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Social Media Policies for Professional Communicators

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Social Media Policies for Professional Communicators:
An Examination of Guidelines for Using Social Media Tools for Journalism,
Advertising and Public Relations Practitioners

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ABSTRACT

As social media tools such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube have become increasingly prevalent ways for people to share and connect, professional communicators have increasingly incorporated these tools into their daily practice. However, journalism, advertising and public relations practitioners have little formal guidance to help them navigate the benefits and risks of using these tools professionally. The codes of ethics of their professional fields have not been updated, and to date, social media policies have not been examined from an academic perspective. This study reviews 26 social media policies of journalism and strategic communication companies to find common themes and concerns and to suggest best practices for professional communicators using social media tools. These themes include transparency, balancing the personal and the professional, maintaining confidentiality, rules for "friending," and other matters central to developing an effective social media policy.

The president was in what he thought was an off-the-record discussion with a pool of White House reporters.   Less than a week before, Kanye West had famously interrupted country music star Taylor Swift's speech during the Video Music Awards, and a reporter from CNBC casually asked what President Obama thought about West's outburst (Gold, 2009). An ABC employee, listening on a shared live feed of the discussion, circulated Obama's slightly crude response, and soon after, Nightline co-anchor Terry Moran sent out the following on Twitter: "Pres. Obama just called Kanye West a 'jackass' for his outburst at VMAs when Taylor Swift won. Now THAT's presidential."

Before ABC officials could respond or make a decision regarding whether this should be published, the damage was done. Moran had more than 1 million followers on Twitter, the micro-blog site created in 2006 that allows users to share information through "tweets" 140 characters or less in length. Even though Moran later deleted the tweet, the word was out (Hendler, 2009). ABC was widely condemned for its lack of professionalism in the matter, and the network soon issued an apology, noting that its "employees prematurely tweeted a portion of (Obama's) remarks that turned out to be from an off-the-record portion of the interview. This was done before our editorial process had been completed. That was wrong." (Hendler, 2009)

Such incidents are not confined to news media. Last year, Novartis Pharmaceutical Corporation received a cease-and-desist letter from the FDA regarding the way it allowed visitors to its website to share information about a leukemia drug on Facebook (Hobson, 2010). For its drug Tasigna, Novartis created a "Facebook share social media widget" on its website that allowed users to repost information on Facebook about the drug, where friends could then comment about it. The federal Food and Drug Administration found that this allowed access to information about the "efficacy" of Tasigna but "fail(ed) to communicate any risk information

associated with the use of this drug" in violation of FDA regulations. Further, the FDA found that Novartis' Facebook share widget had not been submitted to the FDA for preview before disseminating it to the public, also in violation of FDA regulations (Rulli, 2010).

Social media tools present great opportunities for communicators, including news media and marketing professionals, to engage with the audience in ways impossible just a decade ago. However, the benefits social media allow communicators are tempered by the risks inherent in tools that allow messages to be sent immediately and spread rapidly. Further, laws and professional ethics policies drafted with a 20th-century understanding of mass media may not be in tune with communication tools that emerge, develop, spread and change constantly.

In the aforementioned situation involving the rogue tweet of a Nightline co-anchor, the statement by ABC News concluded with the following: "We apologize to the White House and CNBC and are taking steps to ensure that it will not happen again." (Hendler, 2009) But what steps can media organizations take to prevent embarrassing, unprofessional or even illegal behavior when its employees use social media tools?

Several news media and strategic communications organizations have developed guidelines and policies for employee use of social media. These have been catalogued and discussed by professionals, as was the case in an article in *American Journalism Review* last year outlining ways in which journalists should engage with social media (Podger, 2009). And there is no shortage of blog posts about social media risks and best practices warehoused at sites such as socialmediagovernance.com (Boudreaux, 2010). However, social media policies have not yet been subjected to any greater academic scrutiny in light of the legal and ethical demands of the journalism, advertising and public relations fields. The purpose of this study is to build

understanding of social media policies in this context, cataloguing the chief concerns of communicators and outlining best practices in developing such policies.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Using new media tools to increase interconnectivity among humans is hardly a new idea. In the 1970s, media scholar and philosopher Marshall McLuhan foresaw communication technologies shifting to become video-based "extensions of our nervous systems, which can be disembodied and made totally collective," leading to the building of a information-driven economy and a shift in consciousness among individuals as they become part of a "global village" (McLuhan & Powers, 1989, p. 83-89). The first computer-based platform for human conversation, PLATO, was developed in the 1960s, and nearly a decade before Facebook emerged as a worldwide social networking phenomenon, SixDegrees.com was established as a way for friends to connect online (Shirky, 2010, p. 192-93).

However, such tools were not initially successful. In the late 1990s, Web 2.0 embraced the shift from the "information age to the connected age" (Fine, 2006), taking advantage of the Internet's possibilities to allow two-way communication, with audience members able to participate in a feedback loop between them and the communicator, evidenced by the rise of weblogs, or blogs (Yang & Kang, 2009). It is in this context that what have become known as social media have flourished.

