

External social media and internal communication:

Insights from practitioners on an understudied dynamic

Submitted by: Brian Decker

March 30, 2023

Supervisors: Dr. Philip Savage and Dr. Terry Flynn

Course: MCM 740 Capstone Research for Communications Management

Department of Communications Studies and Multimedia

Faculty of Humanities

McMaster University

Abstract

This qualitative research study focuses on the implications of social media strategy and use by organizations on internal stakeholders, focusing on faculty and staff at postsecondary educational institutions in Ontario. An in-depth literature review of existing relevant research reveals a lack of existing studies on how and to what the relationships between internal stakeholders such as employees and the organizations they work for are affected by those organizations' external social media strategies. In-depth interviews with communications and social media practitioners at Ontario universities reveal common themes and suggest that practitioners knowingly communicate with internal stakeholders such as faculty and staff over external social media channels, yet do so without internal communication being either a priority or responsibility for their departments. Practical implications such as the opportunity for social media practitioners to solidify their roles as critical components of their organizations' communications strategy are discussed, as well as theoretical implications such as opportunities for future quantitative research into the subject.

Keywords: Internal communication, internal communication via social media, human resources management, Social Identity Theory

External social media as a tool for internal communication

The practice of internal communication has been transformed by digital technologies. With the adoption of social media, new methods for organizations to communicate with internal audiences have emerged, offering opportunities to foster culture and improve collaboration, among other benefits (Young & Hinesly, 2014; Mpandare & Li, 2020). Research around the use of social media as a tool for internal communication has been extensive, but a focus on enterprise social media (ESM) platforms like Slack and Teams instead of public-facing platforms like Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn has left critical gaps in the literature about the ways internal stakeholders view organizations' efforts on public-facing social media. Furthermore, the topic has received attention from fields such as human resources and marketing. However, with no cohesive theories or frameworks around the practice, there is ample opportunity to explore a practice that is paradoxically somewhat niche and simultaneously ubiquitous.

This research explores the use of external social media by organizations for internal communication purposes through the lens of Ontario postsecondary education institutions. Use of social media by Canadian postsecondary institutions is nearly universal (Atkins et al., 2017), and internal communication plays an important role in the industry due to the high number of and large sizes of internal audiences (Anyangwe, 2012). Critically, the study looks at a space where the way organizations behave and communicate with external audiences nonetheless has implications for relationships with internal audiences. Insights gained from in-depth interviews with experienced professionals working in the social media space for Ontario postsecondary institutions reveal important dynamics at play, and although limited to a college and university context, insights that can illuminate future study of the impacts of external social media strategy on internal stakeholders.

Literature Review

Internal communication

The multidisciplinary practice of internal communication consists of actions taken between organizational functions including public relations and human resources management (Men, 2021). The practice has seen “significant growth in recent decades as a discipline and profession” (Men, 2021, p. 1) and intensified academic study to match it. This practice includes “all formal and informal communication taking place internally at all levels of an organization,” (Kalla, 2005, p. 304), encompassing all methods and processes that take place within an organization. Effective internal communication contributes to the achievement of organizational goals by building mutual understanding of organizational and management work and tying together organizational strategy, representing in essence “both a management function and public relations specialization” (Men, 2021, p. 3).

The practice of internal communication “is simultaneously a part of various organizational functions and not really a part of any” (Tkalac Verčič, 2019, p. 195), with various departments often collaborating on the discipline. While other organizational departments such as human resources and marketing also play a role in the practice of internal communication, public relations and corporate communications practitioners “have the best understanding of internal audiences” (Tkalac Verčič & Špoljarić, 2020). Accordingly, internal communication is frequently the subject of study within the public relations discipline, though also is well-represented in fields such as organizational psychology and managerial studies (Ruck & Welch, 2012).

Publics and stakeholders

An important distinction for discussion of internal communication is the difference between internal *publics* and internal *stakeholders*. In public relations, stakeholders are “individuals or groups who affect or are affected by organizations’ decisions, policies, and communication practices” (Lee & Kim, 2021a, p. 40). Internal stakeholders are typically defined as employees, “ranging from frontline workers, line managers, and middle-level management to senior management and executives publics” (Lee & Kim, 2021a, p. 40; Men & Bowen, 2017). Conversely, *publics* are those who arise independently to recognize and act upon issues related to an organization, constituting categories such as active and passive publics within different stakeholder groups (Grunig, 2013). These publics are “the key stakeholders in effective public relations practices” (Lee & Kim, 2021a, p. 40) and represent a challenging segment for stakeholders for organizations to effectively manage relationships with, owing to the diverse and increasingly digitally literate nature of many organizations’ employees (Men, 2021; Men & Bowen, 2017). Importantly, discourse around publics constitutes an important segment of the existing literature on internal communication, owing to the increased level of multidirectional communication between organizations and their internal publics compared to that between organizations and all stakeholders (Kim & Grunig, 2011). However, discussion about internal communication with *stakeholders* remains an important part of the literature relevant to this study; not all internal stakeholders who view their organization’s social media content act upon doing so in a way that sees them rise to the definition of publics, yet these stakeholder groups and the impact of an organization’s public social media strategy remains an important consideration for public relations practitioners.

Internal communication via social media

Existing literature includes various definitions of social media as it relates to the practice of internal communications. An important distinction in existing literature is the different types of social media used for the practice. Wang and Kobsa (2009) distinguished general social networking sites, such as LinkedIn or Facebook where anyone can register and participate, from *enterprise social media*, which are “internal to the particular corporate and thus only open to its employees” (p. 975), such as company intranet sites. Enterprise social media, hereafter known as ESM, have proven benefits for organizations, from fostering connectedness between individuals and increasing overall job satisfaction (Robertson & Kee, 2017) to constructing and organizational identity that can “help coworkers make sense of the organization, and help them identify with the organization” (Madsen, 2016, p. 200). ESM often mimic the look and feel of popular social networks but have enhanced features for social tagging, document sharing and other important tasks that “provide people visibility into the communicative actions of others and the visible traces of those communicative actions” (Leonardi et al., 2013, p. 2).

While the impact of ESM on internal communication is the subject of much study, the use of external social media, or general social networks as defined by Wang and Kobsa (2009), as a tool for internal communication is less scrutinized. There is existing research to show that employees engaging with an organization’s external social media can have positive benefits, including reaching key audiences (Dreher, 2014), and that employees’ use of personal social media to create, share, and engage with content about their workplaces can contribute to organizational goals (van Zoonen et al., 2018). However, much of the existing literature focuses on managing the behaviour of employees themselves on social media to protect against negative effects on an organization’s reputation (Lee & Kim, 2020; Parker et al., 2019) or recruiting

prospective employees (Sivertzen et al., 2013; Carpentier et al., 2017; Kissel & Büttgen, 2015). Left out of the literature are the practices by which organizations can leverage external social media to perform internal communication functions with *existing* employees, such as improving reputation among employees, improving employee awareness of key initiatives, or making employees feel more of a connection between their personal identity and their organization.

The practice of internal communications over external social media represents a challenge for practitioners, where the distinction between internal and external communications can often be difficult to determine, even by an organization's own employees (Ewing et al., 2019). Employees can often react strongly to an organization's externally focused messages on social media, both negatively and positively. For example, in the wake of protests over the police killing of George Floyd in 2020, many organizations who joined the #BlackoutTuesday campaign faced backlash from employees who derided the posts as 'performative' or 'superficial' (Romano, 2020), triggering internal communications crises and exposing organizations to criticism that may negatively affect employee perceptions (Szperling, 2020). Alternatively, statements made by organizations on external social media can have powerful and positive effects among employees, including creation of group identity and fostering belonging and collaboration among employees (Yoganathan et al., 2021). Yoganathan et al. (2021) found that employee social media competencies – skill and familiarity with social media platforms and their norms – were beneficial in avoiding negative outcomes when organizations were presented with adverse or challenging situations. This suggests that organizations should devote resources not only to developing social media competencies, or at least competencies for those employees who use social media, but that improved internal communication to keep employees active and engaged with organizational social media strategy is beneficial.

Social Identity Theory

Engagement with social media content has been observed to contribute to the creation of social identity, a phenomenon “driven by an individual's need for belongingness and strengthening of self-identity” (Yoganathan et al., 2021, p. 527). The creation of this social identity can motivate consumers of social media content to behave in in myriad ways, from nurturing long-term emotional connections with brands and organizations to eventually forming bonds that lead to brand tribalism (Krishen et al., 2019). The creation of social identity is an important consideration for internal communications practitioners, who are invested in the creation of meaningful connection between their organizations and its employees. The successful creation of connection between organizations and employees through social identity accomplishes many of the same goals of enterprise social media, from improving job satisfaction (Robertson & Kee, 2017) to helping employees make sense of their organization’s purpose and their role within it (Madsen, 2016).

Human resource management and external social media

Human resource management (HRM) involves the bringing together of organizations and people together so that the goals of each are met, with mutual contributions leading to the optimization of four main components: environment, organization, job and individual (Hall, 1986). Internal communication, along with the related concept of internal marketing (IM) differ slightly in their application from HRM, but each concept contributes to a holistic philosophy of organizational relations with internal groups (Sincic Coric & Poloski Vokic, 2009). Internal marketing considers employees to be the “first market” (Sincic Coric & Poloski Vokic, 2009, p. 88) of an organization, and thus treats employees as a type of customer. Alternatively, practitioners of HRM aim “enable organizations to be successful through their people” (Sincic

Coric & Poloski Vokic, 2009, p. 94), thus creating a unique and symbiotic relationship between management and employees that differs from an organization's relationship with customers.

