization (i.e. private, public, non-profit) that participants worked for was not a factor in identifying and selecting candidates. Given the small sample of this study, it would have been difficult to generalize findings to an economic sector. Instead, the goal was to acquire a general understanding of how organizations approached the use of social media by employees. Instead of selecting participants based on the organization they worked for, the selection criteria emphasized recruiting individuals based on their roles, because such individuals would have direct contact with various marketing channels that organizations utilize in order to promote their products and services. Such participants would also be knowledgeable about the communication and marketing policies that existed in their organizations, specifically rules relating to the use of social media in the workplace. Thus, their knowledge and experience of working in the marketing and communications field were instrumental in this research.

Potential participants were identified using the researcher’s personal LinkedIn account. Relying on one’s own professional contacts was deemed to be more effective than conducting cold calls to different organizations in the hopes of securing a willing participant. Among those contacts, priority was given to the individuals that were more familiar with my academic studies and research interests. This was a strategic choice, knowing that an individual with whom I shared a personal connection would be more eager to participate in my study, whereas people who did not know me as well would be less eager or have less incentive to take part.

Finding and interviewing communications and marketing professionals was the first and most important criterion for selecting participants. Other criteria included identifying communications professionals that worked:

- a) as part of a dedicated social media team in organizations that had social media channels and actively used social media. The names of organizations that interview candidates worked for were also acquired from LinkedIn. To verify that the companies that interview candidates worked for corresponded to the criteria, the researcher conducted online research to learn more about the organization and to verify that the organization was active on its social media channels.
- b) in the Edmonton area or in its environs - Professionals from the Edmonton area were chosen for practical reasons, judging that interviews would be easier to arrange with people that lived in the same geographic area as the researcher. The location of interview candidates was acquired from the information found on their LinkedIn profiles.

Given the above criteria and subject-identification method, I shortlisted 12 individuals. Even though I intended to interview only six participants, I thought that it would be appropriate to identify more prospective participants in case if someone would decline my invitation to participate. All 12 individuals were contacted via LinkedIn, explaining the nature of the research and the parameters of the interview. Those who were willing to participate were then provided more information in preparation for the interview. The next section provides a more detailed overview of the interviews.

### **3.4) The Interviews**

The interviews were held during the month of October 2015. All interviews took place through video conferencing. The reason for this had to do with the fact that the identified communications professionals could not meet with me during the day, or after work due to other priorities. Considering this challenge, video conferencing permitted the interviews to be held face-to-face, and at a time and location that were most convenient for the participants. Each interview lasted approximately 30 minutes and followed the semi-structured method.

Before the interviews could take place, it was necessary to develop an interview protocol, to guide the administration and implementation of the interviews. The main objective of the protocol was to ensure that interviews were conducted in a consistent manner to ensure data reliability. Following the recommendations provided by Boyce & Neale (2006), the protocol included a set introduction to the purpose of the research, which was sent to all participants ahead of time to familiarize them with the intent of the study. The same introduction was repeated before the start of every interview, to ensure that all participants were on the same page. Participants were also accorded the opportunity to ask questions if they did not completely understand the goal or the purpose of the research. This step of introducing the research to the participants also included an informed consent form, which all participants had to sign before commencing the interviews. On top of this, the interview protocol dictated that during the interviews, the researcher would take notes using a laptop, and that at the end the researcher would write down any impressions or observations pertaining to each interview.

An essential component of the interview protocol was the development of the interview questions. Boyce & Neale (2006) recommend that interview questions should be open-ended, and that factual questions should precede opinion questions. Further to this, Turner (2010) and

McNamara (2009) recommend that interview questions be not only open-ended, but also as neutral as possible, and worded clearly. The interview questions in this research were developed using these best practices in order to gain maximum data from the participants. As such, most of the interview consisted of open-ended and neutral questions, with the only opinion questions appearing at the end of the interview.

As for the content of the interviews, the questions were designed with the research questions in mind. Since this research is interested in seeing whether organizations should allow their employees to use personal networks to promote their organization and engage with clients, the interview sought to first understand the social media environment in each one of the participants' organizations. The intent was to see how social media was used, to what extent, and by whom. Following this round of questions, the interview switched its attention to the rank and file employees in those organizations. The questions in this part of the interview were designed to allow the researcher to understand the organizational attitudes towards the use of social media by rank and file employees, and the level of engagement of such employees on social media. The last part of the interview invited the participants to share their opinion on the risks of such use and how the challenges could be addressed in an effective manner

### **3.5) Ethical Considerations**

In addition to the requirements and best practices in selecting participants and administering the interviews, as discussed in the above sections, it was also necessary to ensure that the study was conducted in an ethical manner. Part of this processes meant that I had to reflect upon my role in the research. Was I an insider or outsider with respect to the participants? A researcher is said to be an insider if he or she shares certain characteristics with the participants. For instance, in research that involves certain language or ethnic groups, a

researcher would be considered an insider if he or she speaks the same language or shares the same ethnic background. Conversely, in this example a researcher who is an outsider would be one who does not have the same cultural and linguistic background as the participants (Irvine *et al.*, 2008). Both approaches have their merits and shortcomings. The insider approach, as in the example above, can allow a researcher to better access and understand the participants. This, however, may lead to bias, where the researcher is not objective and does not keep an open mind. The outsider approach, on the other hand, is the total opposite; it may be perceived as being more objective, while lacking a complete understanding of the group (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009).

In the context of the current study, I am an outsider because I am not a communications professional and have no personal experiences with managing communications in an organization. Being an outsider should in theory mean that I can be objective and open-minded in my analysis of the issues. This, however, is not necessarily the case. In fact, when interviewing participants and analyzing data, it was important to be mindful that bias was still a concern. This is because, whether one admits it or not, bias informs any research to an extent. Saldana (2009) notes that how one conducts the interview, how one transcribes it, and how one codes it reflect one's personal character as well as the constructs, concepts, language, models, and theories that structured the study in the first place. Being an outsider helped to control for whatever bias I may have had, but I also attempted to limit it by applying triangulation to ensure that the findings of the study were externally valid. This process is discussed at a greater length in the next section.

Although as an outsider I can better control my bias, does that mean that I cannot fully appreciate the experiences of the group I am studying? I think this does not have to be the case, because, as Dwyer & Buckle (2009) argue, being an outsider does not mean that one has to

sacrifice the ability to “appreciate and adequately represent the experience of the participants.” Instead they suggest that researchers need to have the “ability to be open, honest, deeply interested in the experience of one’s research participants, and committed to accurately and adequately representing their experience.” With this in mind, I do not foresee any ethical or professional concerns or issues that may arise from my being an outsider.

Another question that is central to the issue of ethics is that of accuracy of information and confidentiality. To ensure accuracy of data gathering, I transcribed all of the interviews using a laptop. Any observations or impressions that occurred during the interview were not transcribed as part of the interview, but instead were compiled as side notes to guide the interpretation of the data. As for confidentiality, it was ensured by removing the names of the participants and of the organizations they worked for from the transcripts. In addition to that, I saved the transcripts on my computer using password protection. Hard copies of the transcripts were printed and stored securely in my study area using a lock.

