THE EFFECTIVENESS OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN ADVANCING TRANSFORMATIONAL CHANGE

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ABSTRACT

The goal of this study is to determine the effectiveness of social media in advancing transformational change. Successfully implementing transformational change in an organization is heavily dependent on the support of key stakeholders. But engaging those stakeholders requires effective communication. Transformational efforts often fail because of the lack of credible communication or a failure to define a vision that can be easily communicated (Kotter, 2007).

Researchers say that the key to successful transformational change is embracing a communication based in the realm of conversation where there is genuine two-way dialogue that is focused on listening and probing for more information (Dobbs, 2010). Creating conversations is a key component of social media: a platform of online tools designed to connect people and easily share information (Jue, Marr & Kassotakis, 2010). Social media has the potential to achieve employee engagement, enhance productivity and increase collaboration (Ou, C. J., Davison, R. M., Zhong, X., & Liang, Y., 2010).

To determine the effectiveness of social media at driving transformational change a study of existing literature related to transformational change and social media was coupled with a qualitative and quantitative study of organizational users of social media and stakeholders of those organizations. The study employed both a questionnaire and interviews. Results showed a clear preference for the use of social media as an effective form of relationship development and effective communication, but a challenge remains on how organizations can best use social media to create and sustain the relationships required to accomplish transformational change.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION
- Importance of the Study 5
- Statement of Purpose 6
- Definitions of Terms Used 7
- Organization of Remaining Chapter 9

## CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE
- Philosophical and Ethical Assumptions 11
- Theoretical Basis 12
- The Literature 17
- Rationale 32
- Research Questions 34

## CHAPTER 3: SCOPE AND METHODOLOGY
- Scope of the Study 35
- Methodology 36
- Data Analysis 40
- Validity and Reliability 42
- Ethical Considerations 43

## CHAPTER 4: THE STUDY
- Introduction 45
- Results of the Study 45
- Discussion 60

## CHAPTER 5: SUMMARIES AND CONCLUSIONS
- Limitations of the Study 65
- Recommendations for Further Study 66
- Conclusions 67

## REFERENCES
- 70

## APPENDIX
- Notice of Consent 74
- Stakeholder Questionnaire 75
- Leader Questionnaire 78
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Importance of the study

Top-down and one-way communication continues to dominate much of the leadership communication now being used within organizations, (Yates & Vallas, 2012). Focusing on that type of communication, however, leads to continued missed opportunities for senior leaders to serve as a conduit in achieving “common understanding around culture and values,” (Yates & Vallas, 2012).

Those missed opportunities take center stage when an organization seeks to undergo a significant or transformational change. Change by its nature is difficult and “everyone agrees that managing change is tough, but few can agree how to do it” (Sirkin, Keenan & Jackson, 2005, p. 141). The underlying constant that determines the effectiveness of change is how the need for change is communicated. Underestimating the role communication plays in transformational change is a common mistake organizations make (Kotter, 1995; Sirkin, Keenan & Jackson, 2005; Yukl, 2010).

Communication, however, is not an exact science as evidenced by the wealth of communication beliefs and practices that have been employed, but have not been used to effectively achieve transformational change. Yukl (2010) suggests that organizations seeking to accomplish transformational change must communicate a “clear vision of the benefits to be gained from the change” (p. 318).

Kotter (2012) further suggests that a great vision is only as effective as an organization’s ability to communicate that vision, and leaders often under-communicate or send inconsistent messages, leading to the net result of a “stalled transformation” (p. 87). While Kotter (2012) does not speak specifically to social media, he does suggest that communication must be frequent and
to the broadest audience possible. The rapid growth of social media appears to have the ability to meet Kotter’s expectations.

How the vision for change is communicated is even more important today with the growing use of social media, which represents one of the newest and largest growing fields of communication. Social media growth across the last decade has been dramatic and significant. Brenner (2012) reported that as of February 2012, 66 percent of Internet users in the United States are now actively using social networking sites. The largest of the social media sites—Facebook—now has 950 million users (“Number of Users,” 2012). Facebook is the most popular site among social media users. In August 2012, 66 percent of Internet users counted Facebook as their primary social media site (Brenner, 2012).

Li and Bernoff (2011) say the groundswell created by social media has changed the balance of power by creating a scenario where individuals have the power to undermine the communication efforts of organizations (p. 13). Not joining the groundswell of social media is no longer an option for organizations. If organizations embrace social media and take steps to understand it they can thrive in it (Li & Bernhoff, 2011, p. 17). Safko (2010) says that the social media phenomenon has rapidly changed the way people interact and organizations cannot ignore its impact and have to “embrace social networks, digital connections, and the online experience and build an organization that embraces conversation and transparency” (p. 22).

Statement of Purpose

With the success rate of organizational change efforts hovering around 30 percent, (Kotter, 2007), there remains ample room for improvement and a need for research on how best to implement change. A failure in communication remains the most cited reason for the failure of change efforts (Kotter, 2007; Russ, 2007; Sirkin et al., 2005). Because of the difficulty for
organizations to effectively communicate the need for transformational change, it’s important to identify communication tools and strategies to improve the effectiveness of communication. While there is extensive literature on communication practices for organizations, and a similar amount of literature on social media and its uses within organizations, there remains a gap in the literature and research about the effectiveness of social media as a primary form of communication to increase engagement and ultimately achieve transformational change.

The purpose of this qualitative and quantitative study is to identify uses of social media both within organizations and by the stakeholders connected to those organizations. The goal is to quantify the usage of social media and to understand how different parties use social media to identify and qualify the most effective potential social media strategies that can be employed in an organization to communicate and ultimately advance transformational change.

**Definitions of Terms Used**

**Social Media** are the online sites and applications that allow individuals to come together in a virtual format and create communities and share amongst those communities (Jue et al. 2010). Put more simply social media is an online platform that allows users to connect on each other (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). The online sites used in social media include but are not limited to social sharing sites such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and online web logs more commonly known as blogs. In defining social media, it’s important to realize that the tools or social media sites in use today, may not be the sites used in the future, but the concept of social media will remain. Safko (2010) says it’s important to break down the term social media. Social refers to the need we have “as humans to connect with other humans” (p. 4) and the term media refers to the tools we use “make those connections with other humans” (p. 4).
Social Networks are not specific to social media. Social networks represent the groups people join in order cooperatively work, live and gain advice on how to make life’s important and not-so-important decisions. According to Safko (2010) social networks refer to groups of people with “similar interests and a common bond – and most important trust” (p. 23).

Stakeholders or followers are individuals who have a relationship or vested interest in the company or organization. Stakeholders are often defined as customers, employees, investors and others who have a connection. (Caywood, 1997, p. 36).

Leaders are those who by the strictest definition are power holders with the potential to have power over other persons (Burns, 1978). But true leaders are those who act with a purpose who “act for certain goals that represent the values and the motivations – the wants and needs, the aspirations and expectations – of both leaders and followers” (Burns, p. 19, 1978).

Transformational change is fundamentally one of the most misunderstood terms being used by organizations. By its nature, transformational change is change that goes beyond incremental change. Transformational change is accomplished when people managing an organization focus on creating a new future that has never existed before (Dasko & Sheinberg, 2005).

Further defining transformational change requires a deeper analysis into what many organizations have viewed as change. Nevis, Lancourt and Vassallo (1996) say traditional change is thought of as having “a beginning, a middle and an end” (p. 9). Furthermore, Nevis et al. (1996) suggest that transformational change creates a new paradigm that recognizes change as continuous, normal and focused on the needs of stakeholders. Transformational change requires a communication style comprised of a flatter, flexible network where leaders are seen more as
servants rather than the generals often seen in a traditional top-down hierarchical control structure. (p. 6).

**Organization of the Remaining Chapters**

This thesis consists of five chapters. Chapter two examines the philosophical assumptions and theoretical basis that apply to social media with an analysis based on the concept of true dialogue as described by Buber & Kaufmann (1970) and applied to the theories social capital (Lin, 1999) and the social information processing theory defined by Joseph Walther (1992). The chapter concludes with a review of the available literature related to organizational and transformational change as well as the available literature on the uses of social media by both stakeholders and leaders and how that use is often applied in the organizational setting.

Chapter three outlines the scope and methodology used in the research study, which focused primarily on a qualitative study that is guided by a narrative analysis. Chapter three also reviews the methodology used; an overview of study participants; a summary of research questions; validity of the data obtained and ethical considerations for the researcher.

Chapter four outlines the data obtained in the study and provides an overview of the questions posed in the research study, the results obtained and how those results apply to the research questions. Chapter four also provides an overview of the study participants and the demographic characteristics of those involved in the study. The study results are further analyzed in relation to the communication theories outlined in chapter two.

Chapter five addressed the conclusions obtained in the study, which includes outlining potential social media strategies to implement transformational change. The conclusion also addresses the limitations of the study; the theoretical conclusions obtained from the study, and the potential for additional future research in the field of social media and its role in effectively
advancing transformational change. The appendix outlines the questions used in the study and
the participation guidelines provided to each study participant. A complete list of sources used
throughout the study is also included.
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Change is something that dominates much of our daily lives in both the personal and professional arenas, yet successfully navigating change continues to elude not just individuals, but organizations. According to Sirkin, Keenan, and Jackson (2005) most organizations are not effective at implementing change. The popular notion is that change efforts at organizations fail on average about 70 percent of the time. Kotter (2008) confirmed that rate in an analysis of 100 companies undergoing large-scale change efforts (p. vii). The lack of success in implementing change not only harms the organizations, but also customers, employees and other stakeholders. While most organizational leaders agree that change is inevitable and necessary, it is clear that “fully understanding organizational change and effectively managing all of its peculiarities remains a challenge” (Boga & Ensari, 2009, p. 235).

Effective communication is key to achieving successful change (Kotter, 1995; Sirkin, Keenan & Jackson, 2005). Communication must also be persuasive and have a narrative that stakeholders can engage in and interpret correctly (Nevis, Lancourt, Vassallo, 1996; Sonenshein, 2010). How organizations choose to communicate change is dependent on the tools available to them. Today, more organizations are turning to social media as a way to both engage internal and external stakeholders (Qualman, 2009). The growth of social media cannot be ignored. Between 2005 and 2011 the usage of social networking sites by adults has soared from 8 percent to 65 percent and in addition 43 percent of adults say they use social media on a daily basis (Madden & Zickuhr, 2011, p. 3). Postman (2009) said social media has “changed communications forever, giving companies and consumers the power to actually converse with each other like never before” (p. 6). Because of its rapid growth and its emerging stature as the next evolution of communication, organizations have no choice but to make it an integral part of their strategy.
According to Qualman (2009), an organization’s overall success will be dependent on its success with social media.