The concept of 'employer brand' describes when organizations aim to improve their attractiveness to prospective employees, as well as positively influence perceptions among internal stakeholders (Prinzlauer, 2022). Ambler and Barrow (1996) initially defined the term as “the package of functional, economic, and psychological benefits provided by employment, and identified with the employing company” (Ambler & Barrow, 1996, p. 3), with the ongoing relationship providing mutual benefit to both employer and employee. The concept of employer brand stems from the need for employers to first establish a solid relationship with internal stakeholders before credibly building an external brand: “To develop a strong employer brand image externally, there must first exist a good internal relationship between employees and their employer's brand” (Yoganathan et al., 2021, p. 524).

Where social media is involved, much of the HRM-focused literature around internal communication focuses on prospective employees, with some studies differing in their findings on how impactful external social media can be on employee recruitment efforts. Tanwar & Kumar (2019) found that external social media channels can have a ‘moderating effect’ against other factors in becoming an employer of choice, and that content that expresses company values can “market the necessary knowledge required by the target audience” when competing with other organizations for potential employee recruits (p. 816). Carpentier et al. (2019) posited that organizations “can use social media pages to manage key recruitment outcomes by signaling their employer brand personality” (p. 1). The authors found evidence to suggest potential employees examine organizations' social media pages “to infer employer brand personality, which in turn positively relates to organizational attractiveness and word-of-mouth intentions”

(Carpentier et al., 2019, p.12). In study of nurses' exposure to the Facebook pages of hospitals, Carpentier et al. (2017) found that interaction with the pages led to improved employer attractiveness and concluded that "Hospitals can thus employ social media to improve their employer brand image and attractiveness" (Carpentier et al., 2017, p. 2696). Similarly, Sivertzen et al. (2013) showed evidence that organizational values expressed over social media that measurably improve corporate reputation can in turn have positive impacts on intentions by prospective employees to apply for a job with that organization.

Conversely, Kissel & Büttgen (2015) showed evidence that social media reputation alone does not overcome a holistic impression potential employees have of an organization, and instead that social media "represent a tool to manage the whole corporate brand, not just the employer brand" (p. 770) and consistent brand messaging across media is ultimately a requirement to aid employee recruitment efforts. Additionally, the authors recommended that "employer brand should be strongly consistent with the firm's corporate brand to maintain a nearly identical image across relevant stakeholder groups" (p. 770) and that appeals to prospective employees would make more sense on career-focused sites than general external social media. Men and Bowen (2017) noted that in an increasingly connected and online age, communication meant for either external or internal audiences can transcend boundaries and travel to other audiences instantaneously, thus adding to the importance of consistency in messaging across platforms. Ewing et al. (2019) found that aligning content and messages to be consistent for internal and external audiences did positively impact employee engagement, especially when consistent across multiple platforms, and that practitioners should expect that anything meant for internal audiences could be shared externally, placing importance on consistency between internal and external content. These findings suggest that while efforts to

create external social media content with the specific end goal of recruiting employees may not be particularly impactful, there are nonetheless positive effects on employee recruitment when employer brand on external platforms matches employer brand in more targeted, recruitment-focused media such as job postings and targeted advertising.

The existing literature around human resources management and internal communications performed over external social media thus leave two notable topics unanswered. Firstly, these studies refer to organic social media content and not paid or targeted advertising on social media towards prospective employees, a thread that while interesting is outside the scope of this study. What is relevant to this study as a gap in the literature is the lack of discussion around *current* employee engagement with organizations' external social media content, namely processes by which organizations both seek out opportunities to create content and build understanding and consensus among internal stakeholders about their social media strategy. In other words, there is little discussion about the ways organizations might inform their employees about what they plan to post on social media, why they are doing it, how it might impact or interact with employees, and any other dynamics that could ultimately affect those employees' relationship with their employer.

Uses of social media by Canadian postsecondary institutions

Use of external social media by Canadian postsecondary institutions is widespread, especially for the marketing and communications utility provided by platforms (Atkins et al., 2017). A frequently cited study by Bélanger et al. (2014) explored the uses of external social media by Canadian universities and found that most institutions replicated strategies employed in the corporate world, focusing on news, announcements, and marketing content. As opposed to

engaging stakeholders in two-way communication, this type of content strategy is “directed towards a general audience with little or no two-way social interaction, which more or less could be compared to a traditional broadcasting marketing approach” (Bélanger et al., 2014, p. 23). Notably for this study, the authors stated that this represents a missed opportunity by institutions to engage in meaningful brand-building with internal audiences, amount to a “failure to embrace an inside-out approach to brand development” (Bélanger et al., 2014, p. 17). Among most beneficial gains to be found by engaging internal stakeholders on social media is the opportunity to tap into individuals’ own networks of social contacts by turning staff, faculty and students into brand ambassadors, a strategy that is “key to increasing the range of audiences, both nationally and internationally” (Bélanger et al., 2014, p. 27). Further, the authors cite work by Whisman (2009) to show that the employment of an externally focused, marketing-style approach to social media is emblematic of universities’ long-standing tendency to overlook internal audiences. These audiences, instead of being engaged with dialogue, are overlooked as an organization’s “most valuable intangible asset” (Whisman, 2009, p. 370). Bélanger et al. suggest that failure to engage with internal stakeholders and leverage their social networks amounts to not only a missed opportunity, but an organizational risk because arbitrarily operating social media accounts without purpose can be just as harmful as having no social media presence at all (2014).

Given that this research is nearly a decade old, it would be short sighted to suggest that the ways higher education institutions in Canada use social media has not changed, especially given the constantly changing nature of social platforms themselves. A more recent study by Mai To et al. (2022) examined the ways Canadian universities and colleges navigated an increasingly competitive landscape by employing external social media to define brand position and engage with students. The authors found that while institutions employed differing strategies depending

on size and type (namely colleges versus universities), the institutions “were found to hold similar ideas, content, messaging, and key strategies rather than promoting significantly distinctive features” (Mai To et al., 2022, p. 15). The authors cited work by Peruta and Shields (2018) that categorized Facebook posts by universities and found that content related to ‘admin and staff’ represented less than 10% of posts, and that such posts “were shown to lower engagement” (p. 186) when proportionally compared other categories such as news, promotions, and athletics. Similarly, Veletsianos et al., (2017) found that Canadian higher education institutions had varying levels of engagement with audiences on Twitter, but ultimately used the platform in limited ways and defaulted predominantly to broadcasting-style content. While institutions frequently engaged with individual users, these conversations “were used predominantly for branding and marketing” (p. 16) and were consistent with Bélanger’s (2014) assertion that the overall purpose of the organizations’ use of Twitter was a “desire to convey a positive brand to market the university to potential students and other stakeholders” (Veletsianos et al., 2017, p. 15).

Pringle and Fritz (2019) examined branding-focused content posted on social media by select Canadian universities, exploring the ways brand promises made on Twitter and Facebook contribute to the authenticity of those promises in the perceptions of their audiences. The authors found that such content is fraught with opportunities for dissidents to use such brand promises against the institutions when they are inconsistent with their actions, such as statements about creating job opportunities while certain staff were in a labour dispute. A recommendation was made for institutions to invest resources in “creating both engaging and authentic content that can be expressed through multiple touch points” (Pringle & Fritz, 2019, p. 40), suggesting that content that aligns with a broader internal communications strategy has merits.

These studies paint a picture of Canadian postsecondary institutions using external social media in much the same as the corporate world, with the bulk of literature suggesting that individual level engagement and two-way communication are not a main strategy employed by colleges and universities. However, missing in these discussions is the practitioners' perspective on the implications these strategies have on internal stakeholders, regardless of whether they are intended as primary audiences for content. Whether institutions use external social media as a tool to engage in direct conversation with followers or not, internal stakeholders such as employees and faculty are going to view and engage with their institution's social content. The degree to which the implications of this reality are accounted for by social media managers is at once an important consideration for practitioners and yet also absent from the literature.

Research problem: Significance and purpose of the study

The growing field of internal communication has received increased attention in recent years as an "accepted and emphasized" strategy for organizational success (Tkalac Verčič, 2021, p.1), inspiring new academic research of the ways internal communication is performed using emerging technologies. Among these technologies, perhaps none has been as widely adopted as social media, inspiring extensive academic discourse and analysis. By 2014, the practice of using social media for internal communications was widely accepted as a method of improving "internal efficiency, team collaboration, innovation, organizational alignment, and cultural transformation" (Young & Hinesly, 2014, p. 426). This has led to academic research in several fields, including human resources and stakeholder management. However, gaps remain in the literature and key considerations have been largely unaddressed about how internal stakeholders are considered and impacted by organizational strategy on external social media platforms, such as LinkedIn and Twitter. These gaps are important to explore as part of the ongoing literature

around modern internal communication; with the widespread use of social media by organizations (Atkins et al., 2017), the implications of the ways internal stakeholders interact with content meant primarily for external audiences is an important contemporary communication practice that justifies future study.

