

“The Social Destination”: How Social Media Influences the Organisational Structure and Leadership of DMOs

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Abstract—The paper deals with the most important changes that have occurred in business because of social media and its impact on organisations and leadership in recent years. It seeks to synthesize existing research, theories and concepts, in order to understand „social destinations”, and to provide a bridge from past research to future success. Becoming a „social destination” is a strategic and tactical leadership and management issue and the paper will present the importance of destination leadership in choosing the way towards a social destination and some organisational models. It also presents some social media tools that can be used in transforming a destination into a social one. Adapting organisations to the twenty-first century means adopting social media as a way of life and a way of business.

Keywords—Business, destination, leadership, organization, social.

I. THE “SOCIAL DESTINATION”

SOcial media, the global media network that connects us all, has become a *modus operandi* of the 21st century and has determined an unprecedented growth in human interaction in modern times. It provides four main benefits: communication, collaboration, community, and collective intelligence opportunities. Many of its tools are free to use, providing cost-effective solutions for businesses. Social media opens doors to enormous markets (by the end of 2013 the number of users of social networks will reach 1.5 billion worldwide [1]).

Social media generally refers to web applications that allow for the user to post and share content. Common social media applications include Facebook, Twitter, Flickr, MySpace, Pinterest, LinkedIn, Tumblr, etc. Kaplan and Haenlein [2] organize social media types in: blogs, social networking sites, virtual social worlds, collaborative projects, content communities, and virtual game worlds. Fotis *et.al.* [3] organize social media into four domains: expressing, networking, sharing, and gaming. Some distinctive features of social media are sociability, mobility, and purposiveness.

The new social network adds social context to every online

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interaction. Networks are capturing better data all the time, making social media ubiquitous (social shopping everywhere), dynamic (smarter, more flexible groups; from group discount to group dynamics) and intuitive (the evolution of location: from where I am to where I should be, to where I have been, to where I will be).

Web 2.0/social media had a tremendous impact on the tourism industry, but not all Destination Marketing Organisations (DMOs) worldwide are fully utilising it for building strong customer and network relationships, for engaging with and energising online communities.

Social media shifted power to customers and so they are no longer passive recipients of destination brand messages; rather, they are the brand. Traditional approaches to the promotion of a destination decline in effectiveness, so we need to redefine Destination Marketing as a two-way dialogue with the customers, rather than a one-way broadcast.

As social media becomes the primary medium by way of which travel information is shared [4], DMOs must meet the needs of travellers by providing value-added information and services that differentiate themselves from travel agencies and other tourism portals [5]. Knowledge of the travel destination is acquired through social interaction, in addition to traditional market-generated materials and web sites – including DMOs [6]. Consumers can demand what they want from tourism destinations: their expectations are higher and subsequently they are much more difficult to impress [7]. Listening and engaging travellers are now critical to DMO success.

The top goal of an organization is to increase customer satisfaction, something that can be accomplished through social media [8].

According to Brian Solis [9] tourism destinations face two options: a social brand or a social destination. (Reference [9] points out that a social brand is a business that „is remodeling or retrofitting its existing marketing practices to new media”, while a social business „embraces introspection and extrospection to reevaluate internal and external processes, systems, and opportunities to transform into a living, breathing entity that adapts to market conditions and opportunities”).

A „Social Destination” involves new ways of doing things, new organisational structures, new leadership; involves a spirit of collaboration based on open communications, internally (with all industry stakeholders) and externally (with partners and customers), responsiveness to dynamic change

based on engagement and transparency.

II. SOCIAL DESTINATION AND THE ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE

Social media affects the entire organisation. For example, even if an organisation has no official social media presence, its employees may be creating one. Customers and clients, through rating products and services in their online activities, can also help shape a company's brand and image via social media. Positive word of mouth becomes more powerful in the digital world than it has ever been in the off-line world. Organisations themselves often leverage social media to help in recruiting, advertising, and branding. These efforts can influence customers and potential job applicants, and can also affect the organisation's brand and reputation. But, a real social organisation needs more than these aspects.