To better understand the potential of social media and its effectiveness at driving transformational change, it’s important to review the available literature related to social media and change efforts. The review will begin with an analysis of the communication theories that apply to social media, an analysis of what is meant by transformational change, a review of literature available on organizational change, and an overview of the effective strategies to accomplish change. The review will also include the foundations of social media, its role in communication, and its potential to effect transformational change.

**Philosophical and Ethical Assumptions**

Social media is the collective term for the technological and communication processes that allow individuals to participate in social networking (Safko, 2010). The act of social networking is the instinctual need of humans to “be with, communicate with, and share thoughts, ideas and feelings about their daily lives” (Safko, 2010, p. 10). The growth of social media as a new way of communicating appears grounded in the phenomenological tradition, which focuses on the “dialogue or experience of otherness” (Craig & Muller, 2007, p. 79). Dialogue is at the heart of what philosopher Martin Buber refers to as the *I-It* and *I-Thou* relationships (Buber & Kaufmann, 1970). To Buber, dialogue is much more than the back and forth messages and talking that occur between humans. Buber describes dialogue as either spoken or silent (Buber & Kaufmann, 1970). Throughout his writings he did not try to explain a technique about how to be effective at dialogue instead he believed that “dialogue can be invited, but not commanded” (Arnett, 1986, p. 7). Buber makes a significant distinction between his two philosophical approaches to dialogue. His *I-It* relationship is inherently one-sided and often involves no
dialogue or limited dialogue. Such a relationship gives little depth or potential for a long-term relationship. On the opposite spectrum is the I-Thou relationship, which is true dialogue in that individuals are talking to one another with no expectation that there are boundaries (Buber & Kaufmann, 1970). Arnett (1986) summed it up even simpler by defining the I-Thou as the realm of relation and the I-It as the realm of separation (p. 37). As with Buber’s I-Thou, social media also has no bounds, and it has the potential to bring together individuals to create a dialogue to discover new meaning and mutual understanding (Arnett, 1986). In the phenomenological theory there is an acceptance that dialogue remains the ideal form of communication, yet it’s inherently difficult to sustain that dialogue (Craig & Mueller, 2007, p.80). It is also important to understand the types of dialogue. According to Kramer (2003), Buber distinguished three different realms of dialogue: genuine, technical and monological (p. 33). Of the three realms of dialogue, the only one that truly applies to social media is what Buber defines as genuine dialogue:

> Whether spoken or silent…each of the participants really has in mind the other or others in their present and particular being and turns to them with the intention of establishing a living mutual relationship between himself and them. (Kramer, 2003, p. 33)

Sustaining dialogue and building a relationship is key to the success of social media (Li & Bernoff, 2011). Li & Bernhoff (2011) suggest that the current social media tools will likely change, but the idea of social media will remain and the conversations created in that space will continue to evolve (p.126).

**Theoretical Basis**

The effectiveness of social media to drive transformational change in an organizational setting requires a closer look at communication theories that serve as a foundation for the evolutionary change that social media represents. Because of the diversity of social media and
the many possible outcomes, it’s difficult to identify one theory. For the purpose of this study, Buber’s philosophy of dialogue will be incorporated as it applies to the theories of social information processing and social capital.

While both theories speak to the many aspects of social media, there are also aspects of each theory that can help better illustrate the concept of transformational change. At the heart of any change is the need to make an investment toward that change. Change cannot occur in a vacuum. In essence, any change requires an investment on the behalf of the party or parties seeking that change (Kotter, 1995). Of the theories to consider, social information processing is classified as a communication theory, but the latter – social capital – is defined as a social theory in the field of sociology that focuses on choices made in social relations and what motivates people to make those choices (Lin, 2001). But for the purpose of this study a case can be made, as it relates to social media, that social capital theory has a number of communication implications and could be defined as a communication theory as well.

Social capital theory

To understand social capital, it’s first important to understand what is meant by capital. Lin (2001) defines capital as something that is an outcome of a process. In essence, capital is the value associated with an investment. In business terms that could very well be defined in dollars and cents whereas someone invests money in hopes of obtaining their own desired outcome. In the theory of social capital, similar concepts are at play, but the investment is in the social network and the outcome is either on an individual or a group level (Lin, 1999). Both groups have several possible returns on that investment: economic, political, and social (Lin, 1999). But the idea of social change represents the idea of acceptance, which is at the heart of what is required to generate transformational change (Kotter, 1995). Lin (1999) suggests that cyber
networks, which have since developed into social media, have tremendous potential to further social capital and lead her to pose the question: “What is the implication of cyberspace and cyber-network growth for the studies of social networks and social capital? The short answer is: incredible” (p. 45). While social capital is inherently an individual trait, for the purposes of this study, the concept of social capital is also being applied to an organizational setting and the acceptance or value that organizations gain through interactions via social media.

Effective communication is the investment required for change. Fostering social capital will ensure acceptance of that change. How someone gains social capital is dependent on how well people build useful networks and what social capital profits they will gain from the networks (Erickson, 2002). Social capital is paradoxically dependent on the variability of social networks. Social media can both be beneficial, or useless, and potentially harmful depending on the setting (Erickson, 2002, p. 93). Furthermore, there remains debate as to how to best define social capital, but Erickson (2002) maintains that it is important to define social capital as a single variable and that the term social in social capital should refer to social relationships, which are the “aspects of social networks that have the potential for yielding profits” (p. 95). For the purpose of this study, the social capital definition put forth by Erickson (2002) will provide the greatest amount of value and context as it relates to determining the effectiveness of social networks’ use in the realm of transformational change. However, there remains a lack of full understanding as to what aspects of social networks provide the greatest potential for profit because of the variability outlined by Erickson (2002).

While social capital relates to the acceptance of change, the theory of social information processing looks directly at how effective communication is received through computer-mediated communication.
Social information processing

Because of the relative newness of social media, social information processing theory doesn’t specifically speak to the tools for communication that social media provides, but it does have applications relevant to social media. On its face, it would seem that the social information processing theory holds the most promise as it relates to social media and change, but it’s important to review the theory as it applies to social media. Social information processing theory as defined by Joseph Walther (1992) focused on computer-mediated communication (CMC) with a goal of showing that communication through such an impersonal format could still foster personal relationships. Walther’s social information processing theory was groundbreaking in that it defied the belief that CMC did not allow for the personal connection associated with face-to-face communication. Walther’s research showed that CMC relationships progressed at the same rate or faster than normal interpersonal relationships (Griffin, 2009).

Walther’s theory, however, was flawed in that he could never effectively identify why some participants in CMC developed close relationships and others did not (Griffin, 2009, p. 157). Others have since suggested that the diverse group of new technologies available requires more research into how CMC would apply. Walther & Jang (2012) suggests that there needs to be a greater focus on research to better understand how CMC applies to what he terms the participatory websites of social media (p. 2). The challenge of understanding social media is hampered by the rapid emergence of the technology. Because it has emerged so quickly, Walther & Jang (2012) say existing research has focused more on “features, user responses, and design characteristics much more than on theoretical explanations for the underlying causes and contingent effects associated with their use” (p. 3). Baym (2009) further suggests a need for greater study directed not just at the online and CMC aspects of communication, but also at
offline interactions. This *multimodel* approach is important because Baym (2009) says people are constantly crossing the boundaries of communication. In other words, face-to-face communication and CMC are now much more interwoven:

> We cannot bank our research future on the technological forms. Instead we need to interrogate the underlying dynamics through which technology use is patterned across media, relationships, and communicative purposes and with what effects for how we understand and conduct our relations, our communities and ourselves. (p. 721)

Walther (2011) concedes Baym’s point and suggests that the growth of social media points to a need for greater study of the relationship effects of CMC in both venues: the online and the offline. Without including the offline behaviors there is the potential of leading to “false conclusions” about the effectiveness of online communication (p. 471). Walther and Baym’s concerns will be important to note as this research explores the effects of social media on transformational change.

**The Literature**

*Transformational change*

Finding a clear definition of transformational change is challenging given the many interpretations of the term transformation and the limited literature focusing on transformational change. For the purpose of this study, it’s best defined through an examination of leadership and the two realms of leadership: transformational and transactional. Bass and Avolio (1993) define transactional leadership as leaders who work within an existing organizational culture and make changes based solely on “existing rules, procedures and norms” (p. 112). When applying the concepts of transformational leadership to transformational change, a number of similarities become apparent. As noted by Dasko & Sheinberg (2005), transformational change is not
incremental but rather it is change that creates something entirely new, which is similar in scope to the role of transformational leaders. Bass and Avolio (1993) say that transformational leaders go beyond the ordinary and strive to change organizational culture by realigning it with a “new vision and a revision of its shared assumptions, values, and norm” (p. 112).

To understand the significance of transformational change, it’s important to put it into context. Transformational change represents a change that goes beyond just organizational change. Transform is a verb that by definition means to “change the condition, nature or function of” (Webster’s New World Dictionary, 2002, p.67), but in the context of organizational change it is the “creation and change of a whole new form, function or structure. To transform is to create something new that has never existed before and could not be predicted from the past” (Daszko & Sheinberg, 2005, para. 3). Despite the lofty definition of transformational change, Nevis, Lancourt and Vassallo (1996) say it’s not the term that is of such importance but the recognition that traditional change methods do not work in today’s “complex and interdependent environment” (p 3). Furthermore, Nevis et al. (1996) say hierarchical structure of leadership that employs a command-and-control-style is no longer effective.

Transformational change represents a paradigm shift in not just organizational behavior but in individual behavior as well. To accomplish successful transformational change people have to be open to new ideas and engaged in listening, questioning and probing while learning how to engage in constructive conflict while still respecting differing views. The goal is to achieve shared understanding (Nevis et al., p. 7). This new organizational paradigm requires a “flatter, flexible network” (p. 7). Groysberg and Slind (2012) say at the heart of that network is willingness on the part of leadership to set aside top-down communication strategies and engage stakeholders in a conversation. Groysberg and Slind (2012) cite the example of Jim Rogers,
president and CEO of Duke Energy, who listened to employees who wanted he and other executives to be more accessible and more personal. He and other leaders sought out opportunities to interact more with employees and not be afraid to let employees know who they are as a person and create “conversational intimacy” (p. 31).

Grasberg and Slid (2012) say that intimacy is the key to engagement of employees, which as we will see is a critical component to transformational change. To understand transformational change, it is important to review the literature related to organizational change and what makes organizational change efforts successful.

Organizational change

In a review of available literature on organizational change, Lewis, Schmisseur, Stephens and Weir (2006) identified major criteria for successful organizational change that was consistent from all 100 sources of literature surveyed. While not speaking directly to transformational change, the criteria identified for organizational change would also likely apply. The recommendations for successful change identified by Lewis, Schmisseur, Stephens and Weir (2006) would include:

1. Empowering and encouraging participation of individuals involved in the change.
2. Communicating a vision that stakeholders understand and connect with.
3. Create a culture that encourages change.
4. Put a focus on communication and creating dialogue (Lewis et al., 2006).

