Using Social Media in Strategic Management

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The online public conversations seem like Twitter has begun as a common communication tool by people tweeting their ideas, opinions and taking stands, committing themselves during last 5-10 years. This overall assumption has taken its place as a few of world’s remarkable leaders such as Trump, Merkel, and May are using microblog Twitter by pointing out their opinions. This opens question if directors and managers of, e.g., in Higher Education Institutions are using Social Media’s tools such as microblog Twitter as a part of their work in strategic management. As Twitter has launched interactive tools and closed groups in recent years, some HEI’s (Higher Education Institution) directors started to consider and use Twitter in strategic management interactively with their personnel in Finland. Using Social Media and Twitter allows a possibility for a different model of social dialog between inner and outer stakeholders, e.g., of strategy or strategical management. This requires directors who can foster organisation’s values also via Social Media’s microblogs such as Twitter. This draws attention to communication management of strategy or strategical management communication. This research studies by theme interviews how directors of selected Universities of Applied Sciences (UAS) think that they are using Social Media tools such as Twitter in their daily strategic management. The aim and objective is to have an oversight if there is any need for improvement or change in using Social Media tool such as Twitter in HEI’s strategic management according to the theme interviews. The result and conclusion are improvements in using Social Media tools like Twitter in strategic management.

Keywords: Social Media, communication strategic management, Twitter, Facebook

Introduction

Defined target organisations for this research study are Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) called Laurea University of Applied Sciences (UAS) and Seinäjoki University of Applied Sciences. Research study is not aiming to generalisation but to have a light overview of using social media tools in strategic management in selected Finnish HEIs and to adapt next research studies according to the results. Using social media in HEIs operational environment has been under discussion in last 5-10 years. Especially when it concerns marketing and visibility of brand and image when future applicants are comparing universities of applied sciences where to apply. In the same time, board of directors and HEIs directors have become more aware that organisation should also interact more with their stakeholders and be experienced as a modern organisation what follows and acts as expected in time.

Both selected HEIs are recreating/revising their strategies in 2019 for next few years. Discussion behind the scenes has been about involving personnel and other stakeholders transparently and having personnel’s

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feedback concerning the strategy revising. Laurea UAS has used Twitter in last strategy revising five years ago by asking personnel to tweet about strategy related issues via certain hashtag. Laurea UAS is using social media tools as supportive tools for their actions related strategy, values, actions, deliverables, R&D, and revising strategy. Laurea’s directors are telling that they are using social media tools, e.g., Twitter, Facebook, and LinkedIn actively. Seinäjoki UAS is also using social media tools but it is not underlining its use so much than Laurea. Seinäjoki UAS is expanding its using social media tools. Both HEI’s directors think that social media tools, e.g., Twitter, Facebook, and LinkedIn are important channels for transparent interaction in strategic management with their inner and outer stakeholders. This research study focuses on how directors think they are using social media tools and how it is seen, experienced by personnel.