The gaps in the literature around external social media as an internal communications tool appear for two main reasons. Firstly, the bulk of existing research focuses on *enterprise social media* (ESM), a set of technologies that are “internal to the particular corporate and thus only open to its employees” (Wang & Kobsa, 2009, p. 975). Incorporating features of Web 2.0, ESM “usually offer similar networking features as that of a public social networking site” but limit access to members within an organization (Sharma & Bhatnagar, 2016, p. 16). Modern examples of ESM include Slack, Lync, Jive, Skype for Business, IBM connections, Yammer, Workplace by Facebook and Chatter (Mpandare & Li, 2020). Notably, these do not include social media they way they are typically understood outside of the internal communication discourse, including platforms such as LinkedIn, Facebook and Twitter, where employees and internal stakeholders nonetheless view and engage with content from their organizations.

Secondly, a number of silos exist within the academic literature on social media as an internal communications tool. Much of the discussion within the field of human resources management looks at the internal communication utility of social media through the lens of employee recruitment, including the concept of employer brand, which describes efforts to positively influence organizational perceptions among prospective employees (Prinzlau, 2022). Alternatively, strategic management scholars have examined organizational use of social media through the lens of risk management, under the premise that internal stakeholders who post their

own content to publicly visible social media channels may create messages that are undesirable or even damaging to the organization (Miles & Mangold, 2014).

The focus of this study is to take a holistic view of the ways practitioners use external social media, exploring the degree to which internal stakeholders are considered in strategy. The study aims to analyze any common themes and insights in the practice, and if applicable, identify areas for future study. The research will build upon the literature around internal communication by scholars such as Linjuan Rita Men and Ana Tkalac Verčič, whose influential textbook *Evolving research and practices in internal communication* (2021) and other prominent research provide much of the foundation for the modern discourse on internal communication. In addition, given the focus of this research on Canadian postsecondary institutions, an oft-cited study by Bélanger, Suchita Bai, and Longden (2014) on the uses of external social media by Canadian universities provides a foundation from which to study the industry's current practices and the dynamics at work for the practitioners interviewed in this study. By focusing on the niche area of the ways *internal* audiences interact with *external* social media content, this research aims to build upon the foundational work by these scholars to provide new insights and areas for future research.

Research Questions

To understand how and to what extent public-facing social media are used for internal communication purposes by communications practitioners at Canadian postsecondary institutions, this research study focuses on the following research questions:

RQ1: *Who do post-secondary social media practitioners consider to be internal stakeholders?*

The purpose of this question is to understand who industry professionals consider to be their

internal stakeholders. This question is important because it is conceivable that some post-secondary practitioners consider different groups, including staff, faculty, students and alumni, as internal stakeholders, while some may consider those same groups – particularly students and alumni – as more akin to customers.

RQ2: *How and to what extent are internal audiences considered as an audience when post-secondary practitioners craft their public-facing organizational social media strategy?* The purpose of this question is to explore the degree to which practitioners consider the impact of their public-facing social media strategy on internal audiences and whether those implications have any practical effect on strategy or execution.

RQ3: *How and to what extent do post-secondary social media practitioners create content centered around internal stakeholders, such as faculty or staff, as part of their organizational social media strategy?* The purpose of this question is to examine the degree to which internal stakeholders appear in or otherwise play a role in the creation of content by communications and social media departments.

RQ4: *How and to what extent do other organizational departments, such as human resources or management, apply pressure to practitioners to create content centered around internal stakeholders, such as faculty or staff, or consider internal stakeholders in organizational social media strategy?* The purpose of this question is to examine the degree to which any content related to internal stakeholders is influenced by other departments within organizations, and whether ownership of this task is shared between departments.

Research Methodology

This study was performed using two qualitative research methods: an extended literature review, and in-depth interviews performed with social media practitioners at universities and colleges in Ontario. First, an extensive review of the existing literature around internal communication and internal communication performed via social media was conducted, with the goal of building an understanding of relevant themes in similar or even adjacent topics. This was followed then by a review of other topics that appeared regularly in the initial review, such as social identity theory and human resources management. Finally, a review of the existing research on social media use by Canadian postsecondary institutions was conducted to evaluate the current state of the practice.

An extended literature review and in-depth interviews were chosen as methods for this study due to the relatively unknown nature of this specific topic. Given that external social media platforms are used primarily for marketing, news and announcement-type content facing towards external audiences (Wang & Kobsa, 2009; Bélanger et al., 2014), little research exists on internal audiences' interactions with such content. Thus, an extended literature review was chosen to explore any insight to be gained from adjacent research, such as internal communication performed via enterprise social media and employee recruitment on external social media, with the goal of establishing a baseline of existing literature and any differences that may exist between different disciplines.

Secondly, in-depth interviews were conducted with practitioners currently responsible for creating and executing social media strategy for Canadian colleges and universities (n = 10). Interview candidates were recruited, after gaining McMaster Research Ethics Board approval, using the researcher's network of contacts through the McMaster University Master of

Communications Management program and were contacted by email and the researcher's personal LinkedIn account. Interviews lasting between 30 and 60 minutes took place over Zoom, with audio recordings then transcribed and analyzed for themes and recurring sentiment. Questions were asked of post-secondary communications and social media professionals to determine what, if any, considerations these practitioners give to internal communications through external social media, with the end goal of establishing the most critical implications and themes to be explored with future research in this exploratory field of study.

Analysis of the interview responses was performed with the goal of identifying any common themes discussed by interview subjects, with the intent of summarizing any themes if and when data saturation was reached.

Postsecondary institutions in Ontario were chosen as a specific area of study for the in-depth interviews. The focus on a single industry in a single province was chosen to produce a study of appropriate scope, so as to apply reliable findings across interview subjects and create a foundation from which future research can be applied to further contexts.

Results

Interview participants were sought after and carefully selected in consultation with the research supervisor. Seeking interviewees responsible for creating and executing social media strategy at Canadian colleges and universities, the researcher conducted in-depth interviews with individuals (n=10) in various positions at their respective institutions. Critically, the researcher sought to interview not only individuals who oversaw strategic planning of social media content, but those involved with content production and execution as well. Additionally, the researcher sought to interview individuals involved with social media strategy and execution for their respective main institutional brands, as well as those working at the sub-department level, such

as the Office of University Advancement or the Faculty of Business. This was done to gain a broad understanding of the way individuals working in these differing positions approached their relationship to external social media strategy and, if applicable, their relationships to internal communication.

Interview subjects represented seven different institutions in Ontario, including:

<i>Institution</i>	<i>Number of Practitioners Interviewed</i>
Wilfrid Laurier University	2
McMaster University	2
Queen's University	2
York University	1
King's University College	1
University of Toronto Mississauga	1
Conestoga College	1

Interview subjects also represented different departments within their institutions, ranging from the overall institutional level to faculties and other sub-departments. Included in this study are interviewees from the following departments. The specific names of faculties or departments have been withheld to anonymize the participants.

<i>Institution</i>	<i>Departmental Affiliation</i>
Overall institution level	6
Individual faculty level	2
Advancement/Alumni Relations	1
Senior Administration Office	1

All institutions represented by the interviewees in this study are in Ontario. Initially, the researcher sought to interview practitioners at institutions across Canada. However, the sample was limited to Ontario institutions for two reasons. First, Ontario's postsecondary education sector is by far the largest in Canada, with 23 universities and 24 colleges (Government of Ontario, 2022) representing the most of any province or territory. Second, Ontario's

postsecondary institutions include several of the world's most prestigious institutions, accounting for six of the top 250 schools in the QS World University Rankings (Ontario's Universities, n.d.) – three times as many as any other province. This meant that the province's postsecondary schools provided a broad and prestigious enough sample of institutions to justify limiting the study to Ontario only, making findings more applicable as a larger sample of the province's population of practitioners.

The researcher also aimed to speak to practitioners at an equal number of universities and colleges to focus on the entire postsecondary sector. However, upon initial conversations with interviewees and the research supervisor, a determination was made to limit interviews to practitioners at universities due to the difference in faculty governance structure at the two types of institutions; where all college faculty in Ontario are unionized, university faculty in the province belong to varying types of representative organizations, ranging from unions to faculty associations.

Finally, this study was limited to 10 interviews after the researcher began to reach saturation in the insights provided by interviewees. After the sixth interview, the researcher noted many similar themes amongst the responses, and in consultation with the research supervisor, made the decision to limit the number of interviewees to no more than 10. The insights found in the in-depth interviews are discussed below:

Internal stakeholders and audiences

Notably, only one of the ten interviewees listed internal communications (or a similar term) when asked about their primary responsibilities, and only one additional interviewee said that internal audiences were the primary audience on one of the institution's five main social media platforms. Responses instead listing duties such as "top of funnel awareness,"

“community outreach” and “media, government and external relations” were most common. The one interviewee who did cite internal communications as a primary focus of their role works for a senior administration official’s office, with a portfolio that includes overseeing faculty support. This was the first of several notable differences between the insights from the practitioner who worked in the senior administration official’s office and the other interviewees. However, all practitioners agreed that internal stakeholders were a relevant, if secondary, audience for the social media content produced by their departments.

Addressing the first research question (‘Who do post-secondary social media practitioners consider to be internal stakeholders?’), interviews yielded differing and often contradictory opinions about who precisely those internal stakeholders are for Canadian postsecondary institutions. While all interviewees agreed that faculty and staff are internal stakeholders, differences emerged in the categorization of current students. While the prevailing literature around internal communication typically defines internal stakeholders or those within an organization as employees, “ranging from frontline workers, line managers, and middle-level management to senior management and executives” (Lee & Kim, 2021b, p.40), it is notable that some of the participants interviewed for this study nonetheless considered students to be internal stakeholders.