For the purpose of this review, communication as it relates to the use of social media is an obvious connection, but the need for a shared vision, true dialogue and ultimately transformation must also be addressed.

A shared vision
Communication is of little use if the message being delivered isn’t tied into a strong vision guiding the change. Without a clearly defined vision, any transformational change can quickly dissolve and create confusion for stakeholders (Kotter, 2007). The level of employee engagement is often the standard by which many organizations try to predict if transformational change will be successful, but organizations often make the mistake of equating engagement with satisfaction; there can often be a large gap between being just satisfied with things like pay, benefits and working conditions to being actively engaged in a company’s vision or mission (Poglianich & Antonek, 2009).

The key to employee engagement is the concept of shared vision. Kouzes and Posner (2009) define the concept of shared vision as the willingness of leaders to involve others in creating a vision for an organization. Leaders who decide they alone must create the vision will not be successful because “constituents want visions of the future that reflect their own aspirations” (p. 21). What makes a successful vision? Keyton (2011) defines a successful vision as one that is “achievable, powerful enough to generate commitment, coherent enough to provide coordination, and stated in such a way that all organizational members can accept it as their own” (p. 143).

Achieving a shared vision requires leaders to effectively communicate that vision. In a study completed at a mid-size university in the Southeast undergoing a leadership change, Farmer, Slater and Wright (1998) found that leaders who “flatten” the communication hierarchy are more likely to achieve shared vision (p. 219). Farmer et al. (1998) asked faculty and students at the university if they shared the vision of the new chancellor. The question was asked at different times during the first year of the chancellor’s tenure. As the year progressed, the number of people who shared the vision increased as the university broadened its communication.
efforts. The university focused on a two-way communication effort that emphasized not just persuasion (asymmetrical model) but a symmetrical perspective that views communication as dialogue with a goal of not just persuading, but also achieving the goal through understanding and cooperation (p. 221).

Successfully implementing the vision is also dependent on how empowered employees are and how engaged they are in the process of implementing the vision. Nevis, Lancourt and Vassallo (1996) say employees who feel they are true participants and feel a part of a company’s decision-making process will better “sustain the long, hard work of transformation” (p. 124).

The Role of Communication in Transformation.

For organizations, it’s not uncommon to under-estimate the role communication has in transformational efforts. Yukl (2010) suggests that there must be a broad coalition to support major change, yet companies often neglect to pay attention to the timing of communication, and by communicating too late, or inconsistently, they alienate the key stakeholders most needed to achieve the transformation (Sirkin, Keenan & Jackson, 2005). Furthermore, Yukl (2010) suggests that organizations must communicate a “clear vision of the benefits to be gained from the change” (p. 318).

In a review of transformational change efforts at organizations, Kotter (1995) found that one of the primary reasons transformational efforts fail is a lack of communication of the organization’s vision for that change. While not addressing social media as a way to communicate change, Kotter (1995) concludes that change requires the help of a large and diverse audience and “without credible communication, and lots of it, the hearts and minds of the troops are never captured” (p. 63).
Organizations also often fail to identify the entire audience that the communication should be directed toward. Keyton (2011) defined organizational communication as:

A complex and continuous process through which organizational members create, maintain, and change the organization by communicating verbally, nonverbally, electronically, and in writing with individuals and groups of people engaged in roles as internal and external stakeholders. (p. 16).

Groysberg & Slind (2012) suggest that in order for communication to shift from the traditional one-way monologue to a dialogue between leaders and stakeholders it must address four main pillars:

- Intimacy – how leaders relate to employees.
- Interactivity – how leaders use communication channels.
- Inclusion – how leaders develop organizational content.
- Intentionality – how leaders convey strategy.

To put the four pillars into context, Groysberg and Slind (2012) contrasted the different pillars in terms of the old model of “corporate communications” with the new model of “organizational communication.” The new model stresses a significant departure from traditional corporate communication, which relies on a top-down approach, to a model that requires leaders to “relinquish a measure of control over content” (Groysberg & Slind, p. 83). In order to adopt a model of communication that allows for a clear agenda and an acceptance of shared vision, leaders must “talk with employees, not at them” (Groysberg & Slind, p. 82).

At the core of a conversation is the exchange of ideas and a focus on two-way messaging. Unfortunately, when leaders focus communication as solely a one-sided message the opportunity for engagement is lost (Jabri, Allyson & Boje, 2008). Giving people a voice in the
communication process can lead to very different outcomes. As Jabri et al. (2008) suggest, communication is a two-way street and “by listening to the questions and responses people raise in response to change initiative, we can truly see and create an initiative that will indeed change the lives of the people in our organizations” (p. 677). The Towers Watson 2011-2012 Change and Communication ROI Study as reported by Yates and Vallas (2012) examined data at 604 organizations to determine factors that were most predominant in those organizations that successfully navigated change. Employees surveyed at the top-performing companies reported that their leaders were:

- Authentic at delivering messages.
- Accessible and responsive to employee ideas or questions.
- Transparent in messages to employees.
- Successful at creating a dialogue with employees.

Yates and Vallas (2012) noted that the biggest challenge with meeting the successful criteria reported in the study is the time commitment.

Soneshein (2010) illustrated the danger of not listening in a study of communications tactics from a Fortune 500 retailer undergoing strategic change. The study determined that the organization’s focus on a one-sided narrative in its communications allowed for too much interpretation by the employees. The company focused more on the “sender” orientation with no understanding of how employees could “embellish” the meaning when there is no avenue to support two-way dialogue (p. 503).

Companies that embrace two-way dialogue have been successful. Verizon Wireless, for example, created an effective strategy for employee communication that has increased the level of employee engagement. In a survey of Verizon’s efforts, Poglianich and Antonek (2009) found
that Verizon recognized that communication is the key to engagement and that any interaction with senior leaders and employees should be one based on an “open and honest straight talk dialogue with employees” (p. 33).

Creating dialogue

To have successful dialogue, Groysberg and Slind (2012) claim that intimacy should be the primary focus to create the foundation for successful communication. Conversation cannot exist without intimacy, and if leaders do not take the effort to close the gap between themselves and employees “neither they nor those employees will be able to tap the full power of organizational conversation” (p. 14). Closing that gap is a key tenet of the participatory approach to communication where leaders get close to employees and stakeholders in order to build consensus for change (Russ, 2007).

Rather than simply hearing about change in the aforementioned top-down communication strategy, participatory communication gives stakeholders a voice in deciding how to best implement organizational change (Russ, 2007). Jabri et al. (2008) coined the phrase “surplus of seeing” in the belief that two-way conversations lead to improvements because with communication comes interpretation, and “only by listening to the questions and responses people raise in response to a change initiative can we truly see and create an initiative that will indeed change the lives of people in our organization” (p. 677).

Using social media as a catalyst for transformation

The term transformation remains problematic because it is often misused, and often does not represent true transformation. Social media, however, holds the potential to guide change that is not exclusive to transformational change, but it is in the realm of transformational change that
social media holds the most promise because of its ability to harness the power of relationships. Li and Bernhoff (2011) say while the technology of social media helps facilitate relationships it is the relationships that are most important because “the way people connect with each other – the community that is created – determines how the power shifts” (p. 18). Social media can be broadly defined as the online technologies and practices people use to share knowledge, opinions and in essence communicate virtually (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2009; Williams & Williams, 2008). A definition more attuned to this study would be one presented by Safko (2010) who applies the term social media to “how we use all of these technologies effectively to reach out and connect with other humans, create a relationship, build trust…” (p. 4). An argument can be put forth that social media’s rapid rise in prominence and use would put it on par with the definition of transformational change. Social media’s influence has changed the way organization and companies reach out to their customers and stakeholders. The growth in social media is what Qualman (2009) calls socialnomics, which he describes as what happens when “word of mouth goes to world of mouth” (p.1). Qualman (2009) says that social media appeals to the human need to “be an individual, yet feel connected to and accepted by a much larger social set” (p. 4). That social connection also is a key component to the theory of social capital. Lin (1999) recognized this connection early on and said the rise of cybersocial networks would help turn the decline in social capital as users sought out relationships in the growing cyber networks that are “expansive and at the same time intimate” (p. 46).

The available literature on organizational change stresses the need for effective communication. Social media is often heralded as a tool that organizations can deploy for business success (Jue et al., 2010; Li & Bernhoff, 2011; Postman, 2009; Safko, 2010). But as a relatively new form of communication, there is not yet a firm conclusion on the effectiveness of
social media to communication change. Social media as we know it today, is also a relatively new phenomenon, but its roots go back several decades.

Beginnings of social media

Jue et al. (2010) define social media “as the various electronic tools available to help accelerate and improve our ability to connect, communicate and collaborate” (p. 44). Social media “flattens communication” (p. 54). Unlike the traditional communication structure that typically flows from a top-down vertical path, social media does not flow that direction but rather in what Jue et al. (2010) call a “white space” that allows for horizontal and flat communication. Social networking facilitates a “kind of lateral communication, ignoring traditional structures that limit free flow of information, making it available to all” (p. 54).

The roots of social media can be tracked back to the late 1970s with the creation of “Usenet,” a computer-based discussion system that allowed Internet users to post public messages (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). These early bulletin board types of messaging tools evolved into more interactive formats including blogs. Social networking as we know it today truly started exploding with the growing availability of high-speed Internet access (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). That led to the creation of MySpace in 2003 and Facebook in 2004. The addition of these sites led to the coining of the term “social media” (Kaplan & Haenlin, 2010, p. 60). Social networking and social media further evolved into to what is commonly referred to as “Web 2.0,” which Jue et al. (2010) describe as the latest generation of the Internet that allows for the creation and sharing of information. Web 2.0 is often the term used to describe the sum of all ways in which people make use of social media (Kaplan & Haenlin, 2010).

At the foundation of social media is what is called user-generated content, which Kaplan & Haenlin (2010) say is defined as such if it fulfills the following three requirements:
First, it needs to be published either on a publicly accessible website or on a social networking site accessible to a selected group of people; second, it needs to show a certain amount of creative effort; and finally, it needs to have been created outside of professional routines and practices. (p. 61)

These requirements are significant in that they preclude other Internet-based applications that can be misconstrued as social media, such as e-mails or instant messages and the reproduction of existing content and material that was created with a commercial market context in mind (Kaplan & Haenlin, 2010). According to Safko (2009), the Web 2.0 platform coupled with user-generated content provides the opportunity for people to share ideas and information.

*Social Media as Communication*

Jue et al. (2010) highlighted a study at Oracle that looked at how the organization could better connect with employees. Oracle has a large and dispersed workforce and it was recognized that “open and frequent communication is more critical than ever to cultivate connections between employees” (p. 21). Oracle chose to leverage social networking because it enabled them “to foster a shared view of the organization’s direction, greater collaboration, and faster innovation across the globe” (p. 21).