**Literature Review**

Moran, Seaman, and Tinti-Kane (2011) have published research of *Teaching, Learning, and Sharing: How Today’s Higher Education Faculty Use Social Media*. This research focuses on using social media especially on teaching in USA. According to the research 90% of faculties are using social media in teaching as well as in professional life outside the university already in 2011. Isotaulus, Jussila, and Matikainen (2018) point out that 2006 published microblog service Twitter is based on sharing short messages and it is exceptional because it is open and communication is public. It is easy to interact with other Twitter users and interact with unknown person. Isotaulus et al. (2018) also state that this might also be one of the reasons why Twitter’s use is popular amongst politicians, journalism, and sociological when trying to make an impact. They also use United States President Donald Trump as an example whose tweeting has encouraged e.g. other celebrities to use more Twitter as a tool for communication as it has visible role. Twitter (Isotaulus et al., 2018) is a part of larger phenomenon of social media, which consists of active content producers, interaction between users and is cross linked and dispersed. Mass self-communication is one the purest in Twitter even though the group of followers is changing (Isotaulus et al., 2018). Rowles and Brown (2017) discuss e.g. online connections and how to curate own stream in business, e.g., making Twitter lists and content aggregators, and who to follow when business environment is concerned and its effect on value chain. Isotaulus et al. (2018) state that Twitter is relevant part of the change of companies and organisations communication as expertise and so called leadership’s promotion is highlighted. Company or organisation is not marketing in Twitter but takes stand, comment and is present. Twitter is considered a good tool for branding and a part of service communication. Different systems and software have been developed for e.g. identifying different emotions in discussions (Isotaulus et al., 2018). As organisations strategies seem to be more and more like living strategies instead of stable ones, Twitter could be one of the useful tools to interact with personnel. This could be useful involving personnel and to listen its voice in organisation’s development. Koskela and Sihvonen (2018) discuss about hashtag’s (#) functions in Twitter. They point out that research of Twitter has focused on sociological meanings, tweet’s contents and sharing. Latest research has focused on Twitter as a tool for collection of material/data and different angles on visibility of individual users. It seems that Twitter itself is not the target of the researches but a tool and a source of data. Twitter’s hashtag can be analysed e.g. by three different angles: metadata (how hashtag functions as a tool in metacommunicative description and findings), mode of special language (linguistic twists and their combination), and arena for linguistic creativity (how hashtags are used as linguistic play). Linguistic functions and their sources (Koskela & Sihvonen, 2018) have been referred to Jakobson’s linguistic taxonomy in 1968 which consists of six linguistic functions (emotive/mind-set, connotation/relation
with receiver, poetic/mode of message, referential, aliphatic/maintain communication, and metalinguistic/talk of language). These linguistic functions have correspondents for what they are connected (sender, receiver, message, context, contact, and code). Objective and aboutness (abstract, connotation) stage describes level of content also of tweets. Hashtags are functioning as indexes but also as semantic meaning element in communication. Meanings of hashtags changes, e.g., because of retweets’ focus in different contexts. Tweets also consist of links to e.g. videos and then the role of tweet changes. Systematic observation enables deeper understanding and compares with different social media platforms/tools. Hashtags enable observation via all social media tools. Hashtags can also give a cross-section of certain topics. Virolainen and Luoma-aho (2018) discuss about hashtag capturing, especially how it influences on organisation’s image building and branding by using hashtag negative way in Twitter and other social media tools. As hashtags are usually used by themes, capturing hashtag and using it for negative tweets irrationally leaves it vulnerable and content of hashtag might disappear e.g. by effects of memes and humour (Virolainen & Luoma-aho, 2018). Using Twitter as a communication tool in strategic management and renewing strategy is transparent and enables to raise various perspectives of the strategy by inner and outer stakeholders. This leaves hashtag and organisation’s image and brand vulnerable for hashtag capturing which might cause e.g. negative tweets to harm consciously organisation or renewing strategy or director who is using Twitter in strategic management. Virolainen and Luoma-aho (2018) are pointing out that organisations have to be careful how, where, and for which discussions on Twitter they are participating as the mode and role of the discussion can change quickly. They also state that it requires an interesting and diverse content flow. In this context, Virolainen and Luoma-aho (2018) are referring to Lillqvist’s research made in 2016, which argues discourse struggle in interactions between organisations and public depending on e.g. manipulation and monologue sound by organisations or protesting public. All this might cause an image crisis for the organisation. Therefore, selective dialog is cheapest way to handle organisations communication in Twitter as well as in other social media tools. Jussila, Boedeker, Helander, and Vuori (2018) discuss about recognising emotional state in Twitter. There are interactional and communicational elements in sharing experience to another person. As transparency in Twitter is an enabler, the prevention for risk of losing value needs plan for quick actions. Jussila et al. (2018) point out that strategic management should base on conscious decisions on understanding of current state of organisation. In this situation, emotional state of stakeholders by analysing information sourced from social media. This allows information’s modifying for organisation’s purposes in strategic management e.g. by understanding how customers experience company’s brand and how they express emotional state in social media. Analysing can be done by software which analysis metadata produced by social media (Jussila et al., 2018). Easterby-Smith, Thorpe, and Jackson (2013) state that “the structure of the relationships you are embedded within may either promote or restrict your ability to get access to resources”. Social network affects on everything on your life and what comes to business life on social capital. People trust their network and on information, what they are having and receiving via their social network on social media’s platforms. Network’s relations and analysing social networks give an impression for company or organisation where they stand for in their own business environment via social network links. Hakala and Vesa (2013) states that online discussion is natural part of daily life for many persons especially when they want to stand out with their opinion.