The belief that students constituted internal stakeholders was not unanimous among interviewees. One practitioner responsible for crafting social media strategy said that current and prospective students were the main audience for their accounts, and that while they held a belief that “most of marketing is making people feel good about decisions they’ve already made,” students were more akin to customers than internal stakeholders. This practitioner believed that their foremost responsibility was to raise the reputation of their school: “we don’t feel it’s really

important to communicate to people who already work here about what we do, but it would be better to talk to people outside of that and get new eyeballs and attention.” Another worker responsible for social media strategy at their institution said that current and prospective students were their primary audience, and that reaching those groups as part of their department’s mandate. This perspective was also shared by another practitioner who managed social media content strategy and execution for the institution-level accounts at the same university, who took the perspective that students were their most important audience because they “pay the bills,” suggesting again that students are akin to customers. These two practitioners both pointed instead to faculty members and staff as their main internal audiences, pointing out that other channels existed to communicate with these stakeholders including intranet sites, email lists, enterprise social media and physical message boards, and that any perceptions internal audiences would have on organizational social media content would be mediated by the additional context provided in the other internal communication channels. Another practitioner responsible for communications strategy for their university’s institution-level social media channels echoed the sentiment that students were their primary their audience, saying that “they don’t read emails, and we’ve spent a lot of time trying to meet them where they’re at, and for us that’s on social media.”

Other interviewees revealed beliefs that their operating definition of internal stakeholders included students. One practitioner described current students as one of several groups constituting an overall community of internal stakeholders along with faculty and staff, suggesting a belief that this group interacted with content in similar ways, including using social media news feeds as a source for updates about need-to-know events like weather-related campus closures and faculty strikes. This person agreed that other channels for internal

communication, such as intranet sites and emails were also used for internal communication but suggested that in an era where social media use is widespread, that current students and other internal stakeholders would likely check the college's social media channels for critical information well in advance of using those other channels. Thus, students were grouped together with other internal audiences like faculty and staff to form a larger group to consider when integrating the dissemination of update-type information into social media strategy. Another practitioner at a large Ontario university also mentioned that this type of content was an important part of their strategy, sharing the same sentiment that weather-related updates were an important responsibility of the social media content team, and that such communication was by definition internal. Furthermore, this individual suggested that although their university had actually created a mobile phone app to provide updates on weather and safety-related campus closures, a large portion of internal stakeholders prefer to use social media, especially Twitter, to get timely updates and official university information. Because current students are included in this group, this individual suggested that they were by definition at least partly an internal audience.

One practitioner from a medium-sized Ontario university indicated a belief that while faculty and staff were their primary internal audiences, students straddled the line between internal and external and that that some content targeted towards these groups would also make it on their public-facing social channels when it either reflected well on the institution or had broader applicability to the greater community, such as promotion of a campus event. The same individual suggested that their primary objective as a social media manager was promotion and maintenance of their institution's overall brand, and that internal communication was not a primary concern of their job because of the difficulty in controlling which audiences view

organic social media content. In other words, this practitioner suggested that because their focus is on brand reputation and projecting a desirable image of the institution, determining who is and isn't an internal audience is irrelevant to their job.

Another worker responsible for crafting communications strategy for their university's office of advancement indicated a belief that alumni constituted internal stakeholders "because they have an ongoing stake in the university" due to the value they place on their degrees, and that such a relationship "depends on how the University behaves currently." Further, this practitioner indicated that because they are trying to make alumni feel like internal stakeholders by "building a connection with them after they're gone," they and their colleagues try to adopt a mentality of thinking of alumni as internal stakeholders.

Content featuring staff

A consistent theme that emerged from in-depth interviews was the prevalent use of social media posts that featured employees and staff, addressing the third research question ('How and to what extent do post-secondary social media practitioners create content centered around internal stakeholders, such as faculty or staff, as part of their organizational social media strategy?'). Repeatedly, workers responsible for their organizations' external social media platforms pointed to content that highlighted success stories or achievements of faculty members as an important part of their content strategy. One practitioner from a mid-size Ontario university's business school pointed to a regularly occurring type of post on their LinkedIn and Facebook pages, where media stories quoting faculty members, such as news articles, are shared. The practitioner described such posts as "a celebration of staff success" and said that doing so helped foster a sense that the school was keeping in touch with what faculty were doing in their own fields. This sentiment was shared by a practitioner at a large Ontario college who said that

content linking to media stories featuring faculty members typically produced higher than normal engagement rates on LinkedIn, especially from fellow staff and faculty members. One worker indicated that in contrast to other channels such as newsletters, external social media posts were an important tool for recognizing staff and faculty because of the ease with which the friends and family of those stakeholders could see them. Another practitioner from an Ontario university's business school pointed to this type of content as perfect for performing a key objective of their office's mission of elevating the school's reputation, saying he and his team were constantly "spotlighting" the research and successes of their faculty, with examples such as a quotation from a professor invited to speak at a conference or the appointment of a professor to a directorship at the university. One practitioner who works under a senior administration official indicated that not only was content promoting the achievements of faculty and staff important to their content strategy, but went so far as to say they deliberately ensured such content constituted at least a certain percentage of the overall content posted online by their office's accounts, employing a 'scorecard' to ensure such content was equitable and representative of different university groups. This practitioner went on to add that doing so was important because the senior administration official can't be everywhere on campus and can't engage and interact with everyone, but that by showing deliberate engagement with different groups – including a representative sample of each faculty – they could demonstrate a commitment to fairness and inclusivity:

I think that what's working... is being intentional and keeping track to make sure that I'm speaking to all of the stakeholder groups through the [official's] account, because my understanding going into this position is that people do feel left out. People do want to

get noticed. It does make a difference for them. And so, if you can be intentional and mindful that works well.

This motive to show and engage in real two-way communication with internal stakeholders is a rare example of an institution capitalizing on the missed opportunities described by Bélanger et al. (2014) instead of only posting marketing-style content focused on reputation and external audiences. This use of external social media channels to communicate with internal stakeholders calls to attention the second research question ('How and to what extent are internal audiences considered as an audience when post-secondary practitioners craft their public-facing organizational social media strategy?'). The staff member working under a senior administration official being the only practitioner to indicate that internal stakeholders were a primary audience for their public-facing content strategy is notable, as no other practitioners indicated this to be true for their roles.

Interviews also yielded examples of content focused on staff members beyond faculty. A practitioner from a large Ontario university pointed to the substantial number of staff at his institution as an opportunity to access a wealth of stories that could engender connection with the surrounding community. This type of content, such as highlighting the efforts of a librarians' Christmas food donation drive, not only serves to position the institution as a good actor in the community but helps make content more inclusive and representative due to the wider range of socioeconomic status, racial diversity and physical abilities present in a group as extensive as the university's staff.

Interviewees were unanimous in their agreement that this type of content is not created as an internal communications initiative first and foremost. Rather, a consistent refrain from interviewees was that such content aids practitioners in achieving their marketing and public

relations goals, such as enhancing the reputation and image of the institutions they work for. Speaking specifically about a charitable initiative by administrative staff, one worker from a large Ontario university said, “we tell that story widely because we want our community to know that (our) staff members do all these great things,” suggesting a need to engender trust and credibility within their community at large. Another social media manager at a medium-sized Ontario university said that they had seen content about a “beloved” longtime professor perform well in generating organic impressions and engagement, and that they believed such content was additive to their efforts to elevate the university’s brand in the community. Another practitioner from an Ontario university’s business faculty said that such content was helpful in “bringing some oxygen” to the messaging that their school was a good community actor in addition to a prestigious institution. Critically, this person added that they understood the internal communications benefit of this content, even if it was not by design: “People work really hard, and they want to see the lighter side of that reflected with a sense of accomplishment and friendship.”

The perspectives shared by interviewees on featuring faculty and staff stories in social media posts suggest that this type of content is not conceived of primarily to build connection with the staff and faculty who are featured, but instead to utilize the prestige, accomplishments and other desirable traits shown by these people as a means of enhancing the reputation and image of the institutions they work for. However, the ancillary benefits of employees or faculty feeling an increased sense of connection with their employer due to their accomplishments or efforts being shared to a wider audience are nonetheless understood and acknowledged by practitioners, implying that whether by intent or not, they are performing an internal communications function.

Planned vs. Unplanned content

Whether social media managers at Canadian postsecondary institutions seek out content relating to internal stakeholders or these content opportunities present themselves to practitioners is a question left unanswered definitively by these interviews. Interviewees shared a range of opinions on how they sourced social media content related to internal, from performing a role akin to an in-house reporter on one end of the spectrum, to filtering through content opportunities that flowed into practitioners. While common themes were present among interviews, a diversity of thought exists on how this part of a social media manager's role should be performed.

One practitioner at the business school of a mid-sized Ontario university implied that they never spend any time searching for content opportunities related to staff or faculty because they are overwhelmed with an inflow of messages and requests to share stories: "It's very rare we have to go looking for content... telling stories about faculty winning awards or appointment notices is pretty much always available to us." Another practitioner at the institutional level of the same university went on to say that their department not only receives a large amount of requests to post staff and faculty related content, but that they typically receive such requests without much advance notice and occasionally struggle to fit requests into already-established content schedules, to the point that they began to assign different individuals the responsibility of having dialogue with different university departments to avoid situations like the above. Paradoxically, this appears to be an extreme reversal of the 'in-house reporter' role: instead of having practitioners seek out content opportunities among internal stakeholders, staff are required to build relationships with those internal stakeholders to avoid logjams of *too many* content opportunities presenting themselves. Multiple interviewees independently referred to the practice of assessing content opportunities related to internal stakeholders as 'triage,' suggesting

that they ultimately spent more time and resources sorting through content opportunities that came to them instead of seeking them out.