### **3.6) Data Analysis and Interpretation**

The analysis of the data obtained in the interviews was conducted in multiple stages, as per Braun and Clarke’s stages of thematic analysis of qualitative research design (Craver, 2014). Thematic analysis allows identifying and examining various patterns in the information gathered in the research. Braun and Clarke suggest six stages of gathering, analyzing, and reporting the final findings of the research.

The first stage involved obtaining information from the participants using face-to-face interviews. Braun and Clarke suggest that if a response is not written by the participants, then it is the responsibility of the researcher to write their responses as soon as possible to facilitate future analysis. Hence, it was very important to ensure that the information was transcribed

accurately by the researcher. In addition to this, it was also necessary to examine the transcribed answers following each interview. This was done in order to start noticing themes, meanings, or other patterns in the participants' responses and see how these patterns may be useful to the research.

The second and third stages focused on coding the collected data and developing themes, respectively. Coding is a vital tool for analyzing qualitative data as it helps identify repetitive patterns, which can be characterized by similarity, difference, frequency, sequence, correspondence, or causation. In general, coding allows a researcher to find patterns in data, and to then categorize it, subsequently yielding themes or concepts (Saldana, 2009).

When undertaking coding, it is important to keep in mind that this exploratory problem-solving technique does not have a specific formula to follow. In spite of this, the coding process for this research followed the steps recommended by Saldana (2009), in his coding manual. Preliminary coding commenced during data collection. While transcribing the interviews, I created side notes for future reference on parts of the interview that I found striking. These notes were not meant to serve as the final codes, but rather as ideas for analytic consideration.

Once all of the interviews were completed and transcribed, they were printed in a double-spaced format, keeping a wide margin on the right side of the page. This space was used to include the preliminary notes and codes created during the interviews, as well as to write new codes pertaining to the data. To facilitate the coding process, each interview was printed separately (in other words, each participant's interview was coded separately), and the text was divided into short units in order to separate the interview questions. In addition to these formatting steps, the data was pre-coded by highlighting and underlining parts of the interviews that appeared to be significant. This step was useful in obtaining intriguing quotes from the

participants that then served as illustrative examples in the findings section of this report. Moreover, during the coding process, I found it extremely useful to keep a copy of the research question, as well as the literature review, in front of me. This ensured that my coding decisions were focused on the research at hand.

When coding, it was also necessary to keep in mind that coding should be approached as a cyclical process, where data is recoded two or three times to manage, filter, highlight, and focus the prominent features of the qualitative data for generating categories, themes, and concepts (Saldana, 2009). In the case of this research, going through the coding exercise three times permitted the data to be segregated, grouped, regrouped, and relinked, a process that was instrumental in categorizing the codes and creating themes (Grbich, 2007)

The fourth and fifth stages of analysis focused on reviewing the themes, and defining and naming them, respectively. Braun and Clarke explain that when reviewing themes, the researcher may notice that not all codes in a group belong to one theme, or some themes can be further broken down into subthemes. Thus, a thorough review of the themes was required. I followed a two-stage approach. The first step was to see if there were any extra groups of codes that could be extracted from the themes, and put together to into a pattern. The second phase was to see how the themes related to the whole research, reflecting back on the research question and the literature. Once this was done, I defined and named the themes. This was done by reflecting on the codes that were grouped together and thinking which terms from the literature could be applied to those groups. As such, I developed the following themes: organizational social media practices, personal social media use, advantages of social media use, disadvantages of social media use, and personal opinions on the future of social media in the workplace.

The last stage was to reflect on the collected information and write the findings section of this research. Braun and Clarke suggest that the initial collection of the data and the subsequent findings need to be not only logical but also valid (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Craver, 2014). With this in mind, it is important to explain the steps that went into ensuring that the findings of this research were valid. The concept of validity in qualitative studies is a subject of much debate among qualitative researchers, because a researcher's understanding of validity and how to test for it may differ depending on the intentions and methodologies of a particular research (Golafshani, 2003). In spite of this, Nahid Golafshani suggests that validity for qualitative research be conceptualized in terms of a study's trustworthiness, rigour, and quality. Thus, the goal of a researcher should be to eliminate bias as much as possible, while increasing the truthfulness of the argument being presented. To achieve this, one must use triangulation, which is a "validity procedure where researchers look for convergence among multiple and different sources of information to form themes or categories in a study" (Golafshani, 2003). Thus, a researcher may employ multiple methods of gathering data, such as observation and interviews, to produce more reliable and viable findings. Also, a researcher may employ other sources to assist in the interpretation of the data. In the context of this study, triangulation was achieved by collecting data through the observation of participants, through interviews, and through coding. Moreover, the data collected from interviews was then examined in the context of the literature review, thereby ensuring that the analysis of the collected data was not done in a vacuum. Having ascertained the validity of the data, I was ready to turn my attention to the writing of the findings and the analysis.

### **3.7) Summary**

Before proceeding to the next chapter to reflect on the findings, it is necessary to provide a summary of the above discussion. This chapter has focused on the methodology of this research by detailing how the study was designed and implemented. As part of this discussion, this chapter elaborated on the merits of conducting a cross-sectional qualitative research through semi-structured interviews. In addition to this, the above discussion illustrated how participants were identified and interviewed, and how ethical issues were addressed. The last part of the chapter provided a detailed discussion of how data was analyzed and interpreted, thus serving as an excellent segue into the next chapter.

## **IV Findings and Discussion**

### **4.1) Introduction**

Prior to discussing and analyzing the findings, it is worthwhile to reiterate the scope of this research. The literature review has demonstrated that despite the marketing benefits accorded by social media, many organizations seek to restrict the use of this tool to dedicated communications teams within their organizations. This approach ensures that an organization puts out a consistent message to the public, thereby limiting the potential for miscommunication and negative publicity. Conversely, the attempt to restrict other employees from using their personal social media channels to communicate with their clients ignores not only the recent trends in employee empowerment, but also the potential to reach out to a significant number of people.

Given this problem, this research is tasked with two questions: a) should organizations allow employees to use their personal social media networks to promote their organizations and engage with clients? b) If so, how can the risks associated with such use be mitigated?

To answer these questions, this research applied a cross-sectional research design to collect data from six communications and marketing professionals using non-random purposive sampling. The data that was collected from interviewing these individuals went through a number of coding steps. Preliminary coding commenced during the interviews, consisting of side notes created during each interview. Once all interviews were transcribed, the data was pre-coded by highlighting parts of the interview that appeared to be important. The highlighted parts of each interview were then given a descriptive code, which summarized the primary topic of each excerpt. This coding process was repeated three times, which allowed the researcher to filter the data, and to then group it into categories.

The presentation of the findings and analysis that follows has been divided into two major parts. The first part presents the data that was collected from the interviews. The second part analyzes and reflects on the collected data using the theory and themes that were identified in the literature review. The intent of this approach is to answer the research questions from all potential angles, and to therefore provide a comprehensive answer.