**Methodology**

Comparing and discussing of pros and cons of qualitative and quantitative methods as well as mixed
methods and triangulation were base for selecting data collection method for this research study. The topic, aims, and objectives are if directors of Higher Education Institutions are using Social Media’s tools such as microblog Twitter as a part of their work in strategic management. Idea of oriented data collecting focused on interviews but as the research is in the beginning, interviews as a data collecting method were revised and defined theme interviews in this point. This selection happened to have a light overview what selected directors and personnel members think of strategic management in their own operating environment and what they think of using social media tools in strategic management as well as of the interaction in social media when strategic management is concerned. Jensen (2012) states that researcher have to recognise that interview is interactive situation where validity and reliability of statements gathered during the interview are not only representations but issues what interviewee think. Content of the interview connects with context and is affected by interaction between interviewee and interviewer. Gathered data by interviews modified into sources of by analysis as well of meaning through interpretation. In the interview situation researcher should also recognise that researchers do not have perfect insight to interviewed issue in interviewee’s context. Language and language skills in operative environment have also strong impact on interview. Theme interviews have been used to this study to have a light overview of directors and personnel opinions how they think they are using social media in strategic management of few Universities of Applied Sciences in Finland. Theme interview is one of the useful methods to collect research data. Even though these interviews made for research survey interviews weren’t used because for this research study researcher is gathering data for light overview of the topic. By the results of research study’s, theme interview researcher will analyse the wider aspects of the topic and does it which needs revising before further research and collecting data in the field. Hyvärinen (2017) states that interviews handle issues which have happened earlier in different environment and are therefore multidimensional as they here and now as well then and there. He points out that interview is wide interaction and more than asking questions. It is open interaction for sudden actions and surprises. Laaksonen and Matikainen (2013) discuss about interaction and online discussions and point out e.g. Hine’s (2000) taxonomy of synchronous and asynchronous services and communication involved. They are pointing out of change in platform based culture and technology using Twitter’s retweeting as an example. Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) point out that research interview is about interaction between interviewer and interviewee. It has professional nature of discussion where a structure and purpose found. In this discussion interviewer controls the logic of the discussion and defines the topic of the interview. It is important to avoid any leading words or question structure to have objective research data by interviewing. This has to consider also when analysing the collected data. Kananen (2012) states that when researcher wants to understand topic better he is using theme interview as in theme interview researcher is sneaking the core of the topic and trying to reveal the truth of the researched topic. In the situation, the researched phenomenon relates to interviewee. Theme interview proceeds from theme to theme from universal to more focused one. During the process interviewer makes clarifying questions of each theme. Hirsjärvi, Remes, and Sajavaara (2016) state that theme interview is defined between structured and unstructured interview as it has themes but questions are not specific and known beforehand or in a certain order. Hirsjärvi and Hurme (2014) state that interview as a research data collection method is flexible and appropriate for many different premises and purposes. They apply that theme interview logic proceeds by certain themes instead of particular question. This allows interviewee to give certain meanings of formulation by interaction during the interview (Hirsjärvi & Hurme, 2014; Kananen, 2012). Seven theme interviews have done between January and March 2019 for this research study.
Themes of the interviews:

- Strategical management in own business environment?
- Strategical management and social media?
  - Ideas of combining these two?
  - How to use/exploit?
  - Applicable tools of social media?
  - Positive?
  - Negative?
- Communication interaction between directors and staff in social media as part of strategical management?

After thematizing, designing, interviewing, and transcribing theme interviews, there are still three stages as analysing, verifying, and reporting left according to Kvale and Brinkmann (2009). Analysing of interviews is slow process and demands patience as the researcher categorises data according to the research questions and topics (Pietilä, 2010). Analysis starts typically by asking what questions by which researcher familiarises himself with collected data and starts to categorise it. Pietilä (2010) states that it is important to examine and discuss what is not said during interviews.

Davies and Hughes (2014) have listed interviewed data for six classes:

1. facts about the “here and now”;
2. what the interviewee knows;
3. facts about past events;
4. feelings;
5. attitudes or opinions;
6. beliefs.