On the other end of the spectrum, however, is the act of seeking out content opportunities to be added to an existing content schedule. This act was referenced in multiple interviews, including by one practitioner at an Ontario college who said they had set up an email address and instructed (and even reminded) professors to send content opportunities to as a way to keep track of requests. The same person also indicated that this tactic alone was insufficient and that they employed social listening (Newberry & Macready, 2022) on LinkedIn, Twitter, and Instagram to monitor opportunities for content among staff and faculty. Another practitioner indicated that they monitored a third-party message board about their school as a means of seeking out potential staff and student-related stories, and that they even relied on user generated content such as photos taken and posted by event participants as a way to augment their existing content strategy. One practitioner designed a communications plan that defined what type of content was appropriate for their channels and spent time distributing and explaining it to other departments within the university, with the goal of building awareness of content opportunities available to staff and faculty, while limiting the number of requests that would ultimately need to be declined.

Interviews yielded a range of perspectives on how best to navigate the question of searching for content opportunities related to internal stakeholders versus allowing those opportunities to present themselves. These perspectives are likely influenced by several variables, including the size of the institutions and the number of staff and faculty they employ, along with the sophistication of any existing communications frameworks such as internal message boards where social media practitioners might be able to look out for content

opportunities. What is consistent among the interviews, however, is that regardless of *how* practitioners perform this task, it is a significant part of social media managers' job responsibilities.

Managing expectations

An emerging theme throughout the in-depth interviews was the need for practitioners to have alternative outlets to funnel content opportunities towards when they did not rise to the level of or were inconsistent with their organization's social media strategy. The practitioners were nearly unanimous in their belief that the content posted on their main social media channels – typically Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and LinkedIn – were subject to highly curated and closely managed content strategies. As part of this, practitioners mentioned that they were often approached by internal stakeholders with requests to share content or had content opportunities recommended to them, only to determine that doing so would be inconsistent with their strategy. This meant that practitioners typically either had to refuse the requests or find another more appropriate outlet for the content. As an example, one practitioner mentioned being approached by a professor who requested social media content be posted about the release of the fourth edition of their textbook, a request that fell short of the communications department's established threshold for relevance, saying "it didn't really showcase or demonstrate how the college is impacting the community." Another worker at an Ontario university said this area of their role was particularly fraught because requests from internal stakeholders to share specific content could result in issues management problems, especially related to politically charged content. This worker used the hypothetical example of a professor who had made either critical remarks about the institution or otherwise public statements that were inconsistent with the university's brand then requesting to have content shared about a book they had written. In such a

circumstance, the worker indicated that having other department-specific social media pages were useful as more appropriate destination where the content would resonate with a smaller, more niche audience.

A frequent challenge faced by practitioners managing these interactions with internal stakeholders is the growing familiarity with social media among individuals who do not work in the space. As one practitioner put it: “all people think they understand social media, and when you’re dealing with really smart people who teach communications or marketing, sometimes they think they know how to do your job better than you do.” Another practitioner offered a strikingly similar sentiment, saying that while such circumstances were rare, they occasionally encountered feedback from internal stakeholders who believed they were doing a favour to the social media managers by suggesting a content opportunity. In such circumstances, this practitioner said it was helpful to employ some of the individual features of social media platforms that did not amount to creating original content but still produced some level of engagement, such as using the institutional account to leave a supportive comment on a professor’s personal LinkedIn post or adding a professor’s individual Instagram post to the institution’s Instagram story.

A practitioner at a university’s business school said that they had devoted time and resources into building a “robust” and “accessible” social media strategy that could be used as justification when either denying or finding an alternative platform for a request from an individual stakeholder to post content. This worker added that this was one of several factors in what they described as “a balancing act” between content that they know “will get great traction and engagement, and things that we know are important strategically for the school.” In relying on the bulwark of an established strategy framework (especially one endorsed by practitioners’

superiors), this worker essentially outlined a built-in strategy for dealing with internal stakeholders, suggesting that whether intentional or not, they had taken internal communications seriously when building their external social media strategy. Similarly, another worker who had designed a communications plan to define what types of content were and were not appropriate for their channels said that such a plan acted as a buffer and that they “just tell people it’s not in the plan, and people go away.” However, the same worker said that they also maintained other channels, such as a department website, that received limited traffic yet still acted as a landing spot for content requests or obligations that were not relevant for external social media channels.

One communications practitioner responsible for overseeing their institution’s overall social media strategy pointed to a member of their staff who is a “people person” as being a particularly important asset to their team. The practitioner described a large portion of this staff member’s role as being a “front line connector” who could be “put in front of anyone institutionally” and manage the complexities of two-way symmetrical communication between the communications department and other departments within the institution. This practitioner indicated having someone not only to perform this role but to excel in it was critical to their department’s success because they depended on a two-way flow of information. They went on to offer up the hypothetical example of not wanting to upset a faculty member by turning down their request for certain social media content because, “at some point you might need to call that person for something as well, so you want to make sure we’re establishing that relationship and maintaining it in a meaningful, authentic way.” Underscoring the point, the practitioner concluded this point by saying the process of sourcing social media content opportunities is “a two-way conversation with content with flying in both directions, not from one top down, and we have to really be understanding of how we approach it.”

From having transparent and visible content plans to deftly managing relationships with internal stakeholders, the interviews suggest it is clear that being prepared to deal with internal stakeholders' points of view in relation to external social media is a regular consideration for social media and communications practitioners.

Content with internal stakeholders as a primary audience

Several practitioners mentioned the utility of external social media as channels to reach internal stakeholders in unique circumstances, such as during a crisis or campus closures. Multiple practitioners pointed to Twitter as a useful platform to communicate timely updates for weather-related campus closures, noting that in such cases they believed Twitter was the first place internal stakeholders would look for information – even before traditional internal communications channels such as email or an intranet site. As one worker noted: “to an external audience, what do they care if the sidewalks are closed? But for our internal audience, it's crucial that they need to know that information.” Another worker cited anecdotal evidence to suggest that even channels established explicitly for these kinds of updates, such as an app or internal messaging service, were inferior to Twitter for such updates because staff and faculty are conditioned to using social media, especially, Twitter for up-to-date information in other areas of their lives outside of work.

Beyond the utility of breaking news-style updates, however, interviews yielded no evidence to suggest that practitioners post content on external social media with the explicit intention of primarily communicating to internal audiences. In fact, several practitioners pointed out the risks of creating content for social media with a minority of their overall audience in mind. One practitioner recalled the ‘Blackout Tuesday’ phenomenon of 2020 in which many organizations posted simple black square images on their Instagram accounts in lieu of regularly

scheduled content to show solidarity with black and other visible minority audiences, including internal stakeholders (Romano, 2020; Szperling, 2020). The practitioner referred to such content as “performative posting,” suggesting that such a strategy often backfires on communications teams because of the criticism and backlash it can generate, especially from internal stakeholders with knowledge of the organization, leading to more work and ultimately counterproductive if not harmful results. Another practitioner tasked with overseeing social media strategy for their school’s office of advancement also referred to performative content, relaying the story of a staff member who had scheduled social media content celebrating a religious holiday and ultimately having to overrule it being posted because it could lead to criticism about other religious holidays they had not also posted content for (and would not, due to such content becoming an overwhelming majority of their posts). While both practitioners mentioned were not explicitly referring to a specific segment of internal stakeholders as the intended audience for such content, the salient point among these examples is that some practitioners believe there are risks involved in straying from core social media strategy to make certain audiences feel more connected to or seen by an organization. A third practitioner relayed the negative effects of creating content that required further action or engagement on the part of social media managers, suggesting that content that creates further engagement – especially negative engagement and criticism – and thus requires further action on behalf of the communications team comes at the expense of already staff members, leading to other important tasks either receiving less attention or being abandoned altogether. This worker did not go so far as to suggest that all content that generates high levels of engagement should be avoided, but that failure to anticipate how much engagement and work by communications or issues management teams may result from content directed at stakeholders as invested in an organization as staff and faculty disincentivize workers

from employing such a strategy often. This is consistent with Pringle & Fritz's (2019) findings that situations where external social media content is inconsistent with an organization's overall brand promise are fraught with risk for organizations, and that internal stakeholder engagement to inform communications strategy is important to avoid such situations.

Involvement of other organizational departments

Addressing the fourth research question ('How and to what extent do other organizational departments, such as human resources or management, apply pressure to practitioners to create content centered around internal stakeholders, such as faculty or staff, or consider internal stakeholders in organizational social media strategy?'), none of the interviewees indicated that their departments were subject to internal pressures from other departments such as management or human resources to create social media content for the purpose of communicating with internal stakeholders. While multiple practitioners referred to broad organizational values such as diversity, equity, and inclusion and the need to ensure content is representative in nature, none of the interviewees suggested – and indeed, nearly all explicitly denied – that any other units of their organization had specifically requested that social media content be deployed as a means to address internal stakeholder relations with their institutions. The responses suggest a fairly clear answer to the research question, with clear saturation among the data that communications departments are not subject to pressure from other departments to use social media in a specific way as it relates to internal communications. Indeed, one practitioner went as far as suggesting that such a pressure would be a good sign, because it would imply a greater degree of cohesiveness in messaging across the institution's many platforms.