Despite the promise of social media, it has often been viewed with skepticism as a viable communication alternative. In 2005, CNET writer Molly Wood predicted the eventual demise of social media (Jue et al., 2010, p. 33), yet her predictions proved not to be true.

*Social media reach*

Christakis and Fowler (2009) say two characteristics play into the usage of social media tools: connection and contagion. First on the list is connection, which is basically a look at who is connected to whom. There are traditional ties that emphasize family and friends, coworkers
and neighbors, but there are also the less traditional ties and all sorts of social networks where we have connections for other reasons or connections that are fleeting. Some connections can be lifelong or ephemeral, or casual or intense (p. 16). Ellison, Steinfeld and Lampe (2007) further define those connections as strong, weak or latent. In applying the theory of social capital to social media, Ellison, Steinfeld and Lampe (2007) studied college students’ use of Facebook over a two-year time period. The study found that social media was effective at turning weak or latent contacts into real or strong connections because social media was able to “reduce the barriers that would otherwise prevent such connections from happening (p. 441).

The second characteristic that defines our networks is contagion or something that flows across our connections, such as a violent act or unique experience that binds people together that wouldn’t normally be connected. Jue et al. (2010) say at the “heart of all social media is the need to connect with others to exchange information, and social networking sites are specifically aimed at connecting people who were previously unaware of each other” (p. 32).

Determining how best to connect to individuals via social media is further challenged, because of how it’s used differently by stakeholders. Jue et al. (2010) say that understanding social media requires an understanding of the demographics of its users, and organizations “must understand the characteristics of each of the generation if they are to attract and retain the people essential to their success” (p. 27).

For the purpose of this study we will look at four generations. Jue et al. (2010) breaks down the generations into the following categories:

- Traditionalists. Those born between 1900 and 1945. They make up roughly 7 percent of the global population.
Baby Boomers. Those born between 1946 and 1964. They make up roughly 18 percent of the global population.

Generation X. Those born between 1965 and 1976. They make up roughly 14 percent of the global population.

Generation Y. Those born between 1977 and 2000. They make up roughly 24 percent of the global population (Jue et al., 2010, p. 27).

Each group has different views on the world and different attitudes toward social media. Jue et al. (2010) says, “as with all social interactions, some people initiate, others respond, and others stand on the sidelines and observe” (p. 33). What Jue et al. (2010) suggest is that it can be dangerous to predict the success of social media based solely on factors such as posting and active involvement because users of all generations participate in their own way and “among the traditionalists, for example, those who initiate on social media may be few, but the spectators may be many” (p.34). Despite the differing levels of participation it’s clear that the use of social media is growing as evidenced by the aforementioned statistics (Madden & Zickuhr, 2011).

Postman (2009) says social media has “brought a revolution in participatory communications, building communities and creating and sharing information” (p. 7). While not referencing the theory of social capital, Jue, et al. (2010) and Postman (2009) are describing what is at the heart of social capital. How social media directly effected social capital was the focus of a 2009 study on the use of Facebook by U.S. college students. Valenzuela, Park and Kee (2009), sought to determine if Facebook use among students was positive and intense enough to encourage the tenets of social capital such as life satisfaction, social trust, civic engagement, and political participation (p. 875). The study focused on Facebook use by just more than 2,600 college students in Texas. The students were asked to respond to a survey to share how Facebook
impacted the aforementioned categories related to social capital. The survey concluded that Facebook had an impact on creating positive social capital in the students, but it wasn’t the sole source of social capital. The study, however, concluded that concerns about social media isolating individuals and leading a reduction of social capital wasn’t correct and those who were more active had a greater impact on social capital (p. 893).

Social media and transformational change

The rapid adoption of social media and growth in its use across all demographics shows the value of the platform as a way to disseminate information. Kotter & Cohen (2002) say that information flow is critical when trying to achieve organizational change and a lack of information “disempowers” (p. 79). In addition to providing the platform for information flow, social media also provides another critical aspect required for effective change. Achieving a vision for a change requires feedback on one’s actions; without such feedback it is difficult to achieve a vision (Kotter & Cohen, 2002). Social media’s immediacy provides that level of real-time feedback (Safko, 2010).

To effect change, organizations must have engaged employees (Kotter & Cohen, 2002). Social media creates a “culture of contribution that capitalizes on the ideas of potentially every employee, allowing them an opportunity to make a difference in large and even small ways” (p. 91). Jue et al. (2010) take a more business-like approach to social media stressing that a “reason for social media must exist, and that reason must be widely known and shared” (p. 163). Jue et al. (2010) quote Eugene Kim of Blue Oxen, a collaborative consulting company, who stresses that social media “help people remember that being social has important effects on trust, communication, strengthening relationships, learning and knowledge sharing” (p. 164).
While not coming out and suggesting that we have no choice but to adopt social media, Jue et al. (2010) suggest that social media will eventually change the dynamics of organizational structures and as:

We share more through social media; work will become increasingly more humane and more democratized. Social media will also change the very nature of the silent personal organizational contract through which traditional organizations have held the power. As people gain more influence in the relationship, organizations will be forced to adopt less hierarchical structures and more egalitarian practices. (p. 182).

While stopping short of predicting the future, Jue et al. (2010) concede that organizations all over the world are integrating social media into everything they do and that is changing the way large and small organizations accomplish their goals. Jue et al. (2010) say the use of social media is the next catalyst for huge change (p. 184) and will have a significant transformational impact. While new social media platforms are expected, Jue et al. (2010) say social media is not about the technology but “it’s about what people do with the technology. It’s about exchange and a sense of community” (p 190). Companies that have embraced social media have often used it effectively to change an organization’s reputation and to gain a level of engagement with stakeholders that wouldn’t previously have been possible. Postman (2009) cites the example of Dell computers, which in 2005 faced the wrath of a blogger who coined Dell’s customer service, “Dell Hell.” Dell started leveraging a wide variety of social media platforms to address customer service issues and began posting 30 to 50 times a month from both Dell employees and Dell executives. It eventually diffused Dell’s reputation of poor customer service and created a strong community following (p. 98).
On a more personal level, some professions such as physicians have been able to change the physician and patient dynamic by fostering more connected relationships with patients via social media. Katz (2012) says the use of social media by physicians “allows us to listen and share with others easily and instantly. Doctors can develop expertise and then choose how to use that knowledge to improve patient care” (p. 23).

Rationale

The literature review confirms the dramatic rise in social media and the many ways it’s being used at different organizations to increase engagement and grow the stature of the organizations. Among the many uses for social media, a growing number of organizations see it as a marketing tool (Safko, 2010) and others see it as a tool to foster engagement with customers that will ultimately lead to greater success for the organization. Experts are concluding that the level of achievement reached by not just organizations, but also individuals, will be directly dependent on social media success (Qualman, 2011).

However, research on the use of social media to drive organizational change and specifically transformational change remains limited. Groysberg & Slind (2012) offer examples from companies like Cisco and Hoku Corp. that have been using techniques similar to social media such as video as a way to bridge the gap between leaders and employees (p.113). Additionally, the review of leadership books by Lewis et al. (2006) found there are a variety of recommendations on how best to communicate change, but they were more frequently boiled down to “sound bites and general philosophy” and frequently “lacked detail and appropriate qualification” (p. 132).

Kotter (2012) doesn’t specifically address social media in his research on transformational change, but he concludes that accepting a transformational vision of the future
can be a “challenging intellectual and emotional task” (p. 90). Kotter (2012) outlines seven elements he believes are needed to effectively communicate a vision for change. Those elements are:

- Simplicity: removing all jargon and business speak.
- Metaphors, analogies and examples: Create a verbal picture.
- Multiple forums: different venues to spread the word.
- Repetition: repeat the ideas and goals.
- Leadership: lead by example.
- Explaining inconsistencies: Not addressing inconsistencies can undermine efforts.
- Give-and-take: Two-way communication is more powerful. (Kotter, 2012, p. 92).

Much of the current literature available related to social media does not speak specifically to organizational change, but rather gives broad suggestions and about the potential of social media to effect change. The literature related to organizational change also fails to speak in-depth about the potential social media has to effect transformational change. However, the seven points outlined by Kotter (2012) above have a basis in the theoretical and philosophical underpinnings of dialogue as defined by Buber & Kaufmann (1970). It is clear by the literature that social media holds the promise to improve communication, but will require further research to determine if it is possible to identify the best strategies and practices in social media that will guide transformational change. Determining those strategies will also help ask the fundamental question related to social capital. Erickson (2009) said the capital metaphor in the context of social capital forces us to ask questions about networks and “how do people build useful networks, and what profits do they gain from them?” (p. 93). Erickson (2009) further adds that
answering those above questions is difficult because every facet of a network “is useful for some things, but useless or even harmful for others, depending on the setting under study” (p. 93).

The use of social networks does not guarantee engagement unless used properly. Social media has the potential to allow organizations and their leaders to engage in dialogue and to listen to their stakeholders. Burber & Kaufmann (1970) says to truly listen “entails being present to the other, that is, responding to the other as a whole person and creating a space in which the other can speak his or her own words and meaning” (Gordon, 2011, p. 207). The argument could be made that social media creates the space that Burber & Kaufmann (1970) says is required for true listening and ultimately true dialogue.

**Research Questions**

Setting theories and philosophy aside for moment, it’s clear from the literature review that there is a limited and inconclusive amount of literature on the topic of social media and its ability to effect transformational change; therefore, it will be important to obtain additional research through a qualitative study to reach an informed conclusion. The purpose of the qualitative study will be to identify potential social media strategies employed in an organization that can advance transformational change. The research questions of this study are as follows with a goal of determining:

1. As an emerging new form of communication, how can social media be best used to drive organizational change that is transformational in nature?
2. How will the adoption of social media in organizations change the communication dynamic between internal and external stakeholders?
CHAPTER 3: SCOPE AND METHODOLOGY

Scope of the Study

Achieving transformational change requires effectively communicating the vision for that change (Kotter, 2012). Communicating change can take a variety of different forms. Li and Bernoff (2011) say that social media represents the next generation of communication by removing institutional boundaries through the use of technology and applications like Facebook and Twitter, which allow for people to connect directly with each other. The purpose of this qualitative study is to identify potential social media strategies that can be employed in an organization to advance transformational change. Identifying these strategies was accomplished through a qualitative study based on a narrative analysis of information obtained in interviews from individuals identified as actively participating in social media both from the organizational and stakeholder level. Li and Bernhoff (2011) say the rise in social media has changed the balance of power by creating a scenario where individuals have the power to undermine the communication efforts of organization (p. 13). Taking that scenario into consideration, the study relied on interviewing active participants in social media to determine the most effective communication strategies available via social media. The goal was to obtain a diverse cross section of participants who were either actively involved in using social media in an organizational setting for employee or customer engagement to those classified as stakeholders who were either employees or followers of organizations and/or companies. The study attracted a broad base of participants representing three distinct generations. The study attempted to have an equal number of women and men, but ultimately the study skewed higher with women respondents. The larger percentage of women participating in interviews was not
surprising given December 2012 data from the Pew Research Center showing that 71 percent of women were users of social media compared to 62 percent of men, (Brenner, 2012, para. 5).