Data of this research study approach’s theme interviews which have the context of interviewee’s attitudes or opinions and beliefs as well as interviewee’s facts about “here and now” plus what the interviewee knows. Ruusuvuori (2010) points out interaction and authority of interviewer who e.g. mumbles during the interview and doing it proceeds the interviewing to the right direction. This arises the question of ethics and validity of collected data. Ruusuvuori (2010) states that interviewee and interviewer build up an institutional situation where participants have taken roles from the start until the end of interview. She also points out that in discussion analysis researcher focuses his attention to interaction between the parties, regularity and approaches the data by emic angle and meaningful aspects. Gadamer (2004) states that language is record of finitude as language is developing continuously and expresses experiences of humans. This is linked with interaction and discussion in social media texts e.g. in Twitter. Virtanen, Rahtu, and Shore (2018) discuss that human has a need to have a written interaction in almost all areas of life and this has leaded to new technical tools and for multitudinous interventions for interaction. Even though asynchronous text is not the best choice for researching real interaction between humans but it is possible to research to whom the text is intent and what kind of script there is behind for interaction between writer and reader. Poynter (2010) states importance of ethics when making research in blogs or in microblogs e.g. Twitter. He points out that researcher’s involvements have to be clear for participants of online discussion, blog, or microblog and it has to be clear and verifies that researcher might use text of the online discussion, blog, or microblog for project’s or research purposes. Participant’s anonymity must secure.
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Ministry of Education in Finland outlines financial restrictions and budgeting lines for HEIs in Finland. This outlines part of HEI’s strategy and strategical actions and deliverables even though HEIs have their own values, vision, and mission which are related e.g. to their operational environment, aims, and objectives set by owners. HEI’s strategy which is capsulized is essential base for all e.g. director’s actions. Strategic management in operational environment has been changing in last five years according to HEI’s directors. It seems to be more agile and adapted direction. Strategy and strategic management implementation is made by concrete actions. Opinion seems to be by answers that it is important to make strategic management by involving and participating personnel in daily basis what has direct link with organisations vision, mission, values, and strategy. Excluding issues and actions what are not important by director’s own view on organisation’s strategy and strategic management is one main element of strategic management. Implementing strategy and strategical management are daily actions and it is actively involved in operational environment. Strategic management and effectiveness is concrete in daily actions and it is middle management’s work to ensure that it happens. Middle management has tools for implementing strategic management and directors e.g. in personnel’s developing days. One of the results by interviewing HEI’s directors was that these HEIs do not have particular instructions for directors who of them should use or how social media tools in strategic management. Using social media tools seems to be voluntary in social media tools where each director is active and feels comfortable to share results of the organisation or other strategical value related issues. Directors think that social media is a good channel for interaction with inner and outer stakeholders. In discussion which social media tools are used and how, it was difficult to determine good accurate tools by which to reach or involve certain stakeholders.

Twitter, Instagram, and LinkedIn are experienced more professional and useful channels to have connect especially to outer stakeholders than the other social media tools but if future customers/students are concerned there is no clear option for best social media tool. There were doubts if future students are reached by Facebook as there has been discussion of decreasing number of young people in Facebook. Twitter and Facebook seem to be useful when it comes to inner stakeholders and personnel. These tools could be used e.g. in creating, drawing, and implementing strategy but in measuring and effectiveness. Tweet of values and ideas for strategy and then attach those in future strategy. Interviewed directors thought that using social media tools in strategic management is good as in this position organisation’s strategy and values are transparent and set them for stakeholder’s discussion openly. Via social media tools such as Twitter, HEI/organisation can transparently tell about its actions and impacts on its operative environment what can effect on image and brand. Social media as a place for open discussion might encourage discussion between organisation’s stakeholders and organisation even about innovations. Directors are e.g. tweeting of events and actions. These are organisations strategy related issues. Directors are popping out comments and questions to encourage personnel to join in discussion. Data of interviews pointed out thinking of director’s position as a systematic representative of organisation in social media. This outlined thoughts how to modify linguistically messages in social media, how often directors should post of organisation’s actions, values, or other strategy related issues, how actions in social media affects on organisation’s image and brand. Data of selected HEI’s theme interviews tell that HEIs do not have official code of conduct for social media which would be as an instruction for directors how to act and what to do in social media. HEI’s directors think that this might be because that there have not been yet such a big issue
related in HEIs in discussion in social media. HEI’s directors can choose where to post, when to post, what to
post, and how to use social media in strategic management. Crisis management and marketing in social media
has some instructions but it has not been shared openly for organisation’s personnel or it does not have any
clear connections for strategic management or other issue which can be posted. One of selected HEIs has
implemented “messenger-program”. Directors were the first messengers then the idea widened to a selected
group of people who started to post and follow social media time to time. These messengers can choose and are
using social media tools which they find comfortable to associate. This action has started during last year and is
still developing and proceeding step by step in this HEI. Interaction between directors and personnel in social
media is important. Social media tools are a good place for sharing e.g. strategy related information where both
sides can comment and point out their opinions. Sharing information is not enough. Interaction and open
discussions have to be involved. Directors think that social media tools like Twitter and LinkedIn offer a
possibility to place questions and comments on ongoing actions in organisation. Interviewed directors assume
that personnel acts in the same way another way round and has an active position to post of their own actions in
work/operating environment for which directors can comment positively. Directors think that e.g. work-shops
in Twitter are useful. They are easy and good to implement as it allows a possibility to gather collected data
quickly for rational and useful mode. They also think that it is easy to comment and post interactively once and
a while when pausing other work tasks or few hours in a week can take place for taking care of social media
aspects related e.g. in strategic management. Personnel and students are seen essential resource e.g. in
recreating new strategy. Values and ideas processed in social media involving personnel for from mind—map
ideation until processing topics is important. This is because persons involved experience that they can share
their thoughts. It is directors task to evaluate which ideas and issues of strategy and strategic management are
presented and represented for personnel in selected e.g. Twitter and LinkedIn for processing strategy further.
The challenge is content analysis of relevant and irrelevant ideas, comments, posts etc. all the time during the
process. Another challenge is filtering negative, irrelevant comments. Drawing all strategical management and
creating or recreating strategy with social media messenger ensure dialog between personnel and directors.
Customised actions and rendezvous are supportive for strategic management and this has both positive and
negative sides as to proceed in social media. Director’s task is to think beforehand carefully how to filter all
ideas and comments related in strategic management and strategy. At the same time it is said that social media
is not official channel for strategic management or communication. The challenge is that all the personnel of
e.g. selected are not registered in social media tools and even if some of them are what is the percentage of the
personnel who are registered and who are active members and posting/tweeting of events, actions etc. of their
organisation. Other of the selected HEIs has circa 550 persons working but only 75 of them registered in
Twitter. Registering to a social media tool user is a personal choice. Employer cannot demand employee to use
certain social media tools for sharing events or actions of their operational environment. Example of this is one
of the interviewed personnel members who have not registered in any social media tool. She think that she can
use her time effectively and better to other work related issues than hanging around in social media which does
not give any content to her life. She has decided to focus on face-to-face rendezvous. She tells that sometimes
she hears some rumours or information from colleagues which is not shared e.g. in intranet or face-to-face
rendezvous and is trying to figure out more detailed information e.g. from middle management. Researcher did
not receive unambiguous answer or result from theme interviews if directors are sharing exact same
information via social media tools and on face-to-face rendezvous. Those personnel members who are not