Analysis

Definition and relevance of internal stakeholders

Based on the results from in-depth interviews, who social media managers consider to be internal stakeholders remains an inconsistent belief between different practitioners. Regarding students and alumni as internal stakeholders, as many of the practitioners apparently do, is at odds with the definition of internal communication common among the academic literature. For example, Tkalac Verčič's working definition implies that internal communication "creates and maintains communication systems between employers and employees" (Tkalac Verčič, 2019, p.196), while Kalla's includes "all formal and informal communication taking place internally at all levels of an organization" (Kalla, 2005, p. 304). These definitions conceptualize internal communication as taking place within an organization, a definition that would apply to staff and faculty at Ontario universities and colleges, but not students and alumni.

However, most striking to the researcher was the degree to which most interviewees seemed to disregard the importance of this definition in the first place. While one interviewee did describe a refined approach in segmenting their various potential audiences and creating content with their primary audiences in mind first and foremost, prevailing sentiment was in line with Bélanger's (2014) findings that suggested Canadian institutions use social media for outward-facing, marketing-style content that groups all potential audiences together. While the common sentiment presented by interviewees did not suggest that practitioners have no regard for internal stakeholder groups, it does seem to imply that making a distinction between such groups and their primary audiences was either not their department's responsibility, or not an important part of their roles. Indeed, one manager insinuated that because of the limited ability to control which audiences view organic social media content, their primary objective in this realm was to project

a desirable image of their institution regardless of who the audiences that viewed their content were. This perspective was supported by another communications worker who said their department was focused on creating “multi-purpose” content that “served multiple audience groups” because doing so was more efficient and stretched their workload capacity. These perspectives suggest that internal communication is not a primary consideration for social media practitioners at Ontario postsecondary institutions.

A notable exception to this finding came from the practitioner working under a senior administration official, who was the lone interviewee to indicate that one of their primary goals was to create content that showed meaningful and equitable engagement among different internal stakeholder groups. However, this exception should perhaps not be surprising due to the difference in mandates between this senior administration official’s office, which includes internal affairs, and the more externally focused marketing and communications departments of institutions and faculties. Additionally, insight from one worker suggested that not all types of engagement are created equal, and that having to respond and react to engagement from internal stakeholders on social media often takes time and focus away from other priorities; in other words, there is perhaps an optimal level of engagement where stakeholders view their organizations engaging with them meaningfully without creating conflict that requires further issues management or looks badly on the institution.

The prevailing belief among practitioners that segmenting internal stakeholders as an audience for external social media content does not suggest that internal stakeholders should be disregarded when it comes to content strategy. Rather, it suggests a belief is that even if practitioners were to put time and resources into considering and planning for how internal stakeholders would interact with external social media content, their roles and missions would

not meaningfully change, except perhaps negatively from spending additional time responding to negative feedback and performing issues management. However, the consistency with which practitioners described their interactions with faculty and staff as happening inevitably, either for the purpose of producing and sourcing content or dealing with those groups' feedback, suggests that meaningful interactions nonetheless take place between internal stakeholders and the social media content produced by their organizations. Repeatedly, practitioners described the existing methods they employed to manage interactions with internal stakeholders, from embedding themselves within online communities to developing channels to receive content suggestions from internal stakeholders. Further, these interactions with internal stakeholders speak only to those involving the practitioners themselves and does not speak in any way to the dynamics experienced by employees and faculty when independently viewing their organizations' social media content. Thus, the impact organizational social media content has on internal stakeholders is likely understudied and poorly understood.

It is possible this disconnect exists because it is simply not the responsibility of social media and communications practitioners to perform meaningful internal communication, and that this task belongs to other staff such as public relations officers or human resources managers. However, the degree of independence that social media practitioners indicated they typically have in interviews suggests that these departments are largely independent, with no interviews relaying meaningful examples of human resources or management getting heavily involved in social media strategy. Thus, social media managers are simultaneously in control of an organizational function that clearly impacts internal stakeholders yet are not responsible for internal communication. These factors clearly describe a disconnect in the internal communication process at Canadian postsecondary institutions.

Internal stakeholder content and involvement of outside departments

Internal stakeholders are clearly an important asset for social media practitioners telling the stories of their organizations. These interviews have revealed that making internal stakeholders visible in external social media content is an important part of practitioners' organizational responsibilities, from broadcasting the accomplishments of professors to further bolster the credibility of their institutions, to humanizing institutional brands and connecting them with their surrounding communities.

The interviews revealed a prevailing consensus that this type of content is not created for the purpose of engaging internal stakeholders and building organizational trust and credibility, and yet many such benefits exist. Although some practitioners recognized the ways the relationships between internal stakeholders and their organizations might benefit from having staff and faculty featured in content, such as staff feeling recognized and rewarded for their efforts, or the organization fostering increased connection with their employees, it is clear this is an ancillary benefit and not the mission of social media departments. When asked about potential benefits internal stakeholders might receive by being featured in social media content, practitioners were consistently able to identify benefits consistent with the definition of social identity formation (Yoganathan, 2021; Krishen et al., 2019; Madsen, 2016). These include but are not limited to: helping employees find purpose and make sense of their roles within their organizations (Madsen, 2016); improving job satisfaction (Robertson & Kee, 2017); and even forming brand tribalism (Krishen et al., 2019) that builds further cohesion between organizations and internal stakeholders.

Yet from the interviews, it is clear that at least from practitioners working for institutional or faculty level marketing and communications departments, that creating these benefits is

merely ancillary and not the principal mission of social media practitioners. Interviews revealed that practitioners consistently believe the purpose of featuring internal stakeholders in content is to market their product, generate credibility within their communities, and humanize their otherwise faceless institutional brands. These goals are in line with the expressed responsibilities of the departments, which included topics such as top of funnel awareness, community outreach and external relations.

The implication of this apparent paradox is that social media managers at Canadian postsecondary institutions are simultaneously performing internal communication, and indeed are doing so knowingly, yet do not consider it part of their primary responsibility to the organization. The significance of this paradox is that a meaningful part of internal communication is apparently being performed by departments and practitioners with no ownership over internal communication as an organizational function, and furthermore no pressure from other organizational departments to do so in a certain way. This paradox does not suggest that practitioners are necessarily inadequate stewards of this function, or even that such an arrangement is suboptimal. However, the interviews recorded for this study do imply that much of this function is happening either unintentionally or on the periphery of these practitioners' portfolios, and perhaps unknowingly by other relevant departments such as human resources or management. This finding is consistent with Tkalac Verčič's (2019) assertion that internal communication "is simultaneously a part of various organizational functions and not really a part of any" (p. 195), with internal communication taking place over social media representing a mere piece of the internal stakeholder relations puzzle. The data collected in this study provide ample evidence to infer that this practice is not only common and widespread, but its implications are not yet fully understood even by the people who work in this field every day.

Discussion

Through insights gained from in-depth interviews with post-secondary practitioners in the social media management space and extended review of existing literature, this study has generated sufficient data to suggest that internal communication is simultaneously performed (knowingly and unknowingly) over external social media, and yet poorly understood as a practice. This limited understanding exists both within existing academic literature around internal communication and social media, as well as by the real people working in the field of external social media management. This study suggests that an opportunity exists for new research to probe the unexplored frontier of the ways external social media can and is used as an internal communications tool.

Firstly, through an exhaustive search of existing research on internal communications, this study has found that while it is clear external social media is an extremely well-studied topic in business and communications literature, its use as an internal communications tool is poorly researched and studied. Beyond a focus on its practical uses for attracting new employees to work for organizations, little research exists to explore the ways internal stakeholders interact with and are affected by their organizations' approaches to external social media. This gap exists despite the growing body of research around internal communication and its important role in management. Much has been written about the ways *enterprise* social media have transformed organizational communication, leveraging technology to transform the ways employees think and feel about their employers. However, the impacts of external social media on these same dynamics is remarkably absent from much of the current academic literature, with a great many studies seeming to cover adjacent topics but still avoiding this niche matter directly. This absence is even more surprising given the broad research that exists in areas such as social

identity theory and human resources management; these fields are clearly both important to the field of internal communication, and with the ubiquity of external social media in today's day and age, it is remarkable that the impact organizational social media has on these fields is not well understood.

Secondly, the insights found from in-depth interviews with social media practitioners reveal that a disconnect exists within Ontario postsecondary institutions about the ways internal communication is performed on external social media, especially among those practitioners tasked with managing social media accounts for the overall institutions and individual faculties. Though it is perhaps not the most important channel for communications teams to connect with internal stakeholders, the interviews reveal that not only do internal stakeholders view and consume media posted to external social media channels, but that social media managers know this implicitly and adjust their strategy accordingly. Taking ownership of this existing dynamic may or may not be the responsibility of social media managers at the institutional or faculty department level. However, whatever units are responsible for internal communication should also be aware of this dynamic and plan their internal communication strategy accordingly, working with social media management teams to create communications plans, establish lines of open communication and foster trust and transparency between communications and marketing departments of institutions and the employees and faculty members who work there. From the apparent independence common to practitioners who run social media accounts and create strategy for these institutions, to the discernable (and justifiable) lower priority given to internal communication by these departments, these interviews reveal that an incomplete understanding of how internal communication can be and in fact frequently is conducted via external social media is prevalent across this industry.