To facilitate the readers' navigation through this chapter of the research, it should be noted that Section 4.2 will briefly examine the participants who agreed to take part in the study. Then, the discussion will switch to the presentation of the participant responses in Section 4.3. This section is divided into five parts, with each section being a category that was identified during the coding process; namely, a) communication team social media practices, b) personal social media use, c) advantages of social media use, d) disadvantages of social media use, e) should employees be allowed to use social media? if so, how can the risks be mitigated?). The latter part of this chapter (Section 4.4) will be devoted to discussing the participant responses in the context of Structuration Theory and other academic literature on the subject matter.

#### **4.2) Study Participants**

Prior to discussing and analyzing the findings of this research, it is worthwhile to devote some attention to a general overview of the participants who agreed to take part in this study. This part is not intended to repeat what was already written in the methodology section, but to rather reflect on the challenges that were encountered when recruiting participants and to see what can be learned from an initial observation of who chose to participate in the study.

Finding willing participants was not an easy task. Despite assurances of complete confidentiality and anonymity, there were several individuals who refused to participate. This was not unexpected, as I have deliberately shortlisted 12 people to contact in case someone would refuse to participate. What was surprising, however, was who chose to decline. To be clear, it must be noted that here I am not talking about people who chose not to take part because of scheduling difficulties, or other logistical matters. Rather, I would like to draw the attention of the reader to those who initially agreed to participate, but later retracted their consent once they familiarized themselves with the nature and intent of the study. As mentioned in the methodology, I intended to interview six communications and marketing professionals from different organizations. Initially, I thought that finding willing participants from the public sector would be more challenging than getting private sector communication professionals to agree to participate in the study. My preliminary hesitation was informed by previous research into the subject of social media adoption by governments. This research showed that despite a gradual transition towards embracing social media in the name of openness, transparency, effectiveness, and efficiency, some governments and public agencies might still discourage and even actively restrict social media use across their information and communication technology networks, and introduce policies to limit social media use by their employees (Khan, Ho, & Han, 2014;

O'Connor, 2014). In addition to this, I was somewhat uncertain about how much government employees would choose to disclose given the changing political climates in both Alberta and Canada (i.e. both jurisdictions going through elections, which have ousted their respective ruling parties).

In this light, it is interesting to note that I had no trouble finding willing participants from the public sector, while my attempts at recruiting interviewees from the private sector were met with rejection. I have contacted 4 communications professionals from various private organizations and businesses, all of whom either ignored my requests or outright refused to participate in the study. Their refusal was motivated by a concern of disclosing sensitive information about the inner workings of their companies.

The lack of participants from the private sector, while disappointing, did not undermine the study. Since the research question looks at organizations in a broad sense and does not specifically seek to compare economic sectors, or to distinguish between them, the lack of participants from the private sector was not a hindrance.

The six people that took part in the study belong largely to the public sector. For the sake of clarity and to avoid confusion when analyzing interview responses, the participants will be referred to as Participant A, B, C, etc. The table below provides a concise overview of the participants and their area of employment;

Participant A	Participant B	Participant C	Participant D	Participant E	Participant F
Post-secondary educational institution	Post-secondary educational institution	Municipal government	Municipal government	Provincial government	Non-profit organization

Two participants work for different public post-secondary educational institutions (Participants A and B), two work for different municipal governments (Participants C and D), and one works for a provincial government (Participant E). The other remaining participant is from the voluntary sector, working for a non-profit organization (Participant F).

### **4.3) Response Analysis**

All six participants were asked 9 to 12 questions, depending on whether the companies they worked for allowed rank and file employees to use their personal social media channels to promote their respective organizations. As mentioned in the methodology section of this paper, the interviews were transcribed and then coded. As was already mentioned, the coding exercise consisted of pre-coding the transcribed data and then assigning a descriptive code to it. Similar codes and codes that expressed a shared idea or theme were grouped together to yield a number of categories. These categories will inform the flow of the discussion in this part of the paper, and they are: a) communication team social media practices; b) personal social media use; c) upsides of using social media; d) downsides of using social media; e) should employees be allowed to use social media? If so, how can the risks be mitigated?

#### **4.3.1) Communication Team Social Media Practices**

All six participants noted that their organizations had a Communication Team, employing dedicated staff to manage the organizations' social media channels. The types of channels used and extent of social media use varied depending on the needs of the organization, as well as the size of the organization and its internal makeup. Notwithstanding the variety of approaches to using social media, one common denominator for all participants was the near absence of robust policies on social media use. At this point, it is worth noting that the need for clear guidelines and policies was a recurring topic in the literature (see Pitts & Alyott, 2012; Miller, 2013; and

Fichtner, Strader & Scullen, 2013). This is why the absence of concrete policies in the participants' organization is that much more striking. This is not to say that there is a total absence of such procedures, but they appear to be somewhat lacking. Participant C mentioned that the communications department was "just setting up the social media policy," while Participant D noted that the communications team was "still working on [a policy draft] before publishing it for the public to see." Participant E noted that there were "very broad [policies that] mostly talk about balancing personal life and work and encouraging employees not to use social media while at work." Similarly, Participant F said that there were no specific policies besides a general guideline that "if employees decide to promote the organization via their personal social networks, they should do so with respect appropriate posts."

Participants A and B seem to be the outliers, as both have at least some procedures in place. Participant A mentioned that in addition to a social media policy, there were also tip sheets and kits on the use of social media, as well as frequent staff meetings to share lessons learned. In the case of Participant B, while the organization does not have a policy, it does offer courses to staff on the proper use of social media.

#### **4.3.2) Personal Social Media Use**

Following a discussion of how their respective communications teams approached social media, participants were asked to comment on the use of personal social media networks by the rank and file employees of their respective companies. When asked whether their organizations allowed or encouraged their employees to promote the company or engage their clients using their personal networks, all but one participant noted that this was in fact the case. Only Participant E indicated that the organization did not permit personal network use, saying that

For some industries it makes sense to encourage employees to use their personal networks, but it does not for the government. The government is about professional advice to people, new policy making, and it is very easy to cross the line of fairness to the policy creation if spoken about it on social media.”

Participant E elaborated by noting that the government’s attempt at discouraging personal network use made sense. Reinforcing the notion that allowing employees to use their personal networks is laden with risk, Participant E explained that a permissive social media approach by a government would open the door for a disaffected employee, or an employee with strong views about a particular policy, to openly criticize the government and potentially reveal sensitive information.

Considering these strong views and the fact that Participant E’s organization does not openly allow or endorse the use of personal networks, it is somewhat peculiar that employees still manage to use their social media channels to promote the organization. Notwithstanding the general prohibition on such use, “sometimes [employees would promote] awareness campaigns (e.g. national anti-bullying campaign) via their personal networks,” in addition to ‘liking’ posts on Facebook and retweeting tweets posted on the organization’s official twitter account. This, according to Participant E, happens “not because [employees] are being told to do so, but because it happens organically and naturally”, implying that such use is ultimately beyond the control of the organization. Interestingly, the use of personal networks actually varies across the organization, as the general ban on social media use is not uniformly applied. According to Participant E, “it also depends on the department. For instance, employees in the education department tend to re-tweet or share posts on their personal networks more often in order to distribute urgent information (e.g. school updates) to a wider audience.” On top of that, the

member of the organization's communication team responsible for job posts on LinkedIn openly encourages other employees to share job postings on their personal networks.