involved or active members of social media tools e.g. Twitter can miss out of some important information shared by directors in social media tools. When organisation is using e.g. Twitter in strategic management and involving its personnel, the question is, that even though Twitter is transparent tool and following of discussions and commenting is easy it is the overall image false. Is it only in few active member’s hands to give an image for directors that e.g. whole personnel’s opinions of organisation’s strategy is the one what is mentioned in Twitter? Interviewed personnel of the HEIs thought that social media e.g. Twitter, Facebook, and blogs are useful channels for directors to share their thoughts of organisation’s strategy. Personnel members though e.g. that it is important that directors or organisation are active in social media when it concerns future students and it gives an aspect to younger generations’ life and organisation can also learn from those active social media users who are commenting or following HEIs pages. Personnel members think that HEIs should follow time actively and anticipate needs of future students being involved in recent social media tools. Twitter seems to be experienced one of the most important social media tools, which should be used by organisation’s directors. Issues and data what are not related with organisation’s strategy should not be shared in social media. Interviewed personnel did not experience strategic management in operational environment or via social media tools done. Because of this the question is what HEIs should do with it and how it is related to personnel’s work as strategy is given by board of directors etc. to personnel and personnel do not have possibilities to influence on strategical issues. Personnel think that strategy should be more concrete and personnel would realise what it is properly. Part of the interviewed personnel think that there should be a good proper digital strategy instead of organisation’ directors only sharing and work-shopping via social media tools.

**Conclusion**

Ministry of Education defines part of Finnish HEIs strategy, strategical actions, and deliverables. This is combined by HEI’s own views of its strategy by its aims and objectives in its operational environment. Nowadays operational environment includes also social media tools. HEIs are deciding which social media tools they are using and via which their directors are making e.g. capsulized strategic management. Interviewed HEI’s directors experience that strategic management in operational environment have to be agile and strategy should be modified as a living strategy. Directors think that they are making concrete actions in implementing strategy and in strategic management. Excluding things and issues when sharing strategy related e.g. events and implications is relevant by interviewed directors as well as by interviewed organisation’s personnel members. Code of conduct or instructions could be considered e.g. for strategical management to implementation for HEI’s directors and personnel to prevent possible challenges when using social media tools for work. HEI’s directors think that social media is a good channel for interaction with inner and outer stakeholders but they should consider carefully how to inform of the same issues to those personnel members or stakeholders who are not involved with e.g. Twitter and do not experience being unequal position when compared with active social media users. Transparency of social media tools experienced to be good when it concerns HEI’s strategy and strategic management because it allows possibility to open them as well as organisation’s image and brand for transparent discussion. This is related interaction what is experienced very important issue when discussing of strategy and strategic management. This research study indicates for other research studies in near future by concentrating e.g. selected Finnish HEI’s directors and personnel experiences of using social media tools e.g. Twitter in strategic management by more detailed questionnaire. Other research study would concentrate on systematic use of Twitter in strategic management by HEI’s directors.
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