It is notable that the most anomalous perspective among the interviews included in this study came from the practitioner working under a senior administration official. While this is perhaps to be expected given the differences in the internally-focused mandate of a senior administration official compared to institutional or department-level social media accounts, it is interesting that the featuring of staff and faculty in external-facing content was consistent with approaches explained by other practitioners, yet very different in the process that led into the creation of that content. The practices employed by this worker, from a ‘scorecard’ used to ensure equitable representation in content to a robust communications plan that identified engagement with internal groups as a key priority, are perhaps indicative of methods other departments could modify and employ to ensure that internal stakeholders are accounted for in their social media content strategy. Similarly, the practitioner who described a member of their staff as a “people person” and a particularly important asset to their team because of their ability to engage with various internal stakeholders represents a potential pathway forward for communications practitioners. Having such a person, or committing a staff member to engaging in such a process, represents a method to meaningfully engage internal stakeholders, improve employee perceptions of organizations’ efforts in the social media space, and ultimately facilitate two-way symmetrical communication that benefits all parties within the organization.

This study has focused on the practice of internal communication performed using external social media within the context of Ontario postsecondary institutions. The insights contained within are consistent with earlier research (Bélanger, 2014; Whisman, 2009) showing institutions primarily use social media in similar ways to the corporate world, with content primarily deployed for news, announcements, and marketing content. Because of these similarities, it is possible that many of the findings from this study are relevant beyond the

limited industry examined in this study. It is plausible that many other industries face similar dynamics as those outlined in these pages. Any organization that puts its employees front and centre in its social media content to foster connection with its community and humanize its brand must inherently go through a process of sourcing content opportunities. Any organization, especially those with large numbers of employees who actively view and engage with its social media content, likely impacts the way those employees feel about their employer (for better or worse) through that social media content. While perhaps organizations in other industries do not share the lack of connection between the internal communications function and social media management function apparently so common in Canadian postsecondary education, it is reasonable to suggest that because this relationship is so poorly researched and understood, other industries are also oblivious to the implications of this dynamic, and the same disconnect exists in other industries. Indeed, there is little reason to believe that social media practitioners at Canadian postsecondary institutions are somehow missing out on an important communications practice taking place as a standard best practice in other industries, and that this industry is somehow uniquely oblivious to the ways internal communication takes place through external social media content.

Recommendations and future research

This study has suggested that internal communication performed over external social media is simultaneously poorly understood and yet widely practiced. As such, a number of recommendations can be taken from this research, both by academics looking to further explore the field and by practitioners who plan and create social media content on behalf of their organizations.

Firstly, this topic represents an interesting niche at the intersection of several fields, including internal communication, human resources management, social identity theory, employee brand management, and myriad other topics. Further research could explore a number of ways organizational social media content relates to these fields more specifically, including: the impacts of social media content on employee perception, satisfaction, and trust towards organizations; how and to what extent employees being featured in external social media content affects motivation and performance; how and to what extent representation of employees of diverse backgrounds impacts employee sentiment towards their organizations; how social media content related to current events, such as social justice protests and the global COVID-19 pandemic, affect employee sentiment towards their organizations; and how and to what extent social media strategies differ between institution-level departments and those representing more niche or inward-facing groups, such as a senior administration official. Additionally, studies employing quantitative methods to build a larger and more statistically significant sample exploring these topics is warranted to take the insights gathered from this study and turn them into falsifiable hypotheses.

These are suggestions for research that could begin to answer some of the questions implicated by this study. Does the impact social media content has on employee performance justify a greater importance placed on internal stakeholders as an audience? Are there risks involved with centering internal stakeholders in social media content, such as featuring employees whose other social media activity might harm organizational reputation? Should more resources be spent on presenting an organization's social media strategy to employees, so that when internal stakeholders view and engage with content they are provided with more information and greater context that will help them make sense of the content they will

inevitably see on social media platforms? All of these questions are ripe for further study that could prove beneficial to organizations in the social media age.

Secondly, this study presents an opportunity for social media practitioners to further entrench their roles as critical components of their organizations' communications strategy. By taking the lead in recognizing the need to create a more sophisticated and responsible internal communications function that factors in the ways internal stakeholders interact with social media content, practitioners can prove immense value to their organizations, from fostering greater collaboration and connection between departments to building greater trust among employees and improving the internal and external reputations of the institutions they work for.

Opportunities to create this more sophisticated and responsible system are plentiful. Examples that could be useful based on the interviews in this study include: collaboration with those departments that are responsible for internal communication to establish a framework providing information and context about what organizations are trying to accomplish on social media and why; a refined system to funneling ideas that may not otherwise be visible to practitioners all the way from internal stakeholders on the ground floor to those responsible for creating content; and creation of an established social media plan that can be used as justification whenever requests from internal stakeholders need to be deflected or even denied. All these ideas and more are consistent with recommendations by Pringle & Fritz (2019) that external social media content should be in alignment with broader internal communications strategy. In other words, there is no reason why what ends up on an organization's social media channels should be decided upon differently than the rest of that organization's communications strategy, and the amount of internal stakeholder engagement that informs social media strategy should be consistent with that of all broader communications.

Some of these ideas are already employed by practitioners, even in nascent forms, based on the interviews included in this study. However, data from this study suggest these systems are used infrequently, and not because performing internal communications is an established responsibility of social media departments. Therefore, an opportunity exists for social media departments – both at Ontario postsecondary institutions and beyond – to build this communications infrastructure, providing value to their organizations and further fortifying their importance in the modern communications landscape.

Limitations

This study has several limitations that should be noted, beginning with a limited sample. Due to the lack of existing academic literature discussing the uses and impacts of external social media on internal communication, this exploratory study sought to gain insights from carefully selected industry professionals at Ontario postsecondary institutions, with the goal of identifying common themes and areas where future research might be most applicable. The 10 interviews comprising the data collection process for this study yielded valuable insights and revealed several common themes among the experiences of the practitioners interviewed but should not be considered a large enough sample of data to make broad conclusions about internal communication via external social media. Further study might seek to employ surveys and other quantitative research methods to identify significant relationships between variables in the data and bolster any argument that common themes are present across the industry.

Secondly, the fact that the study focused on institutions in Ontario only may be a limitation of this research. It is possible that different dynamics are present at postsecondary institutions in other countries or even in other Canadian provinces and territories. Indeed, given the limited scope of existing literature on the subject, any potential differences in how

institutions in different geographic locations practice internal communication over external social media is a topic worthy of future study.

Thirdly, the heavy focus on Ontario universities over colleges in this study may represent a limitation. Although it is possible that there are no discernible differences in the ways social media practitioners at Ontario colleges and universities consider internal stakeholders, this study does not provide a sufficient sample of data collected from each to authoritatively say so. Differences may in fact exist between these two types of institutions for various reasons; for example, all faculty at Ontario colleges are unionized, whereas the faculty at many Ontario universities belong to faculty associations. Additionally, the prestige that many Ontario universities hold as central institutions in their communities may be reflected in divergent approaches from colleges in the ways they feature faculty and staff in their external social media content.

Fourth, the interviews comprising the data collected for this study were arranged through networked recruitment, or horizontal sampling, with interviewees consisting of fellow students and graduates of the McMaster Master of Communication Management program, along with contacts introduced to the researcher by fellow students, graduates and the program director. It is possible that interviews with a more diverse group of interviewees would yield different results.

Finally, some of the dynamics discussed in this study are consistent with those experienced by the researcher in his full-time field of work as a Director of Marketing and Communications in the golf and tourism industry, where both external social media strategy and internal communications strategy are important parts of the researcher's work portfolio. Though the researcher sought to maintain a neutral position, it is possible that some inherent bias was present and that the researcher took insights from the in-depth interviews because they resembled

real world dynamics experienced in the workplace. However, these similarities do not invalidate the findings of this study, but rather underscore the need to explore them in greater depth, using larger samples and quantitative methods.

Conclusion

This study has explored the understudied yet important dynamic of internal communication performed using external social media channels. Through a literature review that shows the topic is largely unaddressed within academic literature, the findings of this study suggest there is much to be learned about the intersecting dynamics at play and the siloed philosophies among different academic disciplines in addressing them. Further, in-depth interviews produced data to suggest that in at least one industry, practitioners are performing internal communication over social media as an adjacent responsibility of their roles at best, and without the input or even awareness of other organizational departments. The findings suggest that ample opportunity exists for research (especially research employing quantitative and more statistically valid methodologies) to explore numerous questions, especially those around employees' relationships with their organizations and the effects external social media can have on them. Finally, practical suggestions about the nascent best practices employed by some practitioners suggest that communications professionals have an opportunity to ensconce their roles and advance the role of public relations as an important part of organizations.