The most visible of the social media tools is Facebook. The social networking site (SNS) has more than 500 million users worldwide, and users spend more time on Facebook than any other website (Helft, 2010). Social networking sites such as Facebook are "web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share connection, and (3) view and transverse

their list of connection and those made by others within the system." (Boyd and Ellison, 2007)

These allow people to become friends through "only a few clicks of the mouse, rather than any

investment in conversation or social support." (Stefanone et al., 2010, p. 511-12) People use

SNS to make new friends and locate old ones (Raacke and Bonds-Raacke, 2008). The desire to

stay in touch and make new friends is based on a basic need to belong, a desire SNS fills by

providing additional access points to stay in touch with others (Gangadharbatla, 2009).

Beyond SNS, social media tools also allow users to share content online through photo

sharing sites such as Flickr & Snapfish and the video-sharing website YouTube (Stefanone et

al.). Messages and links can be shared via Twitter, which began in 2006 and has grown to tens of

millions of users worldwide, including 8 percent of American adults online by the end of 2010,

according to the Pew Research Center (Smith & Rainie, 2010).

Social media tools also include blogs, user-generated content, podcasts, virtual worlds,

wikis, forums, rating sites, RSS feeds, and sharing widgets, all of which allow users and content

creators and other communicators to engage in an interactive manner (Li & Bernoff, 2007).

These tools can remove barriers between communicators, but they can also shift power

and responsibility between professional communicators and the public, leading to "mass

amateurization," as media scholar Clay Shirky described it in "Here Comes Everybody" (2008).

Shirky has hailed social media as tools for increasing participation in social movements by

increasing interconnectivity online in ways that lead to engagement offline.

One result of the development and widespread use of social media tools has been a shift

in how strategic communication professionals engage consumers. People can use these

"technologies to get the things they need from each other, rather than from traditional institutions

like corporations," a phenomenon Charlene Li and Josh Bernoff call "groundswell" (2007). Also

important is understanding "social media influencers," who take pleasure in offering advice to friends through social media tools and can have impact on brands and companies through their positive or negative reviews, communicating in different ways than CEOs or company spokespeople traditionally have done (Freberg et al., 2010).

In his book "Cognitive Surplus," Shirky notes that the radical shift in technology has allowed humans to change the way in which they spend free time, becoming content creators and sharers rather than mere content consumers and enabling "ordinary citizens…to pool that free time in pursuit of activities they like or care about." (2010) He notes that this can lead to great public resources such as Wikipedia as well as more pointless exercises such as the cat photo sharing site ICanHasCheezburger.com. Social media are tools, after all, not ends in themselves.

The risks for professional communicators, however, go beyond having a segment of the web wasting time producing lolcats. Communications made online are subject to legal punishment and regulation, as was the case in the aforementioned FDA regulations regarding Novartis' Facebook share widget. It has already been established that defamation law extends to Twitter, where one can libel another in 140 characters or less. Musician and actress Courtney Love, who unleashed a tirade against a fashion designer on Twitter and MySpace containing words generally too indelicate for this academic paper but including phrases such as "nasty lying hosebag thief," paid $430,000 to settle a libel action by said designer (McCartney 2011). More recently, an Associated Press sports reporter was sued for more than $75,000 by a National Basketball Association referee for tweeting during a game that the referee promised a team to makeup for a bad call (Zillgitt 2011).

Beyond legal risks, communicators face other dangers from social media use. After the oil spill in 2010 became both an environmental disaster for the Gulf of Mexico and a public

relations disaster for BP, a parody Twitter account made things more difficult, as the humorous

@BPGlobalPR had more than 10 times as many followers as BP's official Twitter feed, with

comments purporting to be from the company's embattled CEO, such as, "Safety is our primary

concern. Well, profits, then safety. Oh, no – profits, image, then safety, but still – it's right up

there" (Cohen, 2010). This Web 2.0 twist on public relations – feedback in kind from

disaffected members of the public – drew a request from BP that the parody site refrain from

trying to confuse the public about its origin and intentions. Further, the Public Relations Society

of America (PRSA) offered an article that advised members on handling fake Twitter accounts,

including the suggestion that companies develop social media policies and incorporate them into

their crisis plans (Schock, 2010).

Despite such risks, journalists and strategic communication professionals cannot avoid

engaging their audiences through social media. Facebook made up almost a quarter of the online

display advertising market in 2010, with more impressions than traditional Web powers Yahoo,

Microsoft, Fox Interactive Media, and Google combined, according to a study conducted by

digital marketing company comScore (2010). News media companies have also incorporated

social media into their plans, trying to build online followings as print circulation and the

broadcast audience have dwindled. The *Chicago Tribune* built a following on Facebook and its

own site by creating the humorous Col. Tribune, a character inspired by Tribune founder Col.