Adapting organisations to the twenty-first century means adopting social media as a way of life and a way of business.

The Generation Y employees (younger than 40) are used to expressing their ideas online. Nowadays everyone owns a mobile phone or even a smartphone. "You already have an engaged workforce – it's just that they're engaged in other things" [10]. The management should embrace change and encourage discussions regarding engaging online for the organisations benefits.

Organisations have to make their way into the future by incorporating new means of working that social media represents deeply into the primary functions of their business. Becoming a social business requires cultural, operational and technological challenging changes. Reference [11] points out some social business techniques: social media marketing, social product development, crowdsourcing (community-powered workforces), social customer relationship management and customer communities (social customer care), social business ecosystems (engaging with business partners), workforce engagement (creating a connected company using social business), social business supporting capabilities.

A study conducted by Altimeter on 140 Corporate Social Strategists presents five social strategy programs into which the companies are organized. It shows that 41 percent of the programs are "Hub and Spoke", meaning that there is a cross-functional team in the centre of an organisation that helps different business units. 28.8 percent of the programs are "Centralized", meaning that there is one specific department that is in charge of all social activities. 18 percent of the programs are "Dandelion" ("Multiple Hub and Spoke"), differing from the "Hub and Spoke" by being related to multinational companies, where "companies within companies act nearly autonomously from each other under a common brand" [12]. Reference [12] also shows that 10.8 percent of the programs are "Decentralized", meaning that there isn't anyone in charge of the social activities. 1.4 percent of the programs are "Holistic", meaning that everyone is in charge of the social activities within the organization.

Jeremiah Owyang presents three organisational models, as

follows:

1. **Distributed:** meaning that the social activities aren't coordinated and are experimental. In this model the strategies start within departments. The advantages of such model are, first of all, that the activities can be started very easy and each individual has more freedom. However it has the disadvantage of not being coordinated with the entire institution. Owyang points out that in this strategy is difficult to sustain growth and evolve.
2. **Centralized:** all activities are controlled by one department. This model has the advantage that the policies and guidelines are established and controlled and the individuals within this department are fully dedicated to social activities. However, it has the disadvantage that the staff needs to acknowledge the needs of different audiences, which might be hard to achieve. It also leaves very little room for flexibility.
3. **Coordinated:** various rules, policies, and best practices are set and spread within the organisation. This model requires a lot of time, but it manages to develop an umbrella of guidelines and best practices [13].

Michael Brito [14] designed a fully collaborative social business which includes a Social Media Centre of Excellence (COE) team that reports to corporate marketing. „The COE serves as a governing body and is responsible for creating governance models, facilitating best practice sharing, training and many times they are creating the brand strategy for social media. This type of organization is empowering and amplifying employees to engage externally regardless of their job function or what business unit they report into. In many cases, the business units (product organizations, customer support, human resources, sales and various geographies) are responsible for the execution of social media programs, leveraging best practices, strategic support and guidance from the COE" [14]. This digital team can include a Head of Digital and Social Media (formerly Head of Digital Media), a Social Media Programme Manager (a new role), and an Online and Social Media Content Manager (formerly Online Content Manager) [15].

A local or regional DMO should help to promote not only the destination as a whole, but also hotels, tourist attractions, restaurants, theatre, sports, activities in the destination itself. Ideally, it would be possible to buy or reserve this through the DMO website. To become a social destination, DMOs (Destination Marketing Organisations) are facing tremendous challenges in the process of moving to social business. Getting to social destination is a deliberate and conscious process and involves all the organisational structures.

DMOs need to learn to apply Kaplan and Haenlein's list of five key actions to abide by when managing a social media presence: be active, be interesting, be humble, be informal, and be honest [16].