**Methodology**

*Nature and Design*

A two-phased approach to sampling was used to look at two distinct populations:

1. Internal stakeholders comprised of organizational leaders and employees.

2. External stakeholders comprised of individuals who have a relationship with the organization. That relationship could take many forms such as customer, supporter, patient, client, etc.

For the purpose of this study, certain criteria had to be met in regards to research participants to ensure the data and information obtained is relevant to the research question:

- Organizations must have active social media programs in place.
- Employees must have full access to social media sites in the workplace.
- Employees and external stakeholders must be active in social media.

*Identifying participants*

For this purpose, the researcher employed a combination of purposive and snowball sampling techniques. Purposive sampling allows for the researcher to use a wide range of methods to locate subjects (Neuman, 2006). Identifying key companies was accomplished through the researcher’s involvement in professional organizations and networks including but not limited to Ragan Communications, The Mayo Clinic for Social Media and the Public Relations Society of America. The researcher also identified participants through personal and professional social media accounts including but not limited to Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter.
Additional participants were identified through the snowball sampling technique, which focuses on expanding the network of those in the sample size by referrals to other sources provided by the initial sample group (Neuman, 2006). The crucial feature of snowball sampling is that each person is connected to the other either through a direct or indirect connection (Neuman, 2006).

Total sample size is dependent on the ability to obtain a variety of sample subjects representing a diverse group of organizations. The researcher’s goal was to have a minimum of 15 leaders and 30 stakeholders who use social media at work or personally to comprise the diversity required to effectively address the questions. The study ultimately obtained responses from 30 leaders and 50 stakeholders. There is not a standard for sample size. Neuman (2006) notes that sample size depends on the kind of data analysis the researcher plans. Because of the explosive growth in social media, Neuman (2006) suggests that larger populations permit smaller sampling ratios because “as the population size grows, the returns in accuracy for sample size shrink” (p. 241).

The research study employed a qualitative form of data analysis defined as research that “does not draw on a large established body of formal knowledge” (Neuman, 2006, p. 459). While social media literature continues to expand, much of it is focused on best practices and the potential of social media. There remains a limited amount of data available on the effectiveness of social media to advance transformational change. Creswell (2009) said that qualitative research is exploratory and useful in the context of topics such as social media that have a lack of academic research and literature. Creswell (2009) wrote that this type of approach is needed because the topic is new, the topic has never been addressed with a certain group of people, or existing theories do not apply with the particular group or sample under study (p. 18).
Because research topics such as social media lack a significant amount of academic research or long-term data, a qualitative analysis is the best-suited approach to determine the plausibility of answering the research question.

Leedy and Ormrod (2005) say that all qualitative approaches to research have two things in common – a focus on phenomena that occur in natural settings and a study of those phenomena in all their complexity (p. 133).

**Purpose and Research Questions**

A series of questions and statements to react to were presented to the study participants to determine their level of engagement with social media and how they view social media as a communication tool. The questions focused primarily on how participants viewed social media and its ability to provide true engagement. As an example, participants were asked to provide examples of where social media accomplished engagement and whether it created a closer connection between organizations and stakeholders. The goal of the questioning was to determine the effectiveness of social media at encouraging the concept of *true dialogue* as presented by philosopher Martin Buber (1926), and discussed in the previous chapter’s literature review. Key to social media and addressing the ultimate research questions is relating how social media not only applies to dialogue, but also to the theories of social capital and social information processing. At the heart of all three is the ability to create a relationship that is not only valuable, but also effective at encouraging communication. As Kotter (1995), Sirkin, Keenan and Jackson (2005) and others have suggested, effective change requires effective communication.

**Limitations of data**
Data obtained from a qualitative analysis can be imprecise, context-based and have more than one meaning (Neuman, 2006), which makes it difficult to test an actual hypothesis. Furthermore, Creswell (2009) says that qualitative research involves multiple sources of data such as interviews, observations, and documents with the goal to “make sense of it, and organize it into categories or themes that cut across all data sources” (p. 175).

**Narrative research**

Guiding the qualitative analysis is a focus on narrative research, which according to Creswell (2009) should include collecting stories and experiences of participants and organizing them into conceptual themes. Researchers employing a narrative analysis focus on events and treats the “sequence of events itself as an object of inquiry” (Neuman, 2006, p. 475). Given the small sampling size, Creswell (2007) said, “narrative research is best for capturing detailed stories” (p. 55).

According to Creswell (2009), the first requirement of engaging with research subjects is to ensure they are clear on the purpose of the research to avoid deception that “occurs when participants understand one purpose but the researcher has a different purpose in mind” (p. 89).

Subjects in the study were asked to participate voluntarily and had the freedom to decline or remove themselves from the study at any time. An acknowledgment of consent was required for an individual’s participation. See appendix A. According to Creswell (2009), a notice of consent should include the following items:

- Identification of the researcher and sponsoring institution.
- Indication of how the participants were selected.
- Identification of the purpose of the research and benefits for participating.
- Identification of any risks associated with participating.
• A guarantee of confidentiality to the participation.
• Assurance that participants can withdraw at any time (p. 89).

Data Analysis

The qualitative approach to this project allows for a more natural setting and collaboration and interaction with the research participants through more informal channels. The primary focus of obtaining research was through an initial online questionnaire of identified subjects. See appendix B and appendix C. The questionnaire poses a variety of closed and open-ended questions to solicit data on the effectiveness of social media to effect transformational change. The questionnaire does not ask the specific research questions. Eriksson and Kovalainen (2011) say novice researchers often confuse research questions and interview questions, but the goal should be to provide questions that are related but not equal so that “your interview questions provide material that will help you answer your research questions through careful analysis” (p. 79). The questionnaire also posed a number of quantitative questions to gain a better understanding how widespread the use was on certain social media sites.

To maintain and respect the anonymity of participants an alias or coding system was used. Individuals were assigned alphabetical and numerical codes and designated from a region such as West, Northwest, Midwest, etc. The individual’s company and organizational affiliation was identified by industry in general and not by a formal name.

The online questionnaire also identified the willingness of participants for follow up interviews when clarification or further detail was needed. The follow up interviews employed a number of methods. Whenever possible preference was given to in-person interviews. Subsequent options included telephone interviews, followed by e-mail interviews. Because qualitative research is interpretative research, it requires that “researchers make an interpretation
of what they see, hear and understand” (Creswell, 2009). To allow for maximum interpretation, the interviews and initial questionnaire rely on open-ended questions that have the advantage of eliciting diverse views and opinions from participants (Creswell, 2009).

**Qualitative analysis**

Creswell (2009) suggest that qualitative analysis involves a process of research that involves:

Emerging questions and procedures, data typically collected in the participant’s setting, data analysis inductively building from particulars to general themes, and the researcher making interpretations of the meaning of the data. The final written report has a flexible structure (p. 4).

The narrative and qualitative approach to this research requires an understanding of the data analysis process of *open coding*, which Neumann (2006) defines as the process in which the researcher locates themes and assigns initial codes to those themes as a way to condense the mass of data into categories (p. 461). Eriksson and Kovalainen (2008) say the first step in open coding is to ask “a set of questions that relate to your original research question” (p. 165). Because narrative analysis lends itself to the potential for a great deal of interpretation, employing the practice of open coding will help identify the key themes in the research and how they relate to the research questions. Creswell (2009) suggests that codes be broken down into four categories:

- Codes on topics readers would expect to find based on available literature and common sense.
- Codes that are surprising and not anticipated at the beginning of the study.
- Codes that are unusual and of conceptual interest to readers.
Codes that address a larger theoretical perspective in the research (p. 187).

Creswell (2009) said that open coding allows for the organization of “material into chunks or segments of text before bringing meaning to information” (p. 186). That organization is important because of the difficulty of qualitative analysis, which “requires more effort by an individual researcher to read and reread data notes, reflect on what is read, and make comparisons based on logic and judgment” (Neuman, 2006, p.488). Both the organizational and stakeholder questionnaire employed a series of closed, open-ended and questions based on a Likert scale that allowed participants to rate a question on a scale of choices such as “agree” and “disagree” and “effective” and “ineffective.”

Validity and Reliability

Creswell (2013) says that substantive validation involves understanding of the researcher’s topic which is accomplished by information of other sources that is documented and interpreted through the researcher’s own self reflection (p. 248). Because qualitative research is interpretative in nature, Creswell (2013) further adds that the research must be documented for other to “judge the trustworthiness of the meanings arrived at in the end. Written accounts must resonate with the intended audiences, and must be compelling powerful, and convincing” (p. 248). The focus of this study accomplished validity by providing a diverse cross section of participants involved with social media who participated in the survey and interviews. Leedy and Ormond (2005) say that validity can be accomplished in qualitative research by a process of triangulation defined as comparing multiple data sources in search of common themes. Identifying common themes in relation to the effectiveness of social media to advance transformational change was one step to guarantee validity.
Researchers often use additional strategies to assure validity as well. Leedy and Ormond (2005) say one example is the concept of thick description, which is described as “sufficiently rich, ‘thick’ detail that readers can draw their own conclusions from the data presented,” p. 100. Ultimately, however, through the course of qualitative research, Leedy and Ormond (2005) say that there may not be a “single ultimate truth to be discovered” (p. 133).

**Ethical Considerations**

*Role of the Researcher*

Neuman (2006) says the role of the interviewer is to obtain cooperation, build rapport, but remain neutral and objective (p. 305). Furthermore, it’s important that the interviewer encourage an atmosphere that is non-judgmental and allow ensure that the respondents “have an understanding of the information sought, understand what is expected, give relevant answers, are motivated to cooperate, and give serious answers” (Neuman, 2006, p. 306). The researcher’s goal is to organize specific details into a coherent picture, model, or set of interlocked concepts (Neuman, 2006).

*Researcher bias*

The researcher currently leads the social media efforts in his organization and has gained significant knowledge about the use of social media. Information obtained from this study may ultimately further the researcher’s personal and professional goals. The researcher made every effort to avoid any personal biases that could impact the collection of research or data analysis. It is important to be aware of the potential for researcher bias. Creswell (2009) said the requires an understanding of reflexivity, which refers to how the researcher positions themselves in the study
to explain their personal background of the research topic and “how it informs their interpretation of the information in the study, and what they have to gain from the study” (p. 47).