These responses present a picture of an organization that is, on the one hand, trying to control the message that appears on social media, but on the other hand realizes that such control is counterproductive. Judging from the responses by the other participants, this seeming love-hate relationship with social media does not seem to be all that uncommon. Participant C, for instance, noted that while the organization allowed employees to use their personal networks for work-related matters, it was also in the process of "trying to get more control over it" by developing a policy for the proper use of social media via personal networks. The intent of such a policy is to ensure that the organization's reputation and public relations are safeguarded from the type of scenario described above by Participant E.

The need to minimize the potential harms of personal social media was shared by most participants, as only Participant A noted the lack of any policy or oversight tool. This does not necessarily mean that other participants' organizations have concrete policies regarding the use of social media by their employees. What it does mean is that other organizations seem to appreciate the risks, and are taking steps to mitigate the potential pitfalls. As such, Participant B's organization does not have a policy in place, but its communication team regularly monitors what other people (including staff) post about the organization, and offers courses to staff on the proper use of social media at work. Similarly, Participant C's organization is working to develop a policy and offsets its current absence through monitoring. Participant D also noted that a policy was in the works, while Participant F attested to there being a broad policy in place along with monitoring by the communications team. There is no policy in participant E's organization,

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because the use of personal networks is generally prohibited. The table below summarizes these results:

Participant A	Participant B	Participant C	Participant D	Participant E	Participant F
No policy, no oversight	No policy, but monitoring by communications team	No policy, policy in the works, only monitoring for now	Policy being developed	No policy	Broad policy and monitoring by communications team

Although the Participants were not asked directly why their organizations did not have robust social media policies, it appears that the need for such policies is not necessarily urgent since the majority of Participants' organizations have encountered few challenges as a result of employees using their social media channels. As a matter of fact, only two participants cited isolated incidents of employees being reprimanded for their online activity. Participant B recalled two instances when two employees had sit down meetings with the communications team regarding inappropriate posts. Participant C also mentioned an incident when a few employees set up fake social media accounts for the organization and posted inappropriate content. The lack of serious negative fallouts related to employee social media use may be the reason why the majority of organizations in this study do not have robust social media policies in place.

In discussing the policies or monitoring mechanisms that organizations have, it is also important to note that the level of organizational endorsement for personal network use and the level of adoption by staff vary. In fact, only two Participants B and D noted that their organization actually encouraged staff to use social media. This, however, has not always translated into widespread adoption by employees. Participant B noted that the employees who

do engage on social media are those who are either “active on social media anyways, so they do it because they like doing it,” or those who are directly engaged in a certain project or department. Participant D evoked a similar view, noting that despite encouragement from the organization to use social media, “only a few employees do that, those who feel comfortable with social media.”

The other Participants (A, C, E, and F) remarked that organizations do not encourage staff to use their personal networks, but that such use happens nonetheless to some extent. In the case of Participant A, such use is widespread. Participants C, E and F, however, remarked that the use of personal networks is limited to a minority of employees. Thus and notwithstanding encouragement or discouragement from an organization, the responses provided by the participants demonstrate that with the exception of Participant A, the use of personal networks seems to be restricted to a number of individuals, who tend to retweet hashtags, like Facebook posts, and follow the organizations’ official channels. This fact seems to be lamented by Participant F, who notes that the “level of engagement is not very high. Employees only follow the organization’s social media channels, like the posts, and retweet them, but this is as far as it goes. Almost none of the comments under the posts come from employees.”

#### **4.3.3) Advantages of Social Media Use**

In addition to being asked to describe the nature of social media use by staff in their organizations, participants had the chance to comment on the perceived advantages of such use. Apart from Participant E, who was rather dismissive of the idea that the use of personal social media networks had a place in the public sector, the other participants listed numerous advantages. Participants A, B, D, and F noted that letting employees use their personal networks

opened the door for a second stream of promotion. This view was best encapsulated by Participant B, saying that:

It is important to allow employees to promote the organization via their personal networks because it is a different type of promotion. You cannot promote every single aspect/event of your organization via the professional marketing team. You need to use other channels/ways to promote if you want to reach [out] to [the largest] possible market share.

This view was seconded by Participant D, who noted that as a result of not all employees using their personal networks, the organization is “missing out on the opportunity to be promoted via a larger number of channels.”

The benefit of having additional promotional channels is not a mere hypothesis. According to Participants A, B, D, and F, the employees who use social media are a real asset that contributes to the growth of their organizations. In fact, as elaborated by Participant F, the “organization’s social media membership increased a lot because of other employees posting and sharing tweets and other posts. Without it, [the organization] would not have so many members and followers.” In this light, it is important to note that this increase is significant, because, as attested to by Participant D, organizations are seeing that their clients have responded by becoming more engaged and responsive. In the case of Participant A, this becomes evident when taking into account that events put together by the organization are better attended, and have more energetic and diverse participants.

Participants A, C, D, and F were also quick to point out that the permissive attitude of their organizations toward the use of personal networks had contributed to a more committed, and passionate workforce. Participant D believes that employees who use their personal networks are “more committed to the organization and are more excited to work here.” Participant A also suggested that even if an employee may not be overly excited about the work

that he or she does, the opportunity to use social media may help in generating greater commitment. “I don’t know which comes first,” remarked the participant, “the excitement of using social media or the actual work at the faculty.” Similarly, Participant B, who noted that while the people who use their personal networks do so because “that is their personality, that is who they are,” the opportunity to use social media lets employees “show their pride of where they work.”

#### **4.3.4) Disadvantages of Social Media Use**

Any discussion of the use of social networks by employees cannot be divorced from an analysis of the disadvantages and challenges. It is, therefore, appropriate to begin this section by noting the views of Participant E, whose organization does not openly support the use of personal networks. According to Participant E, the use of social media by staff may make sense in some industries, but not in the public sector. Considering the politicized nature of government, the use of social media may blur the lines between personal life and work, and between the public servant providing professional advice to politicians and advocating for a certain policy (This view was also echoed by Participant B). In this sense, with the presence of social media, public servants may forget that they are not spokespersons, and are not necessarily qualified to comment on certain issues. This is especially important given that disclosure of opinions and/or sensitive information on a policy or a government position may attract negative media coverage.

The fact that an employee can potentially post inappropriate information on a personal media channel means that an organization has to carefully monitor not only the posts that its employees make, but also how the public and media responds to them. The constant need for monitoring is in and of itself a disadvantage. In addition to monitoring being a challenging task in its own right, considering the multitude of social media channels and their global scale, it is

more importantly a resource intensive exercise. Participant B sees this as one of the main obstacles in the way of allowing employees to use their social media channels, “because it becomes too much to monitor, and it is resource-consuming and costly.” Interestingly enough, the issue of cost does not end there. Participant E also raised the question of remuneration; if employees are asked or encouraged to use their personal networks to promote their organization, they may rightly demand compensation for the additional work that they do, especially if it is outside of work hours. If an organization does not budget for this eventuality, it may create financial liability.