As Brito demonstrated the most effective social destination must include a Social Media Centre of Excellence (COE) to coordinate new ways of working that social media represents

[17]. To remain a competitive and sustainable destination, DMO websites:

- should be comprehensive (with maps, live web cams & YouTube video channels, a Flickr image gallery to capture the special elements of the destination) and should engage the audience;
- need to act as one-stop-shops for the visitors by providing a wide range of information for the destination's product mix as well as centralized hotel & event tickets reservation systems;
- need real time and social content to establish collaboration with people who have a personal or commercial interest in assisting potential travellers to visit a destination.

An efficient COE must:

- listen and evaluate what is being said about the destination, qualify mentions by travel and tourism relevancy, select what metrics the organisation will track, identify advocates and influencers, analyse the online sentiment of the destination, select the channels with discussions about the destination, monitor the daily online mentions and filter to refine the result, get information about people who are discussing the destination (country, province, channel, etc);
- determine the strategy (objectives and goals), segment communications by consumer interests, include calls to action in communications and creativity, etc.;
- engage the audience, encourage destination partners to participate, respond to comments and communication, etc.;
- measure community growth (members, comments, posts, etc), consumer sentiment, website visitor engagement, return on influence, etc.;
- explore and innovate through: monitoring social media channels for change, embrace new technologies and platforms, new initiatives based on goals and objectives, etc.;
- provide destination partners with access to the messaging strategy and empower them as advocates;
- integrate social media sharing across web, mobile, social, emails, offline media, etc.

III. FORMAL APPLICATIONS OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN DMO

The DMO of the future will have virtual offices, so employees worldwide will be able to work together online. But these people must become elite with unique skills, experiences, and professional attributes in order to have a more powerful and evolved structure able to lead its destination through this always changing and challenging future. For these potential employees and also for the potential customers DMO can use some formal applications of social media (very well described by Robert Ployhart), as follows [18]:

1. Recruitment and Selection

Organisations can use social networking platforms (e.g., LinkedIn, Twitter) and digital communities (e.g., talent communities) to share information about their organisations as well as career opportunities, specific jobs, in order to offer realistic job and culture previews and to develop a pipeline of potential candidates. As Shelton showed different platforms may be used for different job type and to target different groups (e.g., recent college grads, experienced candidates) [19]. They can also search the internet and/or social networking platforms using specific key words (e.g., accountant, CPA, etc) to find individuals who meet pre-defined job criteria, regardless of whether they are currently on the job market. Current staff can be encouraged to share job opportunities with their social networks and refer potential candidates for specific jobs.

Job relevance is the critical factor in determining whether to engage in social selection and the nature of the engagement that is relevant to the position should be clearly defined in advance. A search of the candidates' public activity in cyberspace can be conducted to reveal any potential advantages or risks they may create for the employer. The searches should focus only on publicly available information.

There are also some risks regarding the use of social media platforms in recruitment and selection: employment discrimination (e.g., obtaining personal information that is not job-related from sites such as Facebook and using it in hiring decisions); variability in applicant use of social media; disadvantages those who do not use it (some age groups or racial/ethnic groups may be underrepresented on social media sites).

2. Socialization and Onboarding (organisational socialization) through social platforms providing new employees with additional means to understand the organization and their colleagues organically. This can be done by:

- Knowledge Sharing and transfer using wikis and blogs;
- Identifying subject matter experts through the use of profiles. Some tags can then be used to search for individuals within the company for specific expertise.
- Platforms that allow employees to understand activities and ideas from not only their own department but other departments as well.
- Platforms that can promote organic flows of information by providing transparent access to other parts of the organization. New employees can better understand the relationships and issues beyond their proximity.

Personal information shared via profiles can lead to new employees building communities based on shared interests and geographic locations. Relationships can be deepened by interactions within these communities.

There are also some risks regarding the use of social media platforms in onboarding: spread of inappropriate or damaging information (e.g., negative information posted by disgruntled employees could discourage new hires); creation of division

rather than inclusion (e.g., establishment of „cliques” or subcultures).