*Anonymity*

The researcher further must assure the anonymity of participants. As previously mentioned, this study did not identify study participants by name, but rather through a coding system. The researcher is also committed to destroying any identifying information once the research is complete. Neuman (2006) said a challenge in protecting research participants is not to provide too much fictitious information because it could create a question about “what was found and what was made up” (p. 139).
CHAPTER 4: THE STUDY

Introduction

The purpose of the study was to determine the effectiveness at fostering engagement of stakeholders with a goal of concluding whether social media could be an effective strategy to drive transformational change. The study consisted of drawing feedback in an online questionnaire from two separate groups who had involvement in social media. If needed for clarification, follow-up communications were used to expand or clarify a response. The first group consisted of organization leaders, while the second group was defined broadly as stakeholders, which consisted of consumers and employees.

Participants were solicited to participate in an online questionnaire over a 10-day time period. During that time period, a total of 42 organizational leaders and 64 stakeholders accessed the questionnaire. Twelve organizational questionnaires and 14 stakeholders questionnaires were discarded for lack of completeness. While not all respondents answered all the questions, the questionnaires retained had a minimum of an 80 percent completion rate. The final tally of questionnaires was 30 from organizational leaders and 50 from stakeholders. Follow-up communications with four respondents were needed for further clarification and detail.

Results of the Study

Participant profiles

Participants were asked to provide their gender and to identify themselves by generational profiles defined as:

- **Traditionalists** born between 1900 and 1945.
- **Baby Boomers** born between 1946 and 1964.
- **Generation X** born between 1965 and 1976.

Of the 30 organizational participants, 36.7% (11) were classified as Baby Boomers while 46.7% (14) identified themselves as Generation X. The final 16.7% (5) identified themselves as Generation Y. Participants in the stakeholder questionnaire skewed higher in the younger demographics with 38% (19) identifying themselves as Generation Y, followed by 32% (16) identifying with Generation X. Of the remaining participants, 26% (13) identified themselves as Baby Boomers and 2% (1) identified as Traditionalists.

The gender mix of the two groups also skewed higher in the number of female respondents. The organization questionnaire had 56.7% (17) female respondents and 43.3% (13) male respondents. The stakeholder questionnaire was comprised of 74% (37) females and 26% (13) males.

Participants were also asked to identify how long they had been using social media. Of the organizational participants, 56.7% (17) have used social media between 1 to 5 years and 43.3% (13) have used social media 5 to 10 years. Of the stakeholder participants, 4% (2) have used social media for less then year, while 46% (23) have used it for 1 to 5 years and 42% (21) have used it 5 to 10 years. In addition, 8% (4) reported using social media for more than 10 years.

In addition to demographic breakdowns, participants were assigned one of four geographic regions defined as:

- Midwest – Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, South Dakota, and Wisconsin.
South – Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, Oklahoma, Tennessee, and Texas.


The organizational participants skewed heavily to the West with 90% (26) from that region. Of the remaining participants, 6% (2) were from the East, 2% (1) from the Midwest, and 2% (1) from the South. Of the stakeholder participants, 96% were from the West, and 4% (2) were from the East. The stakeholder questionnaire did not receive any responses from either the Midwest or South.

Organizational Participants

To qualify for participation in the organizational questionnaires, individuals had to be in a leadership or management position that either managed or participated in some level in the organization’s social media efforts. The identity of the leaders were kept anonymous providing a coding system that used the term Leader coupled with a corresponding numerical value of 1 to 30 to identify each leader. Additional identifying information including gender, title, age group, and geographic region were included in the citation of any quotes attributed to the individual.

For the purpose of categorizing the responsibility level of each participant, they were assigned to job title categories that either matched or best represented their level of responsibility. The four categories used included: CEO, director, manager, and coordinator. The study group consisted of 7 CEOs, 9 directors, 6 managers and 5 coordinators.

The industries represented by the respondents included: marketing, communications, health care, media, technology, education, utilities, and non-profit. Leaders were also asked to
identify their organization size. Of the 30 participants, 36.7% (11) were from organizations of 100 employees or less, 13.3% (4) were from organizations of 101-500, 6.7% (2) were from organizations of 501-1,000; 13.3% (4) were from organizations of 1001-5,000, and 30% (9) were from organizations of 5,000 or more.

**Stakeholder Participants**

To qualify for participation in the *Stakeholder* questionnaire, participants had to have been active users of social media either in their professional or personal capacity, as either employees of companies that use social media to engage with employees, or individuals who actively follow organizations or companies that use social media to engage with customers and/or followers. Participants were asked to provide their occupation as well. Occupations represented included retail, consulting, health care, marketing, engineering, information technology, self-employed/business owner and student.

The identity of the stakeholders were shielded by providing a coding system for the participants that used the term *Stakeholder* with a corresponding numerical value of 1 to 50. Additional identifying information including gender, age group, and geographic region was included in the citation of any quotes attributed to the individual.

**Social media participation**

The level of participation in social media by both the leaders and stakeholders was also assessed. Of the stakeholders, participants, 96% (48) reported using social media on a daily basis. When asked to identify time spent on social media sites, 36% (18) reported spending less than one hour, and 60% (30) reported spending 2 to 5 hours on social media sites. Only 4% (2) reported spending five hours or more.
When asked to identify their primary use of social media, nearly 90% (43) said it was primarily used for keeping in touch with family and friends. Participants were allowed to choose all the categories that applied. Figure 1 outlines the other primary reasons for using social media.

Figure 1. Stakeholder’s primary use of social media.

The stakeholder questionnaire also asked respondents to identify the primary social media sites they use for personal and business use. Facebook was the primary site being used, with 100% (50) of the participants identifying as users of Facebook. The remaining sites chosen by participants are outlined in Figure 2.
Other sites identified as being used that were not included in the questionnaire, included Instagram and Google Plus. Asked to rank the top five social media sites in order, Facebook also ranked as the site used most frequently by 86% (43) of the stakeholders, followed by blogs at 38% (19). Rounding out the top three was YouTube and Pinterest, which tied at 34% (17) of the stakeholders. Twitter was ranked number four and was used by 30% (15) of stakeholders.

At the organizational level, YouTube and Twitter were the top used sites followed closely by Facebook. See Figure 3 for the breakdown.
Other sites used at organizations included: Vimeo, Yammer, and Instagram. At the organizational level, nearly half 48.3% (14) of leaders said Facebook was used most frequently. Twitter was used most frequently by 24% (7) of leaders, and blogs were used by 24% (7) of leaders. Despite being the third most used social media site by stakeholders, and a top site organizations identified as having, no leaders listed YouTube as a most-used site in organizations. When asked what the No. 1 social media sites for engagement was, Facebook again came out on top with 48.3% (14) leaders choosing Facebook, followed by 31% (9) leaders choosing blogs and 10.3% (3) leaders choosing Twitter.
Leaders were also asked what the primary purpose of social media was in their respective
organizations. Engaging employees was chosen as the primary purpose by 70.4% (19) of the
leaders. Figure 4 shows the remaining uses.

![Figure 4. Primary uses of social media in organizations.](image)

**Study Themes**

Analysis of the data employed *open coding*, which Creswell (2009) says allows for identification
of categories or themes for analysis. The primary themes identified in the questionnaire relating
to the use of social media were:

- Effectiveness of communication.
- Level and quality of engagement.
Effectiveness at creating personal connections.

Effectiveness of facilitating transformational change.

Communication

Effective communication remains critical to any transformational change effort (Kotter, 2006). Of the stakeholders questioned about the effectiveness of social media as a communication tool, 87.8% (43) agreed or strongly agreed that social media was an effective for communication. Most stakeholders agreed that social media would only grow in its prominence and potentially become our main method for communication. “Social media will just continue to be implemented in our daily lives at exponential rates. Everything goes hand in hand with social media, so our reliance on it will keep increasing dramatically” (Stakeholder 20, Female, Generation Y, West).

There were a minority of stakeholders who didn’t see social media as an effective communication tool, their primary reason included concerns about too much social media causing fatigue and pulling people away to other platforms just as social media drew people away from e-mail as a primary form of communication. “I think we will become immune to many things posted on social media as it becomes more saturated. I already am limiting my information feed to only provide me with what I want to know” (Stakeholder 43, female, Baby Boomer, West).

Leaders cited a number of communication advantages of using social media including the immediacy of social media and the ability to allow for a faster response when their stakeholders had questions or concerns. One leader called social media a “A two-way street to communicate with customers. A way to get messaging/branding out, and a way to answer customer questions,
hear customer concerns, and change perceptions if necessary” (Leader 15, female, manager, Generation X, West).

Other leaders spoke to the lifting of the geographic communication boundaries that social media provides. “It opens communications across the world. It is especially great for allowing people to be in contact with family or friends living far away. It also allows people the opportunity to vent on an issue and feel heard” (Leader 20, female, manager, Generation X, West).

**Engagement**

Allowing the opportunity to be heard, was a theme that presented itself in responses of both the stakeholders and leaders. The historic one-side nature of organizational communication isn’t as apparent with the organizations that use social media. One leader described social media as a platform “that allows participants to interact, engage, comment and transact with one another and organizations” (Leader 8, female, director, Baby Boomer, West). Another leader said, “when used to its fullest potential, social media is a two-way dialogue, rather than a top-down method of organizational communication” (Leader 12, female, coordinator, Baby Boomer, West).

When stakeholders were asked to rate the effectiveness of engagement efforts using social media, 42 of the 50 responded. Of that number, 50% (21) found it effective or very effective while 11.9% (5) found it ineffective or very ineffective. The additional 38.1% (16) had a neutral opinion.

When stakeholders were asked to identify an example where they had felt engaged a number of themes emerged centering around engagement. Several mentioned the ability to connect with others who share like interests or causes, to feeling better engaged with their
employer or with companies and organizations they support. One stakeholder, who works in the IT industry, provided an example where he responded to his CEO’s Twitter posting with a new idea for improvement, “he ended up loving my idea and connected me with some of his executive team. I felt valued and appreciated as an employee” (Stakeholder 50, male, Generation X, West). When stakeholders were asked about which social media sites were most effective at engagement, a strong preference was given to Facebook (Figure 5).

![Figure 5. Stakeholder response to social media sites that are most engaging.](image)

A majority of stakeholders also agreed it was easier to resolve issues through social media. “I have been able to share compliments and complaints with several businesses. Most of the time I get a response very quickly either thanking me or trying to find a solution for the problem” (Stakeholder 40, female, Generation X, West). For some of the stakeholders it is important that organizations or companies use social media. “Being able to interact with a company such as before and after purchasing their products is a very good way to learn more
about them, and help them to improve. I always check to see if a company I’m going to do business with has a Facebook page” (Stakeholder 12, male, Baby Boomer, West).

Organizational leaders responded that the social media site most effective at engaging employees was Facebook, which was chosen by 48.3% (14) leaders. Blogs were thought to be second most effective with 31% (9) leaders, followed by Twitter with 10.3% (3) leaders. The top sites that stakeholders felt were the least effective are illustrated in Figure 6.

