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Social Media by Generation:

*A study of generational differences and their use of social media in a public relations firm*

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Spring 2014  
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### Abstract

This study examines the use of social media in a public relations firm considering employees from different generations. The research explores how generational differences affect the use of social media in a public relations firm, if employees perceive that it is important for organizational leaders to push their employees to use social media outlets and if conflict arises as a result of employees resisting to use social media in the workplace. Both participant observation and qualitative interviewing were used in the process of this study. The study was looked at through the lens of organizational culture theory, as it helped to explain the way the office worked and how their particular culture played into their use of social media. This study provided results that show, unlike previous research indicates, there are members of the older generations who are willing to use and are excited about using social media as a tool in the public relations field.

## **I. Introduction and Rationale**

Social media is a growing trend that more and more people are signing on to every day. It is a growing trend that has been shown to help the public relations industry thrive (Bush, 2010, para. 3). Kaplan and Haenlein define social media as “internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0 and that allow the creation and exchange of User Generated Content” (2010, pp. 62).

Like every other marketing sector, the PR industry took a beating in 2009. But unlike the last major downturn in the PR business, which was brought on by the dot-com bust and 9/11, the industry is experiencing a much quicker rebound this time around-and a good part of the credit might be to social media (Bush, 2010, para. 3).

Many studies have been done to show just how much of the public relations industry’s success can be accredited to social media. More than half of the 59 CEO’s and CFO’s of public relations firms who were surveyed by the Council of public relations firms showed growth in the first half of 2010 versus 21% in 2009. A majority of these people also suspected a growth in overall revenue for 2010 (Bush, 2010, para. 5).

Spending on PR will hit \$3.4 billion in 2010, an increase of 3% over 2009, according to Veronis Suhler Stevenson, a private-equity firm that publishes annual reports on the state of the PR industry. It expects that number to hit \$4.4 billion by 2014. John Suhler, co-founder and president, said growth in the industry is being accelerated by a significantly

increased rate of client adoption of social media and word-of-mouth marketing techniques (Bush, 2010, para. 6).

Because social media is having such a positive impact on the growing public relations industry, it is important that all employees within a public relations firm are excited about and willing to use this technology. The Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) researched a relationship between social media and “the employee voice”. Their research found that “senior leaders” frequently lack a complete understanding of the way social media works and how much data you can retrieve from it. The research found that these leaders often only focus on potential risks brought on by the use of social media rather than approaching the use of social media with an open mind (Challinor, 2013, para. 4). Although, Salkowitz gives a reminder that “this multigenerational workforce issue is not a matter of age” (2013, para. 4). There have been several studies that have found that seniors over the age of 65 are the “fastest-growing demographic on Facebook today”, thus showing that the older generation is very capable of learning to use new social media outlets (Salkowitz, 2013, para. 4). The three generations that are currently (and predominantly) in the workforce are the Boomers (born between 1946 and 1964), Generation X (born between 1965 and 1981), and Generation Y (born in or after 1982). All three generations grew up in different eras of technology, and all three have different opinions about the use of social media. This research is going to explore these three generations and their use of social media in the workplace. The research will show if the Boomer generation is less likely to use social media than Generation X and Generation Y because of when they were born.

Researching this topic will be very beneficial as there is a gap between research on generational differences and the use of social media in a public relations firm. As it is becoming more evident that social media is helping the public relations industry to thrive (Bush, 2010, para. 3), it is more important that all public relations practitioners both support the use of social media in the workplace, and understand how to use it. The exemplary literature review below attempts to show how research on both generational differences and social media use in the public relations industry can be connected, and further investigated to see if generational differences have an effect on the use of social media. If found that generational differences do have an effect, it could give public relations firms insight on how to handle these differences, and help those opposed to using it more easily transition into it.

## **II. Theory and Review of the Literature**

### *Theory*

This research is guided by Joann Keyton's organizational culture theory. This particular theory can be used to explain this organization's structure and its employee's stance on the use of social media. Keyton defines organizational culture as "the set(s) of artifacts, values, and assumptions that emerges from the interactions of organizational members" (Keyton, 2014, pp. 550).