Robert McCormick and used to share links and engage younger readers with some success

(Adee, 2008). Major news media had also created social media editor positions, including

National Public Radio, *USA Today*, and *The New York Times*. By the end of 2010, the *Times* had

eliminated the position because the growing importance of social media demanded more

attention and transitioned oversight of social media to a 10-person "interactive news team" (Tenore, 2010).

As Twitter use has grown among American adults, news media institutions have developed large followings on the site as well. A look at the Twitter pages in December 2010 showed that *The New York Times* had more than 2.7 million followers, ABC News had more than 1.1 million followers, CBS News had more than 1.6 million followers, ESPN had more than 800,000 followers, and Fox News had nearly 400,000 followers. Following these feeds allows users to get updates about major headlines, with links back to full stories and video on the websites of the news companies.

However, despite the emergence of Web 2.0 in the past decade and the widespread use of sites such as Facebook, Flickr, YouTube, and Twitter, use of social media has not been specifically incorporated into the most visible codes of ethics in the mass communication field. The Society of Professional Journalists (SPJ) Code of Ethics provides guidance to journalists through language that reaches across publication platforms, and SPJ provides a blog handling current issues in the field (Smith, 2010). However, the code itself was last revised in 1996 (Society of Professional Journalists, 2010). Similarly, the PRSA's Code of Ethics was last updated in 2000, and its examples of improper conduct do not mention electronic communications, much less social media (Public Relations Society of America, 2010). The American Advertising Federation (AAF) code of ethics and the American Association of Advertising Agencies (AAAA), drafted in 1984 and 1990 respectively, face similar challenges (American Advertising Federation, 2010; American Association of Advertising Agencies, 2010). One group, the Radio Television Digital News Association (RTDNA), has issued guidelines for

social media use as part of its ethics initiative (Radio Television Digital News Association, 2010).

The growing importance of social media tools to journalists, advertisers and public relations professionals, coupled with the lack of formal guidance from professional organizations and academics about best practices for social media use, lead to the following research questions to be examined in this study.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

RQ1: How do journalism and strategic communication organizations define social media and describe their uses as communication tools?

RQ2: What uses of social media tools present the greatest concern to journalists, and how do journalists propose to handle them effectively?

RQ3: What uses of social media tools present the greatest concern to strategic communication organizations, and how do advertising and public relations professionals propose to handle them effectively?

METHODOLOGY

To answer these questions, the authors gathered and reviewed social media policies for companies engaged in advertising, public relations and journalism, as well as policies at governmental institutions, universities and other businesses. Authors asked the companies for copies or found them online over two months in the fall of 2010. While several of the requests for copies of social media requests were declined, and one for a consulting company was issued under the agreement that the source and company would remain anonymous, the authors were able to gather more than 40 social media policies and guidelines. These guidelines were reviewed for their relevance regarding the topic of social media policies for journalism and

strategic communications, and 26 were selected for review (see Appendix A for a complete list). News media comprised 11 of the policies, while five were from private strategic communication companies and 10 were from other organizations engaged in public communications such as government agencies and universities.

The authors reviewed these policies for their definitions and descriptions of social media tools, the main topics the policies addressed, and themes regarding the way these organizations advised practitioners to handle the particular challenges of social media.

RESULTS

RQ1: Definitions & Descriptions of Social Media

This question concerned how journalists and strategic communication organizations define and describe social media tools. The purpose of this question is to help build conceptualization of social media use by understanding how these tools are used professionally. In short, journalists conceptualize the term in a narrower manner than advertising and public relations practitioners.

Eight of the journalism organizations (the *Austin American-Statesman*, *The New York Times*, the Associated Press, the *Los Angeles Times*, Reuters, *The Roanoke Times*, National Public Radio, and the Radio Television Digital News Association) listed specific tools in their social media policies. Each included Facebook and Twitter. Four others included MySpace, and one – *The New York Times* – specifically mentioned LinkedIn, a SNS aimed at connecting professionals. The tone of the policies and guidelines was generally accepting of the fact that social media had emerged and should be dealt with according to usual newsroom standards, perhaps best summarized with the following opening passage from the RTNDA guidelines:

> Social media and blogs are important elements of journalism. They narrow the distance between journalists and the public. They encourage lively, immediate and spirited

discussion. They can be vital news-gathering and news-delivery tools. As a journalist you should uphold the same professional and ethical standards of fairness, accuracy, truthfulness, transparency and independence when using social media as you do on air and on all digital news platforms.

This contrasts with much broader descriptions of social media tools, and much more glowing language about the benefits and possibilities of social media, among strategic communication organizations. The state of North Carolina, in its policy for state officials and employees using social media to communicate with the public, begins by noting that "a social networking presence has become a hallmark of vibrant and transparent communications." Ogilvy Public Relations Worldwide calls for its employees to display "insatiable curiosity" regarding development of "new angles, new methods and new platforms" for communication. Mediasmith, Inc., an advertising company in San Francisco, reminds its employees to "be yourself and have fun," reflecting the company's "spirit, creativity, savvy and awesome talent" in all of their online communications.