![Graph showing the effectiveness of social media sites](image)

*Figure 6. Types of social media least effective at engaging stakeholders.*

**Personal Connection**

While both the leaders and stakeholders had positive opinions about the quality of engagement social media provides it is apparent from some of the stakeholder comments that engagement is further improved when a personal connection can occur. One stakeholder, who rated the level of his organization’s engagement with social media as “very effective” said that the “the use of social media allows me to connect with senior leadership in ways I would never
be able to do in person. To this end, social media breaks down the communication hierarchical boundaries that typically exist in large organizations (e.g., where staff are frowned upon for directly engaging an executive member outside of their department)” (Stakeholder 50, male, Generation X, West).

A majority of leaders also agreed that social media created a closer relationship with stakeholders (Figure 7).

Figure 7. Leaders response to quality of connection to stakeholders via social media.

One leader said that the two-way dialogue and personal connection social media creates is critical to allow stakeholders to understand the direction an organization is going. “It allows me to provide messaging to a much broader audience that can be viewed on their terms and allows people to interact with me. I think the ability to better explain our strategies and initiatives helps engagement” (Leader 26, male, CEO, Baby Boomer, West).
The personal connection that users have with friends on their own social media sites also can create engagement and/or relationships with an organization that may not have happened. But the question remains about how effective that relationship is. One stakeholder, for example, said that the relationship she has with her friends via social media has created more interest and engagement about certain causes, but it comes with a caveat. “When you see friends liking something, it peaks your curiosity and you click on the link to find out more information about the organization/issue and either like it because you agree or are just inclined to like it because all of your friends have done it” (Stakeholder 20, female, Generation Y, West).

The responses about the personal connections created by social media speak to the ability to create social capital. Lin (2001) defines social capital as essentially the profit or gains that individuals make through their social relationships. As one might expect those with strong social relationships have a greater level of social capital and consequently a greater level of satisfaction. How social capital is gained through social media has been the subject of some research. Valenzuela, Park and Kee (2009) determined in a study of college students use of Facebook concluded that the “intensity of Facebook use appears to be related with personal contentment, greater trust, and participation in civic and political activities among college students” (p. 893).

Addressing the question of the effectiveness of Facebook at creating social capital, Valenzuela et al. (2009) conceded that Facebook use only played a small part in the development of social capital and a host of other factors such as life experiences, personality, participation in collective activities also heavily influenced the level of social capital obtained by young adults (p. 893).

*Transformational change*
A clear majority of leaders questioned responded favorably to the statement, that social media effectively facilitates transformational change, which for the purpose of the questionnaire was defined as “significant organizational change that creates a whole new form, function or structure” Of those questioned, 17.2% (5) strongly agreed while 65.5% (19) agreed. None of the leaders questioned disagreed, but 17.2% (5) had a neutral opinion and one did not respond to the question.

Asked for examples of social media sites that best facilitate transformational change, blogs, Twitter and Facebook were used as examples. One leader said that Facebook has facilitated transformational change in her organization by shifting the organization from “being a supplier of information (transferring info in one direction, for the office to our members) into a business that listens to the needs of our members which is provided nearly instantaneously via there posts and comments and then our organization can respond or change direction” (Leader 21, female, director, Generation X, West).

A few leaders, however, were still unsure if social media could truly facilitate transformational change. One leaders said recent examples like the Arab Spring that credited social media for bringing people together was an example, but in her “organization, good old-fashioned meetings still work better” (Leader 22, female, director, Generation X, West).

While not using the term transformational change in the questionnaires of stakeholders a clear majority did believe that social media could effectively communicate the need for transformational change (Figure 8)
Throughout the questionnaire and follow-up interviews a number of narrative themes developed. In the stakeholder questionnaire, when participants were asked to describe the term social media, the three most prominent terms that appeared in all responses were the words “engagement,” “interaction” and “dialogue”.

The same question directed at stakeholders didn’t result in the same terminology, but did provide a similar theme. Stakeholders described social media as a way of “connecting,” “sharing,” and “bringing people together.”
The combined responses obtained from stakeholders and leaders present a clear picture that there is a favorable opinion on the ability of social media to engage both parties. As previously mentioned in this paper, true transformational change requires engagement, effective communication and the development of a relationship that is forged on the concept of dialogue (Craig & Muller, 2007; Kotter, 1995; Sirkin, Keenan & Jackson, 2005). Social media, essentially as Manley (2012) suggests puts a “human face on your organization” (p. 60).

The first research question looked at how to best use social media for transformational change. Given the responses in the survey and examples throughout the literature review, it’s clear that engagement is at the center of effective change. Social media tools and tactics that best achieve engagement will likely be the most successful at achieving transformational change.

But how often and how effectively organizations use social media for transformational change wasn’t clear in the questionnaire. What was clear is that both leaders and stakeholders had similar backgrounds in relations to social media. The experience level with using social media was almost split equally between those with five years or less of experience and those with 5 years or more experience. Combining both questionnaires together found 50% of the 80 questioned had only started using social media within the last five years, while 48% had used social media for five years or more. Only 4% of participants had used social media for 10 years or more, so it would be a fair conclusion that the use of social media in organizations and with stakeholders is a relatively new phenomenon.

Because of the relative newness of social media it’s still too early in some efforts to claim successful transformational change as a result of social media. One leader speaking about his CEO’s blog said the blog laid the groundwork for transformational change but, “we’re just at the
beginning of the road…so I don’t think we can claim success yet” (Stakeholder 10, female, coordinator, *Generation X*, West).

Trust and changing the perception that social media is a new thing will also be key to creating true engagement that can ultimately lead to transformational change. One leader said we must change the perception of social media as a “new thing” and promote it as another means of communicating. “It works better if they see the continuity with other forms of communication” (Leader 29, male, director, *Baby Boomers*, Midwest).

If we look at the adoption rates of social media, it is clear that more people are engaging in social media (Brenner 2012), but it’s not clear yet if that engagement has hit a critical mass. It also isn’t clear if leaders and stakeholders are clearly aligned on how to use social media to foster engagement. There were a number of discrepancies in the study that warrant further investigation. Most of the participants 89.6% (43) said they use social media primarily to keep in touch with family and friends, which suggests the importance of relationships in the use of social media. Less than half of the participants in the stakeholder questionnaire used social media to follow companies and organizations or for business or employment use (see Figure 1). As referenced in Figure 4, 70.4% (19) leaders said the primary purpose for using social media in their organization was to engage employees or stakeholders. The second most common reason was to deliver information to stakeholders and employees or to market products and services. It’s clear from the response from leaders that they recognized the value of relationships.

The challenge to solidifying those relationships, according to one of the leaders is “Building the trust necessary to get employees and other stakeholders to engage in the two-way dialogue opportunities that social media can create” (Leader 12, female, coordinator, *Baby Boomers*, West). Another challenge will be not taking the focus on marketing too far and
“balancing personal engagement/branding with corporate strategy/branding” (Leader 1, male, CEO, *Generation X*, West). Developing trust in social media and other forms of online communication is at the heart of the social information processing (SIP) theory of computer mediated communication (CMC) outlined by Walther (1992). SIP theory recognizes the lack of nonverbal communication cues in online communications that would typically accompany face-to-face communication. Walther (2011) says the assumption has long been that the lack of nonverbal cues impedes the ability to have a true relationship with someone in an online environment. The responses to the questionnaire showed that leaders felt that creating trust was critical to effectively using social media. Trust implies a relationship and Walther (2011) said relationships can be created via CMC but because of the often sporadic nature of CMC communication more time is needed for relational effects to accrue in CMC (p. 459).

The questionnaire asked both leaders and stakeholders to share what their favorite and most-used sites were. Based on several of the aforementioned charts, it’s clear that Facebook, YouTube and Twitter are the top three sites, with a fair amount of support for blogs as well. When asked about the future of social media, many leaders and stakeholders suggested that the social media sites would likely change, but the idea of social media is here to stay and will continue grow. “I think it is evolving day by day. The ability to share information quickly and reach large audiences for a small (if any) cost is very beneficial. As we move from generation to generation, we will be reaching a point where our workforce doesn’t know a time when social media wasn’t available to them” (Stakeholder 10, female, *Generation X*, West).

Li and Bernhoff (2011) agree that technologies change rapidly and the technologies now being used by social media are not the point and that those hoping to succeed in social media have to focus on people and not technologies because relationships are everything and “the way
people connect with each other – the community that is created – determines how the power shifts” (p. 19).

The effectiveness of the community created by social media will determine if it’s truly an effective mode of communication that has the ability to create social capital and make the relational connections that researchers and respondents to the questionnaire say are key to achieving transformational change.

How transformational change manifests itself in an organization is dependent in a large part on how the organizations use the social media tools available to them. Baym (2009) says social media raises the potential of entrepreneurs to use social media sites and tools to manipulate personal relationships for their own self-interest and profit. The final question raised in this research study sought an answer about how the adoption of social media in organizations will change the communication dynamic between organizations and stakeholders. Li and Bernhoff (2011) say we have no choice but to adopt social media, but we do have a choice about how we use it. The unethical approach outlined by Baym (2009) is one direction, but Jue et al., (2010) said for organizations to fully achieve transformation they have to be courageous enough to let go and not try to control social media.
CHAPTER 5: SUMMARIES AND CONCLUSIONS

Limitations of the Study

While the sample size in the study represented the primary limitation of the study, it still provided a fairly broad cross-section of respondents with a good representation of the three generations of individuals who represent the bulk of the general population. Of the 30 organizational participants and 50 stakeholder participants, all but one participant were born between 1946 and 2000, which represents the three generations that make up 56 percent of the population (Jue et al., 2010).

Because the study also relied on obtaining research subjects primarily from the researcher’s professional networks, the study did skew heavily to the health, media and public relations industries and was centered more in the western portion of the United States.

A limited scope of time to identify potential participants and to obtain and analyze data also resulted in potentially limiting the pool of participants. The method of obtaining information also had its limitations. The primary vehicle was an online questionnaire followed by follow-up interviews. Recognizing that most participants have limited time, the online questionnaire was streamlined to limit the number of questions and the number of open-ended questions to encourage participants to complete the questionnaire. During the course of obtaining responses from the online questionnaire it became apparent that there were additional questions that could have been posed to garner a more significant response. In the researcher’s opinion, the some of the questions should have allowed for greater elaboration. For example, stakeholders were asked to identify the most effective and least effective social media efforts, but were not asked to elaborate on why they made their choices. Likewise leaders should have been given more opportunity to elaborate why they felt certain social media efforts are more effective than others.
Both questionnaires had open-ended questions that asked for examples of positive engagement efforts, but the questionnaire would have benefitted from more targeted and direct questions.