Keyton created several lenses for studying organizational culture, based off of the original two that were created by Eisenberg and Riley. Keyton's lenses are: symbolic performance, narrative reproduction, textual reproduction, management, power and politics, technology, and globalization. It is useful to look at this

organization through the lens of symbolic performance, narrative reproduction, and technology.

The symbolic-performance lens helps to look at how communication within an organization helps to shape and transform its culture. “Research from a symbolic-performance lens examines both routine and unique communication – specifically, any communication responsible for the creation, maintenance, and transformation of organizational reality” (Keyton, 2014, pp. 556). According to Keyton, a researcher should look at symbolic performance keeping in mind these five types of performances: ritual, social codes, politics, enculturation, and passion (Keyton, 2014, pp. 556). These five performances all work together to help us understand the way that this organization works and how it all comes together.

The lens of narrative reproduction can be used to look at and understand the organizations history, and the way they have incorporated the story of their office building into their culture. “Storytelling is a device for employees to make sense of their organization; and stories become artifacts laden with an organization’s values, norms, and beliefs” (Keyton, 2014, pp. 556-557). This research will look into the background of the organization, and try to find things about it that shape its culture today. This could lead to the idea that the past influences the future (Keyton, 2014, pp. 557). Stories reaffirm values that are both accepted and rejected within a firm, and this organization’s circus theme boldly states their value of creativity and having a good time.

It will be important to look at the organization through the lens of power and politics to see what kind of hierarchical structure they have, and if it contributes to their organizational culture.

Organizations are sites of hierarchy, dominance, and power; and organizational members have varying degrees of control over message creation and meaning. Normative practices are created when the more powerful organizational members get the less powerful ones to accept their views about reality and their values of working (Keyton, 2014, pp. 558).

The organizations hierarchical structure could contribute significantly with respect to gaining insight about the culture within the organization. The structure could set the tone for the workplace and show why some employees act the way that they do. The hierarchy model of this organization will say a lot about the organization and the people working there.

According to Keyton, technology in an organization is defined as “any tool used to complete work, from fully mechanical tools such as pencils to fully digital and automated ones such as cloud computing” (Keyton, 2014, pp. 558). This organization’s use of technology was very important for both it and its clients. The organization needed to properly use its social media technology to promote the business and effectively showcase what they’ve done in the past, and how successful they are as a company. Leonardi and Jackson state that technology is viewed as a “practice that entwines itself with other work and communication practices to constitute a culture” (2009, pp. 396). This is helpful to think about while observing



the employees. It helps the researcher to look for cues about how their use of social media plays into the organizational culture.

### *Review of the Literature*

There have been many studies that look at the ways in which social media is used in the workplace (specifically in the public relations industry), how it is used, and who uses it. There have also been several studies done on generational differences in the workplace and how those who come from different generations work differently. However, there is a gap in the research where those two variables (social media and generational differences) could come together. This literature review attempts to summarize previous research on both subjects, and demonstrate how they can come together to create research on the affect generational differences have on the use of social media in a public relations firm.

### Areas of Focus

A study done by Lester, Standifer, Schultz, and Windsor looked at the actual versus perceived generational differences in the workplace. This study looks specifically at how to handle generational differences between coworkers. It examines the difference between how generations believe they are different, and how they are actually different. The study examines the Boomers generation, Generation X, and Generation Y.

In their study, it was found that Boomers prefer “face-to-face interactions and conventional mail,” but are also willing to use different online tools and resources for their work (Reynolds et al., 2008 as cited in Lester et al., 2012, pp. 342). The Boomer

category included subjects who were born between 1946 and 1964. “Generation X is seen as preferring technology-based interactions, avoiding unnecessary face-to-face meetings, and valuing direct communication feedback with leaders” (Crumpacker & Crumpacker, 2007 as cited in Lester et al., 2012, pp. 342). Generation X participants were born between 1965 and 1981. “Generation Y is typically viewed as a technology-driven, multitasking group of individuals who are committed to generating a culturally sensitive, optimistic, and fun workplace” (Lester et al., 2012, pp. 342). Generation Y subjects were born in or after 1982. The actual difference between these three generations was that “the extent to which a generation values technology is logically driven by the extent to which technology was available, reliable, and understood as they were growing up” (Lester et al., 2012, pp. 343). Therefore, it makes sense that Generation Y puts the highest value on technology, as these individuals have been exposed to a digital world since birth. In the study, it was found that Generation Y had a significantly higher score than both Generation X and the Boomers in social media (Lester et al., 2012, pp. 343). This would suggest that because Generation X and the Boomers grew up before the emergence of social media mechanisms (i.e. Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn), they would be less likely to use it. This study gives insight to a generation of people who may not be interested in using social media as a tool in the workplace, simply because they did not grow up using it.