References

- Atkins, B., Koroluk, J., & Stranach, M. (2017). Canadian teaching and learning centres on Facebook and Twitter: An exploration through social media. *TechTrends*, 61(3), 253–262.
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s11528-016-0144-2>
- Ambler, T., & Barrow, S. (1996). The employer brand. *Journal of Brand Management*, 4.
<https://doi.org/10.1057/bm.1996.42>
- Anyangwe, E. (2012, July 17). Making the case for internal communications in higher education. *The Guardian*. <https://www.theguardian.com/higher-education-network/blog/2012/jul/17/internal-communications-in-higher-education>
- Bélanger, C. H., Bali, S., & Longden, B. (2014). How Canadian universities use social media to brand themselves. *Tertiary Education and Management*, 20(1), 14–29.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/13583883.2013.852237>
- Carpentier, M., Van Hoyer, G., & Weijters, B. (2019). Attracting applicants through the organization's social media page: Signaling employer brand personality. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 115, 103326. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jvb.2019.103326>
- Carpentier, M., Van Hoyer, G., Stockman, S., Schollaert, E., Van Theemsche, B., & Jacobs, G. (2017). Recruiting nurses through social media: Effects on employer brand and attractiveness. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 73(11), 2696–2708. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jan.13336>
- Dreher, S. (2014). Social media and the world of work a strategic approach to employees' participation in social media. *Corporate Communications*, 19(4), 344–356.
<https://doi.org/10.1108/CCIJ-10-2013-0087>

- Ewing, M., Men, L. R., & O'Neil, J. (2019). Using social media to engage employees: Insights from internal communication managers. *International Journal of Strategic Communication*, 13(2), 110–132. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1553118X.2019.1575830>
- Government of Ontario (n.d.). *Go to college or university in Ontario*. Retrieved February 21, 2023, from <http://www.ontario.ca/page/go-college-or-university-ontario>
- Grunig, J. E. (2013). Furnishing the Edifice: Ongoing research on public relations as a strategic management function. In K. Sriramesh, A. Zerfass, & J.-N. Kim (Eds.), *Public Relations and Communication Management: Current Trends and Emerging Topics*. Routledge.
- Hall, D. T. & Goodale, J. G. (1986), *Human resource management -strategy, design and implementation*. Foresman Scott and Company.
- Kalla, H. K. (2005). Integrated internal communications: A multidisciplinary perspective. *Corporate Communications*, 10(4), 302–314. <https://doi.org/10.1108/13563280510630106>
- Kim, J.-N., & Grunig, J. E. (2011). Problem solving and communicative action: A situational theory of problem solving. *Journal of Communication*, 61(1), 120–149. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1460-2466.2010.01529.x>
- Kissel, P., & Büttgen, M. (2015). Using social media to communicate employer brand identity: The impact on corporate image and employer attractiveness. *Journal of Brand Management*, 22(9), 755–777. <https://doi.org/10.1057/bm.2015.42>
- Krishen, A. S., Berezan, O., & Raab, C. (2019). Feelings and functionality in social networking communities: A regulatory focus perspective. *Psychology & Marketing*, 36(7), 675–686. <https://doi.org/10.1002/mar.21204>

- Lee, Y., & Kim, K. H. (2020). De-motivating employees' negative communication behaviors on anonymous social media: The role of public relations. *Public Relations Review*, 46(4), 101955. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pubrev.2020.101955>
- Lee, Y., & Kim, J. (2021). Internal public segmentation for effective internal issue management. In L. R. Men & A. Tkalac Verčič (Eds.), *Current Trends and Issues in Internal Communication Theory and Practice* (1st ed., pp. 39-55). Springer International Publishing.
- Lee, Y., & Kim, K. H. (2021). Enhancing employee advocacy on social media: The value of internal relationship management approach. *Corporate Communications*, 26(2), 311–327. <https://doi.org/10.1108/CCIJ-05-2020-0088>
- Leonardi, P. M., Huysman, M., & Steinfield, C. (2013). Enterprise social media: Definition, history, and prospects for the study of social technologies in organizations. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 19(1), 1–19. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jcc4.12029>
- Mai To, A., Mindzak, M., Thongpapanl, N., & Mindzak, J. (2022). Social media branding strategies of universities and colleges in Canada: A mixed-method approach investigating post characteristics and contents. *Journal of Marketing for Higher Education*, 0(0), 1–21. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08841241.2022.2139790>
- Madsen, V. T. (2016). Constructing organizational identity on internal social media: A case study of coworker communication in Jyske Bank. *International Journal of Business Communication*, 53(2), 200–223. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2329488415627272>
- Miles, S. J., & Mangold, W. G. (2014). Employee voice: Untapped resource or social media time bomb? *Business Horizons*, 57(3), 401–411. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bushor.2013.12.011>

- Men, L. R. (2021). Evolving research and practices in internal communication. In L. R. Men & A. Tkalac Verčič (Eds.), *Current trends and issues in internal communication* (1st ed., pp. 1-18). Palgrave Macmillan US.
- Men, R. L., & Bowen, S. A. (2017). *Excellence in internal communication management*. Business Expert Press.
- Men, L. R., & Tkalac Verčič, A. (2021). *Current trends and issues in internal communication theory and practice* (1st ed. 2021.). Springer International Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-78213-9>
- Mpandare, M., & Li, G. (2020). Utilising enterprise social media for product innovation: The role of market orientation. *Sustainability*, 12(9), Article 9. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su12093913>
- Ontario's Universities. (n.d.). *By the numbers*. Retrieved February 21, 2023, from <https://ontariosuniversities.ca/resources/data/by-the-numbers>
- Newberry, C., & Macready, H. (2022, December 1). What is social listening, why it matters + 14 tools to help. *Hootsuite*. <https://blog.hootsuite.com/social-listening-business/>
- Parker, J. M., Marasi, S., James, K. W., & Wall, A. (2019). Should employees be “dooced” for a social media post? The role of social media marketing governance. *Journal of Business Research*, 103, 1–9. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2019.05.027>
- Peruta, A., & Shields, A. B. (2018). Marketing your university on social media: A content analysis of Facebook post types and formats. *Journal of Marketing for Higher Education*, 28(2), 175–191. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08841241.2018.1442896>
- Pringle, J., & Fritz, S. (2019). The university brand and social media: Using data analytics to assess brand authenticity. *Journal of Marketing for Higher Education*, 29(1), 19–44. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08841241.2018.1486345>

- Prinzlau, M. (2022, April 21). *Employer Branding on Social Media: 18 Companies Doing It Right*. Walls.io Social Wall - Blog. <https://blog.walls.io/socialmedia/employer-branding-on-social-media/>
- Romano, A. (2020, June 3). *#BlackoutTuesday derailed #BlackLivesMatter. A community organizer explains how to do better*. Vox. <https://www.vox.com/2020/6/3/21278165/george-floyd-protests-social-media-blackouttuesday-lace-watkins-on-race-interview>
- Robertson, B. W., & Kee, K. F. (2017). Social media at work: The roles of job satisfaction, employment status, and Facebook use with co-workers. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 70, 191–196. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2016.12.080>
- Ruck, K., & Welch, M. (2012). Valuing internal communication; management and employee perspectives. *Public Relations Review*, 38(2), 294–302. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pubrev.2011.12.016>
- Sharma, A., & Bhatnagar, J. (2016). Enterprise social media at work: Web-based solutions for employee engagement. *Human Resource Management International Digest*, 24(7), 16–19. <https://doi.org/10.1108/HRMID-04-2016-0055>
- Sincic Coric, D., & Poloski Vokic, N. (2009). The roles of internal communications, human resource management and marketing concepts in determining holistic internal marketing philosophy. *Zagreb International Review of Economics and Business*, 12(2), 87–105. <http://www.efzg.unizg.hr/default.aspx?id=6045>
- Sivertzen, A.-M., Nilsen, E. R., & Olafsen, A. H. (2013). Employer branding: Employer attractiveness and the use of social media. *The Journal of Product and Brand Management*, 22(7), 473–483. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JPBM-09-2013-0393>

- Szperling, P. (2020, June 4). *Ottawa business faces backlash after posts on Blackout Tuesday*. CTV News. <https://ottawa.ctvnews.ca/ottawa-business-faces-backlash-after-posts-on-blackout-tuesday-1.4970001?cache=dvgujsbn>
- Tanwar, K., & Kumar, A. (2019). Employer brand, person-organisation fit and employer of choice: Investigating the moderating effect of social media. *Personnel Review*, 48(3), 799–823. <https://doi.org/10.1108/PR-10-2017-0299>
- Tkalac Verčič, A. (2019). Internal communication with a global perspective. In *The Global Public Relations Handbook* (3rd ed.). Routledge.
- Tkalac Verčič, A. (2021). The impact of employee engagement, organisational support and employer branding on internal communication satisfaction. *Public Relations Review*, 47(1). <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pubrev.2021.102009>
- Tkalac Verčič, A., & Špoljarić, A. (2020). Managing internal communication: How the choice of channels affects internal communication satisfaction. *Public Relations Review*, 46(3), 101926. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pubrev.2020.101926>
- van Zoonen, W., Bartels, J., van Prooijen, A.-M., & Schouten, A. P. (2018). Explaining online ambassadorship behaviors on Facebook and LinkedIn. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 87, 354–362. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2018.05.031>
- Veletsianos, G., Kimmons, R., Shaw, A., Pasquini, L., & Woodward, S. (2017). Selective openness, branding, broadcasting, and promotion: Twitter use in Canada's public universities. *Educational Media International*, 54(1), 1–19. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09523987.2017.1324363>
- Wang, Y. & Kobsa, A. (2009). *Privacy in online social networking at workplace*. 4, 975–978. <https://doi.org/10.1109/CSE.2009.438>

- Whisman, R. (2009). Internal branding: A university's most valuable intangible asset. *The Journal of Product and Brand Management*, 18(5), 367–370. <https://doi.org/10.1108/10610420910981846>
- Yoganathan, V., Osburg, V.-S., & Bartikowski, B. (2021). Building better employer brands through employee social media competence and online social capital. *Psychology & Marketing*, 38(3), 524–536. <https://doi.org/10.1002/mar.21451>
- Young, A. M., & Hinesly, M. D. (2014). Social media use to enhance internal communication: Course design for business students. *Business and Professional Communication Quarterly*, 77(4), 426–439. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2329490614544735>