**Recommendations for Further Study**

The goal of the thesis was to identify social media strategies that would advance transformational change and to identify how the adoption of social media changes the communication dynamic between leaders and stakeholders. Results of the questionnaire and follow-up interviews provided a number of potential new areas for study. In the theory of social information processing (SIP), Walther (2011) suggests that engagement on par with that of face-to-face communication could potentially be accomplished through computer mediated communication (CMC) if there is more a reliance on images and interactive online communication forms. Relationships are formed when the level of uncertainty between individuals declines and Walther (2011) concluded that text-based tools of online engagement that aren’t immediate slows the time it takes to reduce uncertainty in a relationship, but “interactive communication contributed the most to uncertainty reduction about another individual” (p. 460). Given Walther’s hypothesis, a more detailed study looking at the interactive features of social media such as instant chat, videos, photography, video conferencing, instant messaging and the abundance of applications now available for smart phones can further the success of relationship building via social media.

As with any new communication method, there is also the danger of adopting it simply because of its popularity. While respondents to the questionnaire often spoke highly about the engagement advantages allowed with social media, at least one participant indicated that some times old fashioned face-to-face meetings are just as effective. Further research should delve into the advantages or perceived advantages of social media over face-to-face communication. A
further limitation of this thesis was not fully determining if the increase of social media was
based more on a convenience factor or a belief that it creates better engagement than is afforded
by more direct face-to-face communication. A majority of stakeholders in this study indicated,
for example, that the primary use of social media was keeping in touch with family and friends,
but is that connection as satisfying or as effective as previous forms of communication.

Building on that concept, further study is also warranted on whether or not organizations
can achieve the level of engagement required for true transformational change, when there is an
obvious preference for use of social media by stakeholders that is more personal in nature and
not necessarily related to organizational use. As previously mentioned in the study results section
of this thesis the three primary uses of social media by stakeholders were: keeping in touch with
family and friends; source of news and information; and entertainment. Business and
employment use and following companies and organizations were at the bottom tier of uses.

Conclusions

It is clear from the available literature and the results shared in this thesis that social
media has been proven to be an effective form of communication that has the potential to
significantly flatten the hierarchy of traditional organizational communication.

The engagement level in social media is growing exponentially as more leaders and
organizations embrace social media as not just a new set of tools, but rather a new evolution in
communication. At the heart of social media is the concept of collaboration and shared
understanding, all factors that are key to the successful implementation of transformational
change. The rapid growth of social media has resulted in what many might see as frantic and
disconnected communications. Li and Bernhoff (2011) say it’s not uncommon for people to
pursue their own interests and connections when using social media, but when brought together the collaboration and relationships created with social media can bring powerful results (p. 24).

Despite the wealth of high praise from researchers and social media advocates, what we cannot do is expect social media to be the panacea for all the difficulties organizations have with communicating to stakeholders. As Groysberg and Slind (2012) said the era of top-down communication has passed. For some flattening the communication hierarchy will be accomplished by embracing social media. But even that approach is not without challenges. As the study results in this thesis show, the key driver in those embracing social media is the relationship opportunities it creates. Social media is about relationships, which not surprisingly is what is at the heart of all effective communication.

Groysberg and Slind (2012) say effective communication is not about social media, but rather what leaders and their stakeholders do with social media and ultimately it’s about “the increasing tendency among people in organizations to put conversation at the center of their work lives. And it’s about the way that conversation-based practices both generate and release organization energy” (p. 8).

Social media at its simplest is conversation or dialogue, and true dialogue is the philosophical underpinning of what creates true communication. This thesis began with a discussion about the philosophic views of Martin Buber (1927). It was Buber who saw the true power of dialogue. Something he referred to as the narrow ridge of communication. A place where true communication is not one sided, but rather takes into account both self and the other. The narrow ridge in human communication “involves a balancing of one’s concern for self and others. One must be open to the other’s viewpoint and willing to alter one’s position based upon
appropriate and just cause, if necessary (Arnett, 1986, p. 36). Is that not the true definition of a relationship?

The results of this study, coupled with the ongoing research and available literature confirms that social media provides leaders and stakeholders with tools that flatten the communication hierarchy, thereby given organizations the potential to improve the effectiveness of communication and ideally achieving the transformational change so many organizations seek. It is true that not every organization will be successful, but the blame cannot rest on social media. Social media has the power to create unprecedented opportunities to discover and nurture relationships free of any type of boundaries that once existed. The social media tools will change, but the evolution of communication spawned by social media will continue. Social media has truly transformed the way we communicate as a society.
References


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Appendix A

NOTICE OF CONSENT

PARTICIPANT

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study. Answers from this questionnaire will be used in a research study conducted by Ken Dey, a graduate student in Leadership and Communications Studies at Gonzaga University. The study is in partial fulfillment of the requirements for a graduate thesis. The purpose of this study is to determine the effectiveness of social media to guide transformational change in an organizational setting.

PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL

By completing this questionnaire you hereby consent to participate in this research study. All participation, however, is voluntary. You may withdraw your consent and discontinue participation at any given time without any fear of repercussion or reprisal.

CONFIDENTIALITY

While the questionnaire asks for your name, affiliation and contact information, your identity will not be disclosed in any publication that results from this questionnaire. All respondents will be assigned a random code and general description of industry or affiliation in any publication. All records with personal information related to this study will be kept secure by the researcher during the duration of the study and will be destroyed when the study is complete.

QUESTIONNAIRE DETAILS

The questionnaire should take about 20 minutes to complete. Please answer all questions that are applicable to your situation. Please feel free to add additional comments that would be relevant to this study.

DEADLINE FOR RESPONSES

To allow time to for analysis; please try to complete this questionnaire no later than March 15, 2013.

QUESTIONS

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this questionnaire please contact Ken Dey by phone at (208) 631-5322 or via e-mail at deyke@slhs.org
Appendix B

Stakeholder Questionnaire

1. Please provide the following contact information. Contact information is solely for researcher's records and will not be shared publicly.

2. If the researcher has additional follow up questions to clarify or expand on any of your responses is it okay to contact you?
   Yes
   No

3. How long have you been active in social media?
   Less than 1 year
   1 to 5 years
   5 to 10 years
   More than 10 years

4. In what generation of social media user would you classify yourself?
   Traditionalists. Born between 1900 - 1945
   Baby Boomers. Born between 1946 - 1964
   Generation X. Born between 1965 - 1976
   Generation Y. Born between 1977 - 2000
   Other (please specify)

5. What is your gender?
   Female
   Male

6. What Social Media sites and tools do you use? (check all that apply)
   Facebook
   YouTube
   Twitter
   Pinterest
   LinkedIn
   Blogs
   Flickr
   Other (please specify)

7. Of the largest social media sites, which do you use most frequently? Please rank 1 to 4
   Facebook
Twitter
YouTube
Pinterest

8. Do you use social media on a daily basis?
   Yes
   No

9. How much time each day do you spend on social media sites?
   Less than one hour
   Two to five hours
   Five hours or more

10. How would you describe social media?

11. What do you use social media for? Check all that apply
   Business or employment use
   Keeping in touch with family and friends
   Source of news and information
   Following companies and/or organizations
   Entertainment
   Other (please specify)

12. What types of social media sites at organizations and businesses do you think are most effective at engaging with you as a customer or employee?
   Facebook
   Twitter
   YouTube
   Pinterest
   Blogs
   Other (please specify)

13. What types of social media efforts have been the least effective at engaging you? Check all that apply.
   Facebook
   Twitter
   Blogs
   YouTube
   Pinterest
   Other (please specify)

14. If your employer or organization you follow uses social media to engage employees or stakeholders, how would you rate its effectiveness.
   very effective
15. Respond to this statement: Social Media is an Effective Tool for Communication.
   Strongly Disagree
   Disagree
   Neutral
   Agree
   Strongly Agree

16. Respond to this statement: I feel a closer connection with organizations/businesses that engage with me through social media.
   strongly disagree
   disagree
   neutral
   agree
   strongly agree

17. Respond to this statement: Social media is an effective tool to communicate a need for a significant organizational change.
   strongly agree
   disagree
   neutral
   agree
   strongly agree

18. Please share an example of where you've been engaged or not engaged by a social media effort.

19. How do you think social media will evolve in the future?

20. Is there anything else you’d like to add?

21. Thank you for your participation. Would you like to receive a link to access the completed research study/thesis once it is available?
   Yes
   No
Appendix C

Leader Questionnaire

1. Please provide your contact information. Contact information is solely for researcher's records and will not be shared publicly.

2. If the researcher has additional follow up questions to clarify or expand on any of your responses is it okay to contact you?
   Yes
   No

3. How long have you been active in social media?
   Less than 1 year
   1 to 5 years
   5 to 10 years
   More than 10 years

4. In what generation of social media user would you classify yourself?
   Traditionalists. Born between 1900 - 1945
   Baby Boomers. Born between 1946 - 1964
   Generation X. Born between 1965 - 1976
   Generation Y. Born between 1977 - 2000
   Other (please specify)

5. What is your gender?
   Female
   Male

6. What is the size of your organization?
   100 or less
   101 to 500
   501 to 1000
   1001 to 5000
   5000 or more

7. How would you describe social media?

8. What Social Media sites and tools do your organization use? (check all that apply)
   Facebook
   YouTube
   Twitter
   Pinterest
   LinkedIn
   Blogs
   Flickr
9. What is the primary purpose for using social media in your organization? Check all that apply.
- delivering information to employees and stakeholders
- engaging employees and stakeholders
- marketing products or services
- employee morale
- Other (please specify)

10. Of the largest social media sites, which is used most frequently in your organization? Please rank 1 to 4
- Facebook
- Twitter
- YouTube
- Pinterest

11. What methods of social media have been the most effective at your organization in engaging employees and external stakeholders? Rank in order of effectiveness.
- Facebook
- YouTube
- Twitter
- Pinterest
- LinkedIn
- Blogs
- Other

12. How do you think social media facilitates engagement?

13. Respond to this statement: Social Media effectively facilitates transformational change.
- strongly agree
- agree
- neutral
- disagree
- strongly disagree

14. What type of social media work best to facilitate transformational change?

15. Respond to this statement: I feel a closer connection with my employees/external stakeholders that engage with me through social media.
- strongly agree
- agree
- neutral
- disagree
- strongly disagree
16. Respond to this statement: Social media is an effective tool to communicate a need for a significant or transformational change.
   - strongly agree
   - disagree
   - neutral
   - agree
   - strongly agree

17. Please share an example of how the use of social media in your organization was either successful or unsuccessful at achieving transformational change?

18. What are the biggest challenges of building a successful social media program in your organization?

19. How do you think social media will evolve in the future?

20. Is there anything else you’d like to add?

21. Thank you for your participation. Would you like to receive a link to access the completed research study/thesis once it is available?
   - Yes
   - No