

Chapter 37

Challenges of Knowledge Management amidst Rapidly Evolving Tools of Social Media

Ritesh Chugh

Central Queensland University, Australia

Mahesh Joshi

RMIT University, Australia

ABSTRACT

Social media technologies have been embraced by individuals and organizations on such a massive scale in the last decade that knowledge sharing and application has molded into a totally new paradigm. It has not only changed the social discourse of communication but also affected the knowledge management strategies of organizations. This raises quite a number of fundamental challenges out of which three are being dealt in this chapter. The first challenge is whether knowledge management has fully embraced social media as a channel of mass reach the way it did in case of other means of mass communication. The second one is the question of speed and extent of knowledge sharing in social media. The third challenge is whether social media strategy can provide a high advantage to smaller and newer companies in comparison to older but larger organizations. It is apparent that the commercial aspect of social media is easy for a tête-à-tête but difficult to articulate and design the right strategy because it needs a lot of refinements owing to inherent complexities in the process.

INTRODUCTION

When Procter and Gamble (2008) and General Electric (2008) introduced social media as a part of their integrated media communication strategy, little could be said about the impact that social media tools left on knowledge management. In much less than a decade, blogs, vlogs, instant messaging, virtual communities, videos, mobile advertising and others have become predominant tools of social media strategy. Something that began as a way of information processing, transferring, codification and reuse

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got evolved into a formal practice of knowledge creation and sharing. It kept growing with transformation of knowledge into social capital as well as a critical resource for value creation and innovation. Every organization should realize the importance of creating and applying knowledge (Chugh, 2012), in this case via social media. In a short history of less than two decades, the mesh of knowledge management and social media has deepened as well as broadened rapidly to acquire an unavoidable and important status in organizational processes. Knowledge management is a process through which organizational intellectual capital and information can be managed (Chugh, 2013). When an organization builds a comprehensive relationship with knowledge processes, it has a challenging opportunity of assimilating social media tools in its knowledge management strategy. Similarly, a complete definition of a learning organization cannot be pictured without involving social media channels in its knowledge sharing activities. This is typically important because such periphery practices have now graduated into mainstream organizational activities. Not only the notion of hierarchy and knowledge transmission is under a shift but the role of knowledge managers has to assume a lot of flexibility inside the consumer-to-consumer communication space. Currently, no business strategy can exist by ignoring social media. So, how knowledge is managed in an organization can actually reflect on the business potential too. The top-down structures of knowledge management in the Information Technology field took nearly two decades to settle its conceptual contours but social media technologies have diversified at such a fast pace in less than a decade that their assimilation via the knowledge management route is full of both risks and opportunities.

A brief look at the technology scenario in 2014 and 2015 presents some unique developments in social media. The sudden emergence of personal broadcast apps like Meerkat¹ and Periscope² through Twitter has taken the Twitterati on to a new level. To all the followers of a Twitter account, it changes the definition from an individual-led textual communication into an audio-video one. The emergence of Skype translator³ has brought multi-lingual speakers on to a common platform as the human task of translation is going to be replaced by cloud-based machine languages. This creates a possibility of so many unexpected advances in business communication that organizations can create a totally new definition of knowledge management. The revenue disruption of voice calling telecom networks by the launch of voice-calling by OTT⁴ players like WhatsApp, Facebook Messenger, Line and Viber has created much better and cheaper means of social interaction. Crowd-sourcing of ideas and crowd-funding of projects is turning into a reality because of widespread use of social media. The business models that were dependent on traditional sources of capital and knowledge are suddenly able to find an alternative space that was non-existent some years back. Physical cash is being replaced by digital cash and that too not through traditional bank-led or government-led networks. The widespread launch of retail payment networks through new platforms like Apple Pay⁵, Android Pay⁶ and particularly through message apps like Snapcash⁷, seems to be driving new ways of linking social media with revenue streams and advertising. The number of people joining this bandwagon is so enormous that this new wave of social media throws interesting challenges of managing knowledge too. Within a large organization, it creates exciting opportunities for communication between staff of different departments, hierarchies and geographical status but for all organizations, and it may fulfill some requirements that were earlier assigned only to mass media. Despite that, social media does not work inside the traditional top-down hierarchical structures of knowledge management rather most of it works as well as emerges from a bottom-up “rhizomatic⁸ form of communication” where customers, suppliers and partners may share a space that is both inviting and disruptive. Though some new terms like Enterprise 2.0, Enterprise social software or even social business have emerged to define this trend, it has not been an easy task to assimilate such forms of new communication inside the available strategies of knowledge management.

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