This enthusiasm is reflected in the field's inclusive approach to social media tools. Of the 12 organizations outlining specific tools in their social media guidelines – Greteman Group, Mediasmith, Ogilvy, Razorfish, Duke University, DePaul University, the state of North Carolina, the state of Texas, the city of Seattle, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the U.S. Navy, and the U.S. Air Force – all mentioned Twitter, and all but one mentioned Facebook. Several included MySpace, Flickr, YouTube, and blogging sites, and others outlined policies for using LinkedIn. Wikis such as Wikipedia were mentioned by DePaul, the Air Force, Ogilvy and Mediasmith. Greteman Group described basic rules for handling location-based applications Foursquare and Gowalla, which allow users to check in at locations. Two organizations, the CDC and Mediasmith even included "virtual worlds" such as Second Life.

RQ2: Concerns & Best Practices for Journalism Organizations

This question regarded the concerns of journalism organizations and best practices as outlined in their social media policies. After reviewing the relevant 11 policies, seven themes emerged: Transparency, Friending, Clearances, Sourcing, Personal vs. Professional Use, Confidentiality, and Intellectual Property. Each of these is briefly discussed below.

Transparency

The SPJ Code of Ethics calls for journalists to identify sources when possible and to "avoid undercover or other surreptitious methods of gathering information" in most situations. This call for openness in reporting methods is reflected in the social media policies as well, most of which demand that journalists identify themselves as journalists in two particular circumstances. First, they should always identify themselves as journalists who are representing a particular organization before posting comments or updates on social media sites, blogs, or while commenting on other news stories. As National Public Radio notes, "Journalism should be conducted in the open, regardless of the platform. Just as you would do if you were working offline, you should identify yourself as an NPR journalist when you are working online. If you are acting as an NPR journalist, you must not use a pseudonym or misrepresent who you are." The RTDNA extends this to avatars and forbids anonymous blogging, and Reuters extends it to chat rooms.

Second, journalists should also be transparent about who they are when they contact potential sources for reporting purposes. *The Wall Street Journal* requires that its employees never "us(e) a false name when you're acting on behalf of your Dow Jones publication or service" and always self-identify as a reporter for the *Journal* when gathering information for a story.

Friending

Journalists are called to "act independently" under the SPJ Code of Ethics, in particular by avoiding conflicts of interest, "real or perceived." This concern is at the heart of statements in nearly every news organization social media policy reviewed in this study, reflected by specific guidelines for who can be added to a list of "friends" or what organizations or movements journalists can become a "fan" or "follower" of. Journalists are warned to be careful in who they associate with online for fear of compromising their appearance of independence and neutrality.

First, becoming a "friend" of a source or subject of coverage invites risk. *The New York Times* policy asks, for example, if reporters can write about someone who is a friend on a SNS before concluding, "In general, being a 'friend' of someone on Facebook is almost meaningless and does not signify the kind of relationship that could pose a conflict of interest for a reporter or editor writing about that person. But if a 'friend' is really a personal friend, it would."

The Wall Street Journal requires approval by an editor before a source who may demand confidentiality can be added as a friend. "Openly 'friending' sources is akin to publicly publishing your Rolodex," according to the *Journal*'s policy. Issues can also arise in newsrooms between managers and employees who may be "friends" in social media. The AP says that managers "should not issue friend requests to subordinates, since that could be awkward for employees. It's fine if employees want to initiate the friend process with their bosses."

Second, becoming a friend of a person involved in a controversial issue, or becoming a fan of a movement, may present issues. Reuters advises that "it may be safest not to join a group or to follow participants on just one side of a debate." NPR forbids its reporters from advocating "for political or other polarizing issues online," a policy that extends to using social media "to express personal views…that you could not write for the air or post on NPR.org." *The Roanoke Times*, however, is more flexible, advising caution and consistency:

Either avoid them entirely, or sign up for lots of groups. If you become a fan of a political party, become a fan of the other parties as well. Manage your friends carefully. Having one source on your friends list but not another is easily construed as bias. As above, be consistent. Accept no sources or people you cover as friends, or welcome them all.

Clearance & Review

News organizations generally require journalists to receive clearance from editors or managers before engaging in social media or releasing news items publicly. While most policies were less formal – as NPR advises, "when in doubt, consult with your editor" – others required specific clearances.

Reuters requires its employees to seek permission of their managers before "setting up a professional presence on a social networking site." Similarly, any controversial topic or sensitive topic must be cleared with editors under *The Wall Street Journal* policy.

The Roanoke Times requires employees who blog to "notify their immediate supervisor that they have a blog and talk through any potential conflicts of interest or complications." However, this is not a policy to forbid blogs – rather, the paper encourages blogging, but wants to make sure that reporters are "build(ing) off our institutional voice."

Sourcing

The SPJ Code of Ethics requires journalists to "test the accuracy of information from all sources," a demand that can be challenging when reporters use social media tools to engage with sources. A healthy skepticism of sources contacted or uncovered through social media tools is built into many of the news organizations' social media policies.