#### **4.3.5) Should Employees be Allowed to Use Social Media? If so, How Can the Risks be Mitigated?**

Despite the obvious challenges associated with social media use, all but one participant (Participant E) believe that organizations should allow employees to use their personal networks. The reasons given for this view vary, but they are all, in one way or another, connected to the recent and emerging trends of openness, transparency, and employee empowerment. To illustrate, consider the opinion of Participant A, who emphasized that “if you trust your employees to carry out your business, you should also trust them to do so on social media.” In this light, Participant F added that employees who use their personal networks to promote an organization should not be viewed as a risk, but rather as an asset that allows a company to connect to more people. In fact, it is Participant F’s view that not only do the benefits of social media outnumber the risks, but that if a company is more open it can better manage the risks through open communication. Participant B elaborated on this point by noting that allowing the use of personal networks lets a company have a more personal touch with its clients, which in turn helps minimize the negative sentiments associated with corporate capitalism. Participant B

also added that “if you need to monitor your own people, why just not allow it? Because people are going to do it anyways behind your back.” Further to this, Participant D said that organizations need to “lighten up and allow employees to use their personal networks....that is where technology and the world is headed now and you do not want to be behind.” This sense that the adoption of social media is not about to slow down was even conceded by Participant E, who stated that despite the restrictive approach by the organization, people still use their personal networks, “because it happens organically.”

Apart from their views on whether employees should be allowed to use their personal networks, participants also shared their thoughts on how to mitigate the risks. Participant A noted that organizations need to give their employees the proper tools and techniques of handling and addressing risk through training, workshops, and discussions. Participant C added that organizations need to have a good understanding of the different social media channels if they want to be able to mitigate risk in a timely fashion. To assist in this, this participant advised that a social media policy is a must for organizations in order to ensure that they can protect their reputation online.

#### **4.4) Discussion**

Despite the degree of variance in participant responses to some questions, a number of findings emerge:

1. The use of personal networks by employees is present in all six organizations to some extent;
2. Social media tends to be used by a minority of employees in each of the six organization;

3. Social media use usually consists of content sharing and creation, but there is little to no social interactions among users (i.e. no active engagement of clients/public);
4. Such use is not always encouraged, but a majority of organizations allow it;
5. Apart from general guidelines and monitoring, few organizations have robust policies to guide personal network use by employees;
6. The majority of organizations are working to develop such policies.

These results are quite revealing about the nature, scope, and direction in which the use of personal networks is moving. Developing these findings, however, presents a challenge, because it is rather difficult to generalize and to draw conclusions from a sample size of six participants. This means that these results cannot alone provide a comprehensive answer to the research questions of this study.

How then, can the results obtained in the interviews be used in a way that does not compromise external validity? External validity is concerned with ensuring that the results of a qualitative research are applicable to people and groups outside of the study. As discussed in the methodology, one approach to ensuring external validity is triangulation. To reiterate, triangulation is the process by which the researcher uses multiple data sources, methods, or theoretical perspectives in the study of a single phenomenon. This method ensures validity by circumventing the personal biases of the researcher and overcoming the drawbacks of single-method studies (Brink, 1993).

With this in mind, the analysis that follows below will provide a discussion of the findings in the context of Structuration Theory and existing literature on the subject of social media adoption in organizations. This approach will allow to put the findings in perspective and to answer the research questions by seeking congruence among these varied data sources.

#### 4.4.1) Structuration Theory

To recall, Structuration Theory marries the objectivist and subjectivist social theories by proposing that both human agents and structures mutually enact social systems. Giddens argued that the “organization of social practices is fundamentally recursive. Structure is both the medium and the outcome of the practices it recursively organizes” (Giddens, 1982). Human agents play an important role in this process, because “just as an individual’s autonomy is influenced by structure, structures are maintained and adapted through the exercise of agency” (Gibbs, 2015). Structuration, therefore, describes a cyclical process across time where human agents operate within a context of rules produced by social structures. By following these rules, human agents repeatedly reinforce the structure until routine interactions between agents and structure become institutionalized. Given that a social structure is continually reinforced through human action means that a structure is dependent on agents acting in a compliant manner. Once, however, agents begin to act outside of the structure’s limits, they can modify the structure. This process is best captured by Marshall Scott Poole and Robert McPhee, who state that:

As agents engage in practices, they draw on structures grounded in the institutional realm and produce and reproduce them in the structuring of meaning, norms, and power. This contextualizes the structures to a particular practice and has the potential to change the institution, if particular modes of action that change the structure become widely established in the society. [emphasis added] (Poole & McPhee, 2005).

This is a very important point to consider in the context of this research. Just like in any institution, the participants of this research work in organizations where their actions are constrained by certain structures. These structures dictate the manner in which employees work, how they interact with each other, and how they engage their clients. These structures are continually reinforced by employees as they follow the established rules. Although these

structures may appear rigid, they can change over time if the employees begin to gradually and collectively act in a different way, thereby creating new structures. This process of structuration is quite evident in the participants' organizations, whose structures are undergoing a significant change. Prior to the emergence of social media, employees who were not part of the organization's dedicated communications team could not effectively engage clients, and were thus limited in their work to their assigned tasks. This was seen as the norm, until the gradual adoption of social media by companies, which has considerably altered the organizations' structures.

To better understand this ongoing transformation, it is necessary to consider the impact of technology on structuration. The ability of certain technologies to impact the process of structuration cannot be underestimated. As such, Wanda Orlikowski advances the Structural Model of Technology, arguing first that technology is dual in nature, as it is created and changed by human action, yet it is also used by humans to accomplish certain actions (Orlikowski, 1992). Second, she notes that "technology is interpretively flexible, hence that the interaction of technology and organizations is a function of the different actors and socio-historical contexts implicated in its development and use" (Orlikowski, 1992). Thus, even though technology is a product of human action and is used by humans, it tends to assume structural properties by embodying and representing some of the rules that make up an organization (Brooks, 1997). In other words, as technology is adopted by an organization, it gradually becomes institutionalized and assumes the structural properties of the organization (Orlikowski, 1992).

Even though technologies tend to assume structural properties, they remain flexible, partly because they are used by humans. Since humans are knowledgeable and reflexive, action by humans may have unintended consequences. Orlikowski illustrates this by referring to a

company's adoption of email, which may intentionally contribute to an increase in communication and information sharing, but unintentionally reduce status barriers (Orlikowski, 1992). As such, while the use of technology by human agents may have a direct impact (intended or not) on the local conditions in an organization, it may also indirectly affect the institutional environment in which agents are situated (Orlikowski, 1992).