3. Training and Development

Learning through social media channels, whether it is for new employee orientation or purely a process change, will be an important communication and training tool.

For instance, YouTube is being extensively employed in a variety of ways to deliver training. YouTube channels demonstrate expertise and can mentor employees by incorporating learning programmes enabling them to acquire new skills through step by step training videos available through the channel.

Google+ was launched in 2011 with a feature entitled “Hangouts”, a video chat room enabling up to 9 people per session to participate in online video chats via their webcam, so it is ideally geared towards hosting training sessions online. A new rollout of “Hangouts on Air” will allow Hangouts hosts to record the proceedings, edit them, and then automatically publish them to YouTube (another important training tool).

Some important benefits of using training through social media channels are: reduced training costs; greater training effectiveness; continuous skill enhancement; self-directed learning, etc.

The risk can be the unequal access or usage (e.g., those who do not use social media have less opportunity to share); too much information (e.g., work time consumed with reading social network posts); quick spread of negative or private information, etc.

4. Knowledge Sharing and Transfer

As Panahi, Watson and Partridge pointed out, social media has the ability to support several major requirements of knowledge sharing by providing a better place for social interaction, by establishing opportunities for experience sharing, by building a domain of informal relationships, by providing facilities to observe, listen, and imitate best practices, and finally by establishing a mutual swift trust among participants [20].

Some benefits of using social media in knowledge sharing and transfer are: fast and inexpensive dissemination of information, easy sharing of knowledge from few to many, etc.

There are also some risks: the unequal access or usage, too much information, quick spread of negative or private information, etc.

5. Branding and Marketing

Social media gives marketers a voice and a way to communicate with peers, customers and potential consumers. It personalizes the "brand" and helps the organisation to spread its message in a relaxed and conversational way. There are important benefits to use social media tools in marketing: it gives you the ability to reach new customers, to enhance customer loyalty, to increase time savings and cost efficiency.

Some risks can also occur: no relevant effect on customer metrics (e.g., investment in social media does not generate sales or customer growth); hidden costs with maintenance of media (e.g., staff time to monitor social network sites and constantly provide fresh content).

6. Creativity and Problem Solving

Social media gives the ability to get the kind of quick feedback that inbound marketers require in order to stay agile. Through social media channels, destination marketers can solicit the feedback of people they trust regarding new products or changes to features of the existing products. It allows marketers to get people actively involved in the success of their brand. They can get answers from experts. They can go to the network and ask what kind of content followers want to see and so they can have some topics that will resonate with the audience. They can monitor brand mentions. They can increase problem solving accuracy and speed and they can spread innovation throughout organisation with minimal effort.

Regarding creativity, Brito argued that an organization that has more human touch is likely to be more open. He presents the case of Google, with the “20 percent time policy” which allowed the employees to work on whatever they wanted in 20 percent of their work time. In this way, the employees are more focused on doing what they please and innovations can come out of this practice. As it happened, for instance, for Google, an employee apparently came up with Gmail on its 20 percent time at work [21].

Some disadvantages can also occur: consensus process slows decision-making (e.g. the higher number of people involved in decision making increases time needed to resolve an issue); consensus leads to pursuit of poor choices with a lack of critical thinking (e.g. groupthink or an influential employee generating support for a bad idea)

7. Influencing Organisational Culture/Change

Corporate cultures are a complex amalgamation of executive personalities, external events, and history. Culture affects almost everything, from how employees are treated to how they compete in the marketplace.

Corporate culture represents shared values, traditions, philosophy and policies of an organisation which project a professional atmosphere that influences behaviour and performance. Through social media organisations can communicate, share and reinforce this value system, or change culture through communication.

Cecez- *et.al.* [22] show that a Social Media Platform can serve as an agent for cultural transformation. It can deliver new values, beliefs and norms. Moreover, social media is able to change patterns of social interaction by increasing openness, knowledge sharing, and solidarity [23].