The RTDNA treats information found on social media sites as similar to "scanner traffic or phone tips," which must be confirmed independently. Similarly, *The Roanoke Times* notes that "Facebook and MySpace are not a substitute for actual interviews by phone or in person, or

other means of information gathering, and should not be solely relied upon," instead requiring

offline confirmation and verification of claims made through these sites.

The Associated Press and *The Los Angeles Times* specifically extended requirements of

verification and authentication to re-tweeting items found on Twitter. As the AP notes: "We're

still the AP. Don't report things or break news that we haven't published, no matter the format,

and that includes retweeting unconfirmed information not fit for AP's wires."

Personal vs. Professional

The primary concern expressed in social media policies of news organizations was

blurring of the line between a journalist's personal life and his or her professional life. Several

policies, such as *The Los Angeles Times* and Reuters, suggest that journalists assume that there is

no divide between one's professional life and one's personal life. "The distinction between the

private and the professional has largely broken down online and you should assume that your

professional and personal social media activity will be treated as one no matter how hard you try

to keep them separate," Reuters notes. Most news organizations agreed, making bold statements

that "everything you write or receive on a social media site is public," as NPR notes.

Some policies are simpler than others. The Australian Broadcasting Corporation

demands that employees "do not mix the professional and the personal in ways likely to bring the

ABC into disrepute." NPR and *The New York Times* extend this caution to reporters expressing

personal opinions, in a similar manner to concerns about following or becoming a "fan" of a

political person or movement mentioned above. As the *Times* notes, "Anything you post online

can and might be publicly disseminated, and can be twisted to be used against you by those who

wish you or *The Times* ill — whether it's text, photographs, or video." The AP gives a

humorous illustration to distinguish personal opinions from other statements: "when tweeting,

remember that's there a big difference between providing an observation ('I nearly bumped into Chris Matthews outside Penn Station') and an opinion ('I nearly bumped into the loudmouthed and obnoxious Chris Matthews')."

Reuters recommends that its employees make a clean break between the personal and professional, setting up separate accounts for "newsgathering and professional community-building activity." *The Roanoke Times* is less restrictive, instead suggesting that social media posts "be crafted with concern for how they might reflect on our news products or our reputation for fairness and professionalism."

Confidentiality

Several social media policies demand that journalists avoid revealing confidential information. The AP forbids "posting material about the AP's internal operations," while *The Wall Street Journal* advises journalists to avoid discussing "articles that haven't been published, meetings you've attended or plan to attend with staff or sources, or interviews that you've conducted."

Reuters extends this to protecting the organization's name and brand, demanding that employees "not use social media to embarrass or disparage Thomson Reuters."

Intellectual Property

While a concern about intellectual property rights was not common in these social media policies, they were noted in different ways in a few policies. *The Roanoke Times* and NPR both made it clear that the company owned copyrights on the materials created by its employees and that employees should not violate those rights on social media. As NPR notes, linking to stories on NPR.org is fine, but employees "may not repost NPR copyrighted material to social networks without prior permission. For example, it is o.k. to link from your blog or Facebook profile to a

story of yours on the NPR site, but you should not copy the full text or audio onto a personal site or Web page."

The BBC expressed similar concerns about using creative works elsewhere on the web. Even if such pictures and videos have been published "on third party social media and other websites where the public have ready access may be considered to have been placed in the public domain," the BBC noted that reposting these would draw greater exposure and may violate copyrights of the content creators. This was the only mention of social media in the BBC's guidelines for its employees.

RQ3: Concerns & Best Practices for Strategic Communication Organizations

This question regarded the concerns of strategic communication organizations and best practices as outlined in their social media policies. After reviewing the relevant 15 policies, seven themes emerged, with several similar to the concerns addressed by journalism organizations. These themes were: Transparency, Friending, Clearances, Personal vs. Professional Use, Confidentiality, Tone, and Intellectual Property. Each of these is briefly discussed below.

Transparency

As was the case with journalism organizations, each strategic communication policy emphasized the need for professionals to be transparent. Rather than dealing with sources and subjects of coverage, however, the strategic communication policies focused more on blogging and posting comments online. These transparency guidelines parallel those in the PRSA Code of Ethics, which say that members should "(b)e honest and accurate in all communications" and "(r)eveal the sponsors for causes and interests represented."

The social media policies identify three areas of concern. The first is avoiding anonymity; as Mason, Inc., notes, "Identify yourself – State your name and (when relevant) position at Mason, Inc. When discussing Mason or Mason related matters you must write in the first person, and make it clear that you are speaking for yourself and not on behalf of Mason, Inc." Most policies, including the Navy and the Air Force, require people to identify themselves by name and title.

A second area of concern is pretending to be someone else. As Ogilvy notes in its policy, "Be Yourself: Never assume a "fake" identify in social media and always be transparent about who you are and who you represent." Ogilvy goes on to require employees to be transparent about their relationship with clients, for example, while using Twitter, "this is generally done by adding a (disc: client) or (cl) when space is limited."