Using this information to reflect back on the use of personal networks by employees, it is possible to see how the adoption of social media has had certain unexpected consequences. In general, social media is adopted by organizations to maintain and improve public relations with their clients. The fact that organizations have official social media channels to communicate and engage with their clients reinforces the notion that only certain employees (those who manage the official channels) are qualified to undertake this task. This is an attempt to use social media in a way that would institutionalize it, thereby making the technology assume the structural properties of the organization. Unlike other technologies, however, social media is a unique and complex technology that appears to be hard to contain. Gerardine Desanctis and Marshall Scott Poole illustrate this by noting that:

Advanced information technologies bring social structures which enable and constrain interaction to the workplace. Whereas traditional computer systems support accomplishment of business transactions and discrete works tasks, such as billing, inventory management, financial analysis, and report preparation, advanced information technologies support these activities and more: they support coordination among people and provide procedures for accomplishing interpersonal exchanges. [emphasis added] (DeSanctis & Poole, 1994).

Social media, by its nature and intended mode of use, contributes to a culture of openness, sharing, and coordination. Although its adoption by organizations has had the intended consequence of increasing contact with the public, the unintended consequence has been the ability of employees to use their personal networks to interact with clients. This is seen as an

unintended consequence, because the majority of participants have indicated that their organizations do not encourage such use and in fact are now trying to regulate it with increased monitoring and the development of policies. This means that the institutional structures in these organizations, where only the communications team interacts with the public, have been or are in the process of being significantly altered. Even though the use of personal networks is rarely encouraged, this practice seems to have been established. Participant B evokes this reality best when suggesting that organizations need to accept this behaviour and not try to limit it, because eventually employees will simply use their personal networks behind the backs of management. Interestingly, this is exactly what is happening in Participant E's organization, where despite the unfavourable view of personal networks use by employees, such use still takes place naturally and organically.

So what does this mean in terms of the research question, and the larger context of social media adoption in the workplace? Should organizations permit the use personal networks? The application of Structuration Theory to this research demonstrates how organizational structures can change through human action and through the introduction of new technology. This suggests that sometimes certain organizational changes are beyond the immediate control of an organization, as institutional practices depend on their recursive repetition by human agents. Once this pattern is altered, new institutional realities can develop. In the case of this research, this new reality appears to be the use of personal networks by employees. As the use of personal networks becomes institutionalized, it seems that there is little an organization can do to reverse this development, since structural change depends on human action. This makes it evident that the use of personal networks may not only be beyond the control of an organization, but is actually dependent on the willingness of employees to use their personal networks. This would

then mean that the discussion should shift from a question of whether organizations should permit the use of personal networks, to a question of how this shift can be best managed.

Structuration Theory helps to put the findings of this research in a theoretical framework that explains the forces behind the transformation that is seen in the participants' organizations. The theory, however, falls short of illustrating if the changes observed in this research are occurring in other organizations that have embraced the use of social media. To help put this research in the larger context of social media adoption by organizations, it is necessary to turn to the literature on this subject. This will permit to answer the research questions more thoroughly.

#### **4.4.2) Literature**

A question that one may have from reading the above discussion is how it can be concluded that the use of personal networks has been institutionalized if the participants themselves have attested to the fact that only a minority of individuals in each organization uses their personal networks. At first glance, this may seem as being incongruent with the conclusions derived from the application of Structuration Theory. Nevertheless, once the wider literature on social media adoption in organizations is consulted the fact that only a few employees use their personal network emerges as being consistent with how personal networks are used in other organizations.

The fact that personal networks are not widely used in the six organizations is not surprising. When these results are viewed in the context of Mergel and Bretschneider's research (2013) – which describes the three-stage adoption process for social media use in government – it becomes quite clear that they are consistent with how social media is adopted in other organizations. Mergel and Bretschneider demonstrate that the first stage of social media adoption is characterized by a few individuals using the technology informally. Having some prior

experience with the technology from non-work-related activities, these individuals act as change agents to diffuse the technology locally within their organizations. This activity may not be coordinated and usually happens outside of accepted organizational norms (Mergel & Bretschneider, 2013). This first stage, which the authors call *intrapreneurship and experimentation*, seems to closely mirror the way in which personal networks are used in the participants' organizations. It is also in line with the above discussion on Structuration Theory as the authors demonstrate that institutional change begins with the actions of a few individuals who act outside of accepted boundaries.

During this initial step of exploration, individuals may experiment with different social media channels. Ultimately, this leads to the blurring of personal and professional norms, which poses a challenge to the privacy of information, accuracy of information, ownership rights of information, and access to information (Mason, 1986). As a result, "organizations will [eventually] seek to...control the technology so as to reduce the problems that it is creating in order to mitigate the risks..." (Mergel & Bretschneider, 2013). Subsequently, this results in the formalization of social media strategies and policies, which may outline what constitutes appropriate behaviour and describe the types of interactions that employees can have with clients. The need for such policies is a common feature of the literature on this subject (Pitts & Aylott, 2012; Maniero & Jones, 2013; Hall & Lewis, 2014; Miller, 2013).

Reflecting back on the findings of this study in the context of this literature, the lack of robust social media policies or procedures in the participants' organizations is not surprising. As Mergel and Bretschneider demonstrate, policies and procedures are usually developed in response to emerging challenges of social media use. In the case of the six participants, there has been a near absence of negative impacts of personal network use (except for two isolated

incidents). It appears, however, that the six organizations in question are slowly catching on to the reality of personal network use and are therefore gradually developing policies and monitoring frameworks to deal with the potential risks of such use. Thus, as these organizations transition from the stage of *intrapreneurship and experimentation*, one can expect them to continue to formalize and institutionalize personal network use.

In terms of the research questions, the creation of policies to manage the risks posed by personal network use demonstrates that although organizations are wary of the potentially negative impacts of such use, they do not seek to eliminate it. After all, not a single study reviewed for the purposes of this research advocated for the total ban of social media or personal networks at the workplace. Instead, every study that was reviewed talks about managing the risks through policies and regulations. Indeed, having robust procedures does not necessarily mean that organizations should restrict social media use entirely – as demonstrated by Ben O'Connor (2014), such a practice has little efficacy. Rather, the risks can be managed by embracing the collaborative aspects of social media and providing proper access and education to employees on the appropriate way of using it. This demonstrates that the discussion in academic circles views social media as something inevitable and even necessary that needs to be managed in a proactive manner, as opposed to a tool that needs to be restricted or banned (Pitts & Aylott, 2012). This information, together with the results of this study and the application of Structuration Theory demonstrate that organizations, if they have not already, should indeed allow and embrace the use of personal networks by their employees. Not only does the use of social media accord numerous benefits, more importantly such use is ultimately beyond the control of the organization, and is rather at the hands of, what Mergel and Breschneider refer to as, *individual intrapreneurs*.

The argument that the use of personal networks is bound to or has already become commonplace in many organizations is supported by the notion of employee empowerment. As illustrated in the literature review, there is a growing expectation that employees will perform tasks above and beyond the ones listed in their job description. In fact, some organizations expect their employees to demonstrate enterprising qualities and initiative in the interests of generating greater productivity, better service, and increased organizational commitment (Kirkman & Rosen, 1999). From the employees' point of view, there seem to be similar expectations; as stressed by some participants in this research, employees want to be trusted, they do not want to be micromanaged or controlled, they want to be seen as assets that can improve the organization-client relationship. The participants that share this view see open communication as the way of the future and social media as the tool for achieving this end.