Some negative facts can also happen: broad resistance to organizational change (e.g., employees bond together to resist change); facilitation of undesirable company culture (e.g., employees use social media to form coalitions counter to the

organisation's culture).

The starting point of organisational change is leadership. With this idea in view, the paper will now present some aspects regarding this issue. Adequate resourcing and leadership are arguably the two most important factors contributing to the management of a successful tourism destination.

IV. SOCIAL DESTINATION LEADERSHIP

Leadership is a complex process having multiple dimensions and there is not one common definition of it available.

According to Michel [24], leadership is „the art of empowering and mobilizing others to want to accomplish a mutually agreed-upon goal while advancing the group's integrity and morale”.

David Mielach asked some business leaders about leadership definition and what makes a good leader. Two interesting opinions are presented below: [25]

"Leadership is accomplishing things that reach beyond solitary abilities by acting — and getting others to act — with a maturity that surpasses limited self-interest." (John Baker, president of READY Thinking, an organisational and leadership development firm);

"To paraphrase Dwight D. Eisenhower, 'leadership is the art of getting others to do things you want done and feel good about it.' I would go so far as to say the goal is to get the person to embrace the "mission" and own it." (Dale Hamby, a former Army major and a teacher at Harrisburg University);

Northouse defined leadership as a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal. Defining leadership as a process means that it is not a characteristic that resides in the leader, but rather a transactional and interactive event that occurs between the leader and the followers. It involves influence. A leader affects and is affected by followers. Leadership is a process involving vision and long-term thinking. [26]

Kotter [27] described leadership behaviours in terms of: (1) Establishing direction; (2) Aligning people; (3) Motivating and inspiring; and (4) Producing change.

Four leadership styles were identified by Hersey and Blanchard: telling (Directing); selling (Coaching); participating (Supporting); and Delegating. These styles are formed from a combination of task and relationship behaviour. [28]

Burns, in his book *Leadership*, distinguished two types of leadership [29]: transactional and transformational. Transactional leadership occurs „when one person takes the initiative in making contact with others for the purpose of an exchange of valued things”. Transformational leadership occurs „when one or more persons engage with others in such a way that leaders and followers raise one another to higher levels of motivation and morality”. Transformational leadership is viewed as the „real” leader. “The transformational leadership holds great promise for advancing

associations, business and society” [30].

Collins [31] introduces the concept of “Level 5 Leadership” as „the highest level in a hierarchy of executives capabilities, who blend extreme personal humility with intense professional will”. Level 5 leadership will transform a good company into a great one. The hierarchy is the following:

1. Highly capable individual: Makes productive contributions through talent, knowledge, skills, and good work habits;
2. Contributing team member: Contributes to the achievement of group objectives; works effectively with others in a group setting;
3. Competent manager: Organises people and resources toward the effective and efficient pursuit of predetermined objectives;
4. Effective leader: Catalyses commitment to and vigorous pursuit of a clear and compelling vision; stimulates the group to high performance standards; and builds enduring greatness through a paradoxical combination of personal humility plus professional will.

Some essential skills for the relationship-building which is critical for any leader are: active listening, conscientiousness, empowerment, effective communication, persistence, consistency, being a good follower, etc.

Significant and ever-evolving progress in technology, government, business, demographics and economics require leaders to rely on the expertise and knowledge of many advisors [32]. It's very important to never assume the leader is more important than the follower; indeed, without the follower, there would be no leader.

Starting from these considerations, it is necessary to introduce other key-concepts related to our research, such as „sustainable leadership” and „social leadership”.

Sustainable leadership is a leadership that recognises the complex interdependency between individuals, businesses, markets, society, and the eco-system, with the aspiration that the organisation will create prosperity and social value as well as long term commercial success, while protecting the environment in which we are all participants.