Third, most policies encourage use of social media but require employees to post disclaimers about the extent of their personal comments. Mediasmith says that employees publishing a blog related to professional work, for example, should include the following: "The postings on this site are my own and don't necessarily represent Mediasmith's positions, strategies or opinions."

Ogilvy also mentions the Federal Trade Commission guidelines requiring companies to disclose payments or free products given to reviewers or other bloggers (Federal Trade Commission, 2009). Ogilvy requires its employees to "fully disclose" these relationships, and to "(n)ever talk about a product or organization in social media in exchange for cash. If you receive a product or service to review for free, you must disclose it in your post or review." DePaul University similarly advises employees to keep the FTC guidelines in mind, and the *Austin American-Statesman* makes a similar demand for its product reviewers.

Friending

Strategic communication organizations had fewer guidelines regarding who should become friends with whom through social media. Rather than demanding caution, Ogilvy urges its employees to use social media tools to "build a following" by "promot(ing) yourself and finding and sharing information that will be interesting to your friends and followers and useful for them to share." The Greteman Group also offers guidance regarding using SNS to build a network of friends, suggesting that employees use Facebook and MySpace as their "personal network," and not to feel pressured to friend "coworkers, vendors or clients." For professional networking, Greteman suggests using LinkedIn instead.

Clearance & Review

Because strategic communication professionals are representing both their organization and the clients they represent, the social media guidelines are much more specific regarding who is authorized to speak through certain social media channels.

Speaking on behalf of the organization or using social media for work purposes requires clearance from a manager at Mediasmith "to be sure that their online activities are part of their expected job duties." Ogilvy reminds its employees that they are "not an official 'spokesperson' for Ogilvy PR and there are many cases when we must leave speaking for Ogilvy up to them." Razorfish has a similar policy, noting that employees "are personally responsible for what we write on blogs including Twitter. Irresponsible blogging can risk legal action against Razorfish."

Review by superiors and receiving clearance before publishing was particularly relevant for government organizations. For obvious reasons, the Navy requires official statements regarding policy or events to be given only by commanding officers, public affairs officers or others who are authorized to speak officially through social media. The state of North Carolina

requires public information officers for each agency to develop protocols that include "firm employee boundaries" for use. The city of Seattle extends its policies specifically to Facebook and Twitter, requiring agency heads to approve of the creation of Facebook group pages for city organizations and allowing only one official Twitter account per department unless otherwise approved by the mayor's communications director.

Confidentiality

Preserving confidentiality is another great concern for strategic communication organizations, and every social media policy reviewed in this context provided some kind of guidelines regarding confidentiality. This follows the PRSA's requirement that members "(s)afeguard the confidences and privacy rights" of clients and "(p)rotect privileged, confidential, or insider information" divulged by a client.

Confidentiality concerns were manifested in three ways in the social media policies. First, strategic communication professionals should keep confidential matters regarding its clients, particularly when these matters are part of the representation agreements. Matters such as business strategies and product development are rightly the property of the clients and should not be divulged without approval of the client, as Mason notes. Permission of the client is very important. Ogilvy requires "explicit permission from your client and manager" when discussing clients or potential clients online. Razorfish provides additional detail, noting that "(e)ven acknowledging a client relationship on Twitter can violate a client privacy agreement." Greteman Group extends this to location-based social media, recommending that employees not check in on "Foursquare, Gowalla and the like" at clients' locations because "we don't want to clue in our competition on which potential (and current) clients we're visiting and when."

Second, several policies require approval from clients when quoting them or using their information on social media. Mediasmith, for example, recommends "(w)hen quoting clients, partners or suppliers, always get their approval on quotes before publishing something. It's a common courtesy that goes a long way."

Third, government and educational organizations express concerns about federal laws and other policies guaranteeing privacy of students and healthcare patients. For example, Duke University cautions against posting "confidential, proprietary or protected health information about students, employees, patients or other members of the Duke community," particularly in light of privacy laws such as the Family Education Rights and Privacy Act, which protects student academic records, and the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act, which protects patient records from disclosure by healthcare organizations.

Personal vs. Professional

Similar to news organizations, strategic communication organizations noted the blurring line between one's personal and professional life. These policies were similar, including phrases such as "everything is public" (Duke University), "do not believe anything is private" (Mediasmith), and "know you're always 'on'" (Ogilvy).

The Greteman Group offered Microsoft's "bone-simple" blogging policy as an example for its employees: "Be smart." Greteman goes on to note that the "ability to publish things that may never go away and can be forwarded endlessly, well, it gives us pause and we hope it does you, too."

Ogilvy suggests that its employees "assume that your social media usage is visible to clients, managers and prospects...be sure to manage what and with whom you are sharing." Further, Ogilvy notes that Facebook and Twitter are not the best place to air the "occasional

work frustration." DePaul cautions employees to "think before you post," and if they "feel angry

or passionate about a subject, it's wise to delay posting until you are calm and clear-headed."