The conclusion that stems from this discussion is that organizations should allow their employees to use their personal networks. Having answered the first research question, it is now appropriate to address the second question; how can the risks associated with such use be managed? Part of the answer to this question has already been provided when discussing the need for robust policies and procedures. The discussion below will seek to elaborate on this point. As was mentioned previously the notion that organizations should accept the fact that their employees will use their personal networks to engage with clients does not mean that the former should sit idly by. The use of personal networks still carries significant risk and organizations should act accordingly in the attempt to mitigate it.

The calls in the literature for implementing comprehensive policies to manage social media have been echoed by the participants in this study. Although this notion may seem as self-evident, upon closer inspection it becomes apparent that an organization needs to do some

homework to ensure that it implements “appropriate, robust governance processes that are both proactive and capable of the rapid identification of, and response to, emerging threats” (Pitts & Aylott, 2012). The participants in this study have suggested that this process should begin with self-reflection to ensure that an organization has a clear understanding of its needs, what it hopes to achieve with the use of social media, and the benefits and risks of various social media channels. Sergio Picazo-Vela *et al.* (2012) shares this view by proposing that prior to introducing a social media policy, organizations need to understand the problem that is to be solved by social media, and to adjust organizational practices and process to match the strategic objectives of social media. This exercise is necessary, because organizations do not all use social media in the same way. Thus, each application of social media needs to be specifically tailored to account for different organizational factors, such as work characteristics, innovativeness, technology and management capacity, and stakeholder needs (Oliveira & Welch, 2012).

Once an organization has a clear picture of what it hopes to achieve, it should develop a social media policy. The need for such a policy, as voiced by the participants and echoed in the literature, has already been discussed above. What remains to be mentioned is the fact that the adoption of a social media policy should not be made in a vacuum. In other words, such policy needs to be accompanied by an improvement of capacity to handle the introduction of social media effectively. In this vein, the participants in this study called for organizations to trust their employees while providing them with adequate tools and training in order to manage the risk. The question of trust is seconded by Godwin *et al.* (2008), who emphasize the need for organizations to improve employee access to social media sites instead of blocking them from using certain sites like YouTube, Facebook, and Wikipedia. A similar view is shared by Picazo-Vela *et al.* (2012), who argue that organizations need to invest in their employees by providing

them with training, while working to improve process integration, as well as interorganizational collaboration and knowledge sharing in order to maximize the benefits accorded by social media.

The above discussion demonstrates that the findings of this study fall largely in line with the academic literature on the subject. The apparent consistency between the participant responses, the theoretical framework, and previously conducted research infuses a degree of confidence in the conclusions of this research; namely that organizations should allow employees to use their personal networks, while managing associated risks by a) carefully reviewing the implications of social media adoption, b) introducing comprehensive policies, and c) investing in employee training and organizational capacity. In spite of this, the researcher is cognizant that this study has its limitations. As was already mentioned, the fact that this study attracted only six participants is relatively problematic. While the study tried to control for this limitation by triangulating the findings with other data, it would have been preferable to have a larger pool of participants in order to produce more generalizable data. The second limitation is that this study looks at the research question and the variables in a broad sense. This research does not analyze organizations in a specific economic sector, neither does it look at a specific social media channel or a particular group of rank and file employees (i.e. different age groups). Although the broad approach is taken because of the small sample size of this study, it does not mean that future research cannot explore one of those variables more in depth.

#### **4.5) Summary**

In concluding this chapter, it is necessary to reiterate the findings of this research and their implications on the research questions. This study found that in spite of expectations to the contrary, the use of personal networks by employees was pervasive in all six organizations in one way or another. Given the fact that employees actively use their personal networks, even when

such use is not sanctioned by their respective organizations, has illustrated the need for the latter to develop appropriate policies to be able to manage the risks that come with social media use. Considering that these findings are consistent with the trends anticipated by Structuration Theory and the findings of other researchers in the field, it is possible to conclude that organizations should accept the fact that their employees will use their personal networks at work. Instead of trying to restrict such behaviour, which has been demonstrated to be ineffective, organizations need to be more proactive in managing the risks posed by such use by not only developing policies, but also understanding social media, and investing in employee training and organizational capacity to handle the full extent of social media use.

## **V Conclusion and Recommendations**

This goal of this research was to examine how organizations could manage the use of personal networks by their rank and file employees without compromising privacy and accuracy of information, as well as ownership and access to information (Mason, 1986). The driving force behind this objective was the apparent disconnect between the growing tendency by organizations to embrace social media while being worried that their employees would use the same technology in ways that would decrease productivity, generate unwanted publicity, and increase work-related claims (Handman, 2013). Considering that eliminating the use of personal networks did not seem practical or feasible – due to the failure of past attempts to curb such use and the sheer number of workers who do use social media at work – this paper’s research questions pondered whether employees should instead be allowed to use their personal networks to promote their organizations and to interact with clients, and how the associated risks could be managed.

To answer these questions, this study embarked on a cross-sectional qualitative research, which involved semi-structured interviews of six communications professionals. These individuals shared their experiences, knowledge, and opinions about the feasibility of allowing personal network use in the workplace. The data that was collected during the interviews was coded and then analyzed in conjunction with existing literature on Structuration Theory, employee empowerment, and social media use at work. The findings demonstrated that personal network use was present in all of the participants' organizations, notwithstanding attempts by some organizations to discourage or curb such use. This finding showed that the use of personal networks was bound to occur whether an organization tried to restrict it or not. This was corroborated when analyzing the results in the context of Structuration Theory, which emphasized that individuals had the power to alter the structures within which they operated and to create new ones. The literature on social media use also echoed this finding, with Mergel & Bretschneider (2013) outlining that when social media is initially adopted by organizations, a few individuals act as change agents outside of accepted organizational norms to explore the potential of the technology and to diffuse it within their organizations. In the context of the first research question (should organizations allow personal network use by employees?), these findings suggest that it is difficult or nearly impossible for organizations to control personal social media use. This means that organizations should allow such use as it is bound to happen.

As for the second research question (how can the risks of personal network use be mitigated?), most of the participants indicated that their respective organizations did not have any negative consequences as a result of employees using their personal networks, which could explain why most organizations had only general guidelines and monitoring mechanisms to guide the use of personal networks. The absence of negative implications, however, did not mean

that organizations could not take proactive measures to deal with potentially negative consequences of personal network use. In fact, the participants attested to the fact that their organizations were in the process of developing social media policies and guidelines. The need for such mechanisms was echoed in the literature, which emphasized the need for policies to manage risks. Policies alone, however, are not sufficient to mitigate risk. This was made clear by both the participants and the literature, which indicated that any guideline had to be reinforced by clearly understanding the specific risks that each social media channel carried, and investing in employee training and organizational capacity to utilize social media effectively and to minimize risk.