Sustainable leadership is concerned with developing high quality relationships across four important dimensions:

1. personal: the ability to learn from experience, a sense of personal purpose, and care for own physical wellbeing and vitality.
2. organisation: understanding the relationships between cultural norms, the achievement of business goals and the customer experience.
3. society: understanding the relationships between society and business, because business needs a healthy society in which to operate.
4. environment: protecting the environment and minimising the environmental impact of the organisation.

The social leader is a collaborative, open minded, humble, curious person, interested in developing future leaders, with inclusiveness and a team oriented philosophy and with active participation in social networks - internal or external - to their

business. The social leader sees things a little differently, and knows there is a more social approach to operating business than it is usual thought. He is a social media strategist, community manager, internal communicator and social analyst - all rolled into one. He has a pivotal role in transforming the organisation from doing social media to being a social business.

Prior to the web-era, conventional development models focused entirely on sourcing ideas from specific and defined sources. By contrast, currently potentially innovative ideas can appear from anywhere and many ideas come from multiple sources. Not everyone with an idea knows how to carry it forward through a project, and achieve success. Developing project leadership becomes both a required new skill for every employee and a training challenge for the organization.

Today social leaders must know about a lot of different things and they have to be very open to the outside world. Some leadership required skills are:

- collective intelligence: the ability to maximise the knowledge inherent in networks;
- the ability to conduct and curate these networks;
- the practice of speaking the truth;
- greater social responsibility;
- the need for emotional (and other) intelligences.

According to a survey conducted by Maddie Grant and Jamie Notter regarding the ways in which social media is changing leadership, 84 percent of the respondents consider that through the involvement of social media in leadership the organization gets a competitive advantage and 44 percent of the respondents are worried because the leaders don't get involved that much in social media. The survey conclusions point out the fact that the expectations of the employees go from more transparency to change, experimentation and more clarity [33].

At the same time, a recent research by global public relations firm Weber Shandwick and KRC Research, "The Company behind the Brand: In Reputation We Trust", found that 66 percent of consumers say that their perceptions of CEOs affect their opinions of companies and the products they sell. Executives, too, recognise the importance of leadership reputation – they attribute nearly one-half (49 percent) of a company's reputation to the CEO's reputation. Executive leadership is critical to burnishing the overall reputation of organisations today, as a large 60 percent of a company's market value is attributed to its reputation [34].

V. CONCLUSIONS

Social media, the global media network that connects us all, has become a *modus operandi* of the 21st century and organisations have to make their way into the future by incorporating social media into the primary functions of their business. Adapting organisations to the demands of the twenty-first century means adopting social media as a way of life and a way of business.

The tourism industry has changed dramatically with the

overwhelming emergence of social media platforms and destinations must adjust to these changes. According to some researchers tourism destinations face two options: a social brand or a social destination. We consider that a social brand is just an intermediate step to the social destination.

Becoming a „social destination” involves new ways of doing things, new organisational structures, and new leadership. It also requires cultural, operational and technological challenging changes. Getting to social destination is a deliberate and conscious process and involves all the organisational structures.

The main factor that dictates an advanced social media strategy is leadership and the social leader has a pivotal role in transforming the organisation from doing social media to being a social business. Competent, visionary, and motivating leadership will allow a destination to reach its full potential.

Social media has a tremendous impact on the tourism destination, but not all DMOs worldwide are fully utilising it for building strong customer and network relationships. A research conducted by Hays, Page and Buhalis among the DMOs of the top ten international tourism destinations, showed that DMOs are at the initial stages of understanding and experimenting with how to use social media to promote their destinations [35].

This paper is the first phase of a research study based on the grounded theory approach with the aim to identify and conceptualize the leadership and organisational challenges involved in a social destination initiative. The next steps are to collect other qualitative data through interpretation of statistical data, questionnaires, in-depth interviews, etc followed by the development of a model for a social destination and pilot testing of the model in the Sibiu (Romania) destination.

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