Tone

Remaining calm in the face of the possibility of instantaneous publication through social

media can be difficult, and most strategic communication organizations emphasize the

importance of maintaining a civil tone when using social media.

These guidelines included obvious advice against using insults, obscene language or

ethnic slurs in online communications as part of a general call not to offend the audience

(Mediasmith) and to "(b)e civil and human" (Ogilvy).

When professional communicators are dealing with members of the public who are

arguing with them or are not engaging in such a civil tone online, they are encouraged to take the

high ground and "(b)e diplomatic," as Mediasmith notes. Mason suggests that employees

"respect the audience," and when disagreements arise, employees should not "pick fights."

When you do get in an argument, Razorfish suggests, "it's not cool to attack others with

unprofessional remarks;" rather, one should "exercise grace." Mediasmith details this further:

> Stating your position on a topic is what the digital channels are about, but don't assault
> other members of the online world if you don't see eye-to-eye. Take the high road if you
> get hassled by another blogger, community member, etc. and let it go. If you are at fault,
> be the first to correct your own mistakes.

Correcting mistakes was another common theme in these policies, reflecting the

requirement of disclosure of full information in the codes of ethics of the PRSA and the AAF.

As the PRSA notes, members should "(a)ct promptly to correct erroneous communications."

Intellectual Property

The PRSA Code of Ethics notes that members should "(p)reserve intellectual property

rights in the marketplace," and this concern permeated the social media policies of strategic

communication organizations as well. These organizations appear to want to use the social media policies as a way to remind employees to keep copyright and trademark considerations at the forefront when sharing information online.

Of particular concern is sharing images and video. As Mediasmith notes, "be aware that images, photos, music, and art work make up a good portion of copyright material and can not be used unless specified otherwise." Ogilvy also notes that words and ideas are mostly fine to share – "It's OK to quote or re-Tweet others" – as long as proper credit is given, but that employees should avoid using "language, photography, or other information" that belong to someone else.

Razorfish suggests that employees be aware of the terms of service of social media sites before using or sharing content from them. For example, videos posted on YouTube do not belong to YouTube but to the creator of the video, and permission must be received from the creator before reusing. Similarly, photographs posted on the photo-sharing site Flickr do not become public domain, but the service has partnered with the Library of Congress and Creative Commons to create a searchable database of photos that are either public domain or can otherwise be used with mere attribution rather than requiring permission and licensing in advance (Flickr, 2010).

DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION

While the social media policies for journalism organizations and for strategic communication organizations share several major themes – transparency, friending policies, clearances, the personal-professional divide, confidentiality and intellectual property – they approach these issues in different ways.

For journalism organizations, the approach seems to be much more restrictive, both in terms of what kinds of social media tools are typically used and how they should be used.

Journalism organizations mostly focused on Facebook and Twitter, and the policies about these seem largely concerned with protecting the organization's status as an objective, neutral reporter of the news. This is to be expected considering the ethical demands of the field. However, it can also be unnecessarily limiting. One of the great benefits of social media tools is enhancing interconnectivity with the audience, and the journalism organization policies seem to inhibit the ability of journalists to engage the audience in this manner. When organizations such as *The New York Times* and NPR do not allow journalists besides those in the business of providing opinions to blog about personal or political matters, it limits how the audience understands who journalists are and what they do. This policy may detract from, rather than enhance, transparency. If journalists cannot publicly "friend" some people or become fans or followers of their organizations, the audience may be left in the dark as to their motivations and affiliations.

The ideal of transparency in strategic communication social media policies is less restrictive, allowing – and even encouraging – practitioners to blog and comment openly, as long as they post disclaimers that the content does not represent the official opinions of their employers or clients. This encouragement of use, and experimentation, with social media tools stands in stark contrast to the approach of journalism organizations.

Beyond transparency matters, the social media policies reviewed in this study have several weaknesses. For one, they do not address several very important concerns of professionals. For journalism organizations, the rogue tweet of President Obama's off-the-record aside does not seem to have impacted the level of clearance by editors or managers regarding how and when information should be disseminated. While the policies mention using social media posts as sources of information and seeking clearances for breaking news, handling informal comments and items perhaps not suited for publication may fall in between the cracks

of these policies. Further, journalism organizations should approach social media in a more

expansive and inclusive manner, recognizing sites beyond Facebook and Twitter.

While strategic communication organizations have a more inclusive approach, it still may

not be inclusive enough. These organizations should come up with a coherent policy to deal

with the public's use of social media. Social media tools' great benefit is increasing engagement

with the public, but these social media policies seem only to concern how advertising and public

relations practitioners should manage their end of communication. Beyond encouraging a civil

tone when engaging the audience, strategic communication professionals do not have guidance

about dealing with parody Twitter accounts and negative reviews on sites such as Yelp and

UrbanSpoon that allow the public to evaluate the quality of restaurants and businesses.

These review sites were not mentioned in any of the policies, and location-based

applications such as Foursquare and Gowalla were only briefly mentioned. As social media

tools develop, the social media policies should adapt to handle them. Broad statements of

principles that guide engagement through social media tools can help practitioners, but specific

advice for different sites is of value as well. These policies should be constantly updated.