These findings mean that organizations that were previously hesitant to allow their employees to use their personal networks should in fact allow such use. Instead of focusing their attention on trying to bar employees from using social media, these organizations would be better served by accepting that such use is bound to occur, and by developing appropriate user guidelines, while investing in employee training and evaluating the respective risks and benefits of different social media channels. Not every organization may accept these results with ease, but such acceptance is necessary if an organization wants to move forward and to reap the benefits accorded by social media.

It is, of course, easy to say that an organization should do 'a', 'b', and 'c' in order to be successful in mitigating the risks posed by social media, but in reality it may appear confusing and intimidating. Where does an organization start? How should an organization go about initiating this change? Even though the above findings suggest that organization need to accept the new reality of personal network use by rank and file employees, it does not mean such acceptance can occur overnight. After all, people are creatures of habit and it may take some

time for both employees and management to get used to permissive attitudes towards social media. The fact that such an approach can take employees and management by surprise points towards the need for both to work together in the development of a new work culture, culminating in the development of appropriate guidelines and policies. These guidelines and policies must reflect the needs of each organization, and as such both management and employees need to take part in their development. This is not only consistent with employee empowerment and Structuration Theory – which recognize the potential of rank and file employees to be agents of change – but more importantly this approach ensures that employees can take ownership over the policies, and management can better understand the social media habits and needs of its employees. In turn, this can lead to the development of policies that are more likely to be followed by the rank and file employees, while responding to the management's need to minimize risk. Whatever avenue an organization decides to take, the implication of this research for organizations developing social media policies and risk management strategies is that they need to take a proactive role by anticipating risks and engaging employees.

Even though the conclusions of this research may appear to be definitive, I am cognizant of the fact that it has some limitations. As mentioned in throughout the paper, this research had a rather general approach that limited its sample size and analyzed all of the variables in this study in the broadest terms. As such, this study did not distinguish between organization types, social media channels, or types of employees. I think this was a necessary step considering that there were no previous studies with the same focus that I could use to guide my research and to make it more precise. Instead, I had to analyze the issues at their broadest in order to develop a general understanding of the subject matter. In fact, the findings in this research can be used as a

stepping stone for future research, which could go more in depth by evaluating personal network use and risk management in organizations that were of different sizes, that belonged to different economic sectors, or that had different lines of business. For instance, a potential avenue for future research is to conduct a longitudinal study to assess the impacts and effectiveness of risk management strategies across different types of organizations. Similarly, other studies could be conducted to see if risk and the extent of personal network use fluctuated depending on the type of social media, or the type of user. By doing this more pointed analysis, future research could provide more specific and precise answers to the feasibility of personal network use in the workplace.

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**VI Appendices****Appendix A: Recruitment Tool**

Dear participant,

**RE: Social Media in the Workplace: Exploring the Benefits of Promoting an Organization via Its Employees' Social Networks**

Thank you for your interest in my research. As you may recall from our previous correspondence, this study aims to evaluate the feasibility of having rank and file employees use their personal social media channels to promote their respective organizations. As a communications/marketing specialist, your experience and knowledge is extremely valuable for this research, hence my request for your participation.

This is an 8 month long study that relies, to a great extent, on interviews with communications and marketing specialists from various organizations. The interview will take 20-30 minutes to complete. Should you decide to share any documents or images with me to aid in my research, it will be used solely for the purpose of this research and will not be distributed to anybody else.

The findings of this study have the potential of benefiting organizations that want to maximize their promotional activities via their non-marketing employees. The results of this study will help your organization to evaluate whether such an initiative would be worth pursuing.

Participation in this study is absolutely voluntary and there will be no reimbursement to participants. You are under no obligation to participate, even if you agree to be a part of the study, you can withdraw at any time up-to 2 weeks past the interview after the interview by contacting me via email or phone. In the event of your withdrawal, the information and any materials that you will have provided by that point will be deleted from the research and destroyed in full. There are no known risks associated with this research.

All responses will be strictly confidential and will be stored in a safe at my supervisor's office at the Faculty of Extension. Only I and my supervisor will have access to it. Information collected will be stored for 5 years following the completion of this research. Your name and the name of your organization will not be specified in the research findings. Only the industry, the size and the structure of your organization may be discussed in the analysis of the research. If you would like to receive a final copy of my findings, please let me know.

Bellow you will find a consent form. If you choose to participate in this study, please fill out this form and return it to me by email. If at any time you have any questions regarding this study, please do not hesitate to contact me or my supervisor.

The plan for this study has been reviewed for its adherence to ethical guidelines by the Research Ethics Board of the University of Alberta. For questions regarding participant rights and ethical conduct of research, contact the Research Ethics Office at (780) 492-2615.

Sincerely,

Yuliya Riabko

**Appendix B: Participant Informed Consent**

**Participant Informed Consent**

I have read all the information pertaining to the research I am currently participating in. I have been given the opportunity to discuss this information and all of my questions have been answered to my satisfaction.

My signature on this consent form means that I agree to take part in this study. I understand that I remain free to withdraw at any time.

\_\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_\_  
 Signature (initials) of Participant      Name (Printed)      Year    Month    Day

\_\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_\_  
 Signature (or initials) of Investigator      Name (Printed)      Year    Month    Day

### **Appendix C: Interview Questions**

- 1) Tell me about the social media policies and practices in your organization.
- 2) Does your organization use social media as a promotional tool?
- 3) If yes, who manages it (ie. headquarters, local team, designated person, etc.)?
- 4) Does your organization allow its employees to promote or seeking new clients for the organization on their personal social media networks?

**Continue with question 5 if answered YES, or go to question 13 if answered NO**

- 5) How does your organization manage this?
- 6) Are there any specific rules that the organization provides to guide employees? Please explain.
- 7) Does your organization encourage its employees to promote the organization via their social media channels?
  - a. If yes, what are the best practices to do this?
  - b. If yes, what are the pitfalls or challenges?
- 8) Do employees in your organization actually promote the organization on their personal social media channels?
  - a. If yes, are they successful?
  - b. If yes, how do you measure success?
- 9) Do you believe that employees who discuss your organization on their personal networks feel more committed or excited to work in the organization? Please explain.
- 10) Has your organization encountered any challenges as a result of employees using their social media channels?
  - a. If yes, how have you or they dealt with the challenges?
- 11) Do you think that companies with strict policies on social media are losing out on potential market share? Please explain.
- 12) What advice would you provide to those who think that allowing non-marketing employees to promote organizations via their personal networks is a huge risk?

**Continue here if answered NO to question 4:**

- 13) Why are employees in your organization prevented from discussing their organization on their personal networks?

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- 14) Has your organization ever considered the idea of using the networks of your employees to promote your organization?
  - a. If yes, what stopped it from implementing this initiative?
- 15) Has your organization encountered any challenges as a result of employees using their social media channels?
  - a. If yes, how have they dealt with the challenges?
- 16) Do you think that your organization is losing on potential market share because it is not using the personal connections of its employees to promote itself? Please explain.
- 17) In your opinion under what circumstances would your organization consider to rely on non-marketing employees to use their personal social networks to promote the organization?