A study by Correa, Hinsley, and de Zuniga looked at people’s use of social media through personality predictors, gender, and age (Correa et al., 2010, para. 3-4). This research was not specific to use in the workplace, rather it was more general looking at if the use of social media differs by gender and age. Their research questions were, “Does

the relationship between personality predictors and social media differ by gender?” and “Does the relationship between personality predictors and social media use differ by age?” (Correa et al., 2010, para. 17). They conducted an online survey to gather data.

In relation to my study, their second research question is especially relevant. They divided their sample for this question into two groups: young adults (18-29 years old) and adults (30 and older). For the young adults sample, “extraversion was the only personality predictor that was related to social media use” (Correa et al., 2010, para. 30). Many young adults enjoy openly discussing them selves on social media sights. A young adult will easily offer up information online about their likes and dislikes, who they’re friends with, and where they’re from. Therefore, it makes sense that extraversion would be a predicator of social media use for a young adult. Personality predictors accounted for 10.5% of the variance in social media use (Correa et al., 2010, para. 33). For adults, extraversion was also positively related to social media use, but personality predictors only accounted for 4% of the social media use variance (Correa, et al., 2010, para. 34). Older adults are less likely to divulge information about themselves online, because they are more aware of and more educated about the dangers that can lead to. This demonstrates the reluctance by adults to use social media outlets personally, which could lead to them being unwilling to use it in the workplace.

An article written by A. C. Croft examined the use of “new” media in the public relations profession in comparison to older, traditional media resources (Croft, 2007). Croft makes the distinction between traditional and “new” media.

Instead of waiting patiently for the scheduled evening/morning newscast or print run, the public has developed a crushing need to access news and

information practically before it exists, and so there is a growing dash – particularly in the younger age brackets – to find out what’s new or breathtaking as quickly as possible via the thousands/millions of blogs, podcasts, social network sites and other “new” media that mushroom exponentially on a daily basis (Croft, 2007, pp. 18).

This excerpt from his article perfectly captures the need to know information as soon as possible, and how that need shines through in a younger population. Croft feels that the public relations landscape is rapidly changing through this outburst of social media, and the success of a public relations practitioner depends on adapting to the changes: “the time for excuses is over” (Croft, 2007, pp. 18). This points out yet again, there is in fact a difference in generations when it comes to understanding and using social media. Croft offers suggestions on how to “get up to speed” on how to use all of the “new” media tools. The first item on his list is to “learn the lay of the land.” His suggestion for doing this is to team up with younger people within the organization and have them walk you through the latest social media tools and give a quick lesson on how to use them (Croft, 2007, pp.19). Croft feels that public relations firms who acquire the greatest understanding of social media will become more attractive to potential clients in the future (Croft, 2007, pp. 17).

In this study, seventeen public relations practitioners were chosen and interviewed about their feelings on the use of new technology (new internet programs) in the firm. After analyzing the interviews, Johnson found a consistent theme was “how audience-centered the practitioners were in their employment of new technologies” (Johnson, 1997, pp. 223). Practitioners divulged they choose strategies either with or without new

technology based on the ability to reach certain audiences (Johnson, 1997, pp. 223). One practitioner said that new technology “allows us to leverage existing communication tools to reach new audiences” (Johnson, 1997, pp. 223). Some practitioners addressed the problem of an age gap when it comes to using new technology. One technology company executive talked about how some people have not adapted to reading on a “tube” and divulged that the biggest factor in him choosing to use or not use new technology was the age of the worker he was trying to reach (Johnson, 1997, pp. 224).