Further, none of the strategic communication organizations specifically mentioned how

use of social media tools should be changed during times of crisis or disaster. Crisis

communication plans should specifically incorporate social media use, but these plans should be

detailed, particularly regarding clearances regarding who must authorize public communications

through social media, in organizations' social media policies as well.

Overall, the results of this study make it clear that while individual news and strategic

communication companies have developed social media policies that provide guidance to

practitioners, there is much more work to be done to ensure that communicators understand the

benefits and risks of the broad array of social media tools. Professional organizations such as the Society of Professional Journalists, the Public Relations Society of America, and the American Advertising Federation should follow the lead of the Radio Television Digital News Association and develop social media guidelines to serve as best practices for their respective fields. These could be incorporated into existing codes of ethics or drafted as addenda that can be updated online as new tools and situations arise.

This study has some obvious limitations. The social media policies analyzed were only those that were available online or that were otherwise able to be received publicly, so they may not be representative of the policies of the thousands of journalism and strategic communication companies in existence. However, because of the consistency of the themes found in the policies reviewed and the ways they mirror professional codes of ethics, it is not unreasonable to suggest that those themes would be commonly found in other policies as well. Similarly, these policies were all examined at one particular point in time, before new technologies such as location-based applications have been fully understood or incorporated into day-to-day use by professional communicators. It would not be surprising to see informal policies in place at companies regarding these tools, even before they are put into more formal policies available to the public.

Social media tools have created a tremendous opportunity for news media, advertisers and public relations practitioners to engage with audiences. While these tools come with risks, they are also becoming used by larger and larger portions of the population, and they cannot be ignored by professional communicators. This study offers an overview of what kinds of policies and best practices are in place in the fall of 2010, and future studies should examine the policies as they change to embrace new tools and the new risks and benefits they entail.

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Appendix A: Social Media Policies & Guidelines Examined in This Study

News Organizations

Associated Press:
http://www.wired.com/images_blogs/threatlevel/2009/06/apsocialnetworkingpolicy.pdf

Austin American-Statesman: http://www.statesman.com/news/ethics-code-for-austin-american-statesman-news-editorial-284590.html

Australian Broadcasting Corporation:
http://www.socialmedia.biz/social-media-policies/australian-broadcasting-corporations-social-media-policy/

British Broadcasting Company:
http://www.bbc.co.uk/bbctrust/assets/files/pdf/our_work/editorial_guidelines/draft_ed_guidelines.pdf

Los Angeles Times:
http://latimesblogs.latimes.com/readers/2009/11/updated-social-media-guidelines.html

National Public Radio: http://www.npr.org/about/aboutnpr/ethics/social_media_guidelines.html

New York Times:
http://60secondmarketer.com/blog/2009/01/20/the-new-york-times-issues-social-media-guidelines-for-staffers/

Radio Television Digital News Association: http://www.rtdna.org/pages/media_items/social-media-and-blogging-guidelines1915.php?g=37?id=1915

Reuters:
http://handbook.reuters.com/index.php/Reporting_from_the_internet#Social_media_guidelines

The Roanoke Times: http://roanoke.com/newsservices/wb/xp-59614#47

Wall Street Journal:
http://www.socialmedia.biz/social-media-policies/wall-street-journals-social-media-policy/

Strategic Communication Organizations

Greteman Group: http://gretemangroup.com/blog/index.php/2009/01/social-media-policy/

Mason, Inc.: http://socialmediagovernance.com/Mason_Inc_SM_Policy.pdf

Mediasmith, Inc.: (provided by company, copy in files of authors)

Ogilvy Public Relations: http://blog.ogilvypr.com/2010/02/empowering-communicators-via-a-social-media-policy/

Razorfish: http://www.razorfish.com/img/content/RazorfishSIMguideWebJuly2009.pdf

Government & Educational Institutions

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention:
http://www.cdc.gov/SocialMedia/Tools/guidelines/index.html

DePaul University: http://brandresources.depaul.edu/vendor_guidelines/g_socialmedia.aspx

Duke University:
http://www.educause.edu/Resources/DukeUniversitySocialMediaPolic/217616

International Olympic Committee:
http://www.olympic.org/Documents/Reports/EN/en_report_1433.pdf

City of Seattle, Washington: http://www.seattle.gov/pan/SocialMediaPolicy.htm

State of North Carolina:
http://www.records.ncdcr.gov/guides/best_practices_socialmedia_usage_20091217.pdf

State of Texas: http://www.texas.gov/en/about/Pages/social-media-policy.aspx

U.S. Air Force: http://www.af.mil/shared/media/document/AFD-090406-036.pdf

U.S. Navy: http://www.npc.navy.mil/NR/rdonlyres/AD9DB957-11CC-4118-92F8-6CB2CD54D768/0/ALN10056.txt

University of Texas: http://www.utexas.edu/know/directory/guidelines/