Practitioners also discussed how the demand to use new technology in the public relations industry impacted them personally and professionally (Johnson, 1997, pp. 225). All respondents in this study admitted to having knowledge gaps about some of the new technology. “Right now, we’re so bogged down just trying to get online and I don’t know any of this stuff. We’re just trying to catch up. And after this there will be something else. So I know I’m juggling my job and all the technology. I’m swamped already and now there’s this” (Johnson, 1997, pp. 226). Johnson found that the attempt to keep up with the new technology caused a large amount of stress for the practitioners. They felt behind their colleagues if they were not using certain social media tools yet. Some practitioners commented on how their firms understanding of the newest technology helped their business. “Our members like it. They see that we are trying to keep up with the latest trends, expand the way we do things, and look out for them” (Johnson, 1997, pp. 227).

This study digs deeper into the reluctance by public relations professionals to use new technology. While the article was written before the creation of social media sights such as Twitter and Facebook, it does demonstrate the fact that many people do not have

the time or do not want to take the time out of their work day to try and understand how to operate a new form of technology.

In a report by Melcrum, it was found that “CEO’s greatly differ in their opinion on social media” (Hathi, 2008, para.1). This report was done through 18 interviews with CEO’s in different organizations in the U.S., Europe, and South Africa (Hathi, 2008, para. 2). The study found that “although some leaders are enthusiastic about the potential of social media and keen to know how to use new channels, others are skeptical” (Hathi, 2008, para. 2). In further reviewing the interviews, it was found that some of the CEO’s barely know about some of the social media tools, such as blogs and podcasts (Hathi, 2008, para. 2). Rona Fairhead is the CEO of the Financial Times Group. She is a skeptic of the use of social media, and in her interview said, “There is more of a need to reach out and touch in a personal way. You can make it feel more personalized through technology, but technology has its limits and nothing beats people being in a room together” (Hathi, 2008, para. 3). CEO of Schneider Electric, Jean-Pascal Tricoire, disagrees and said he believes that leaders of organizations need to start accepting the use of social media as we move away from older methods of communication (Hathi, 2008, para. 4). Current CEO’s are more likely to come from an older generation, who are not as familiar with the new social media tools as people from Generation Y are. If the upper management personnel are resisting to move toward the use of social media, then it would be difficult to implement it’s use throughout the company. The life of public relations firms are now becoming dependent on keeping up to date with the latest social media for clients. If the CEO refused to use these tools, it is likely the company would suffer.

Unfortunately, there is no study that looks at the relationship between generational differences and a reluctance to use social media in a public relations firm. Studying this could be of great use to both public relations firms and their employees. For the firm, they could better understand why it is that some employees are reluctant to use social media outlets. For the employees, it could educate those who are reluctant about why it is important for them to learn and use these tools. An organizational culture perspective will help guide this research and show how the organization's culture effects its use of social media.

### **III. Research Questions**

RQ1: How do generational differences affect the use of social media in a public relations firm?

RQ2: Do employees perceive that it is important for organizational leaders to push their employees to use social media outlets?

RQ3: Does conflict arise as a result of employees resisting to use social media in the workplace?

### **IV. Method**

The community for this study is the employees within a small public relations firm which I am calling Sunrise Public Relations. To collect data, I used two methods in my research: participant observation and qualitative interviews. Gans defines participant observation as “the craft of experiencing and recording events in social settings” (1999,

as cited in Lindlof & Taylor, 2011, pp. 135). The observation portion of my study took place over two separate days at the firm. I observed the employees who are working with social media in their natural work environment. My observations included watching how each employee used social media tools, and what they used them for. Observing the employees while they were using these social media outlets helped me understand how they were used, and get a sense of whether or not using them was frustrating or simple. While observing, I paid close attention to the employees' nonverbal communication and the way they acted while using social media. I watched for signs of frustration when using the social media tool, and for signs of satisfaction while using it. I also watched for interactions between employees who are both using social media. Conversation flowed freely between myself and the employees while using social media, so I was able to ask their thoughts while they were using those tools. While observing, I kept a journal to record my observations, people I meet, and personal thoughts. "Keeping a journal can be a highly practical project: it can help you to manage a rising tide of data by recording the dates of your fieldwork sessions, the names of the people you meet and interview, and so on" (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011, pp. 163).

My study involved conducting two qualitative interviews with two different employees at Sunrise PR who work with social media, and I asked about their perceptions and uses of social media. In the interview, I asked about their social media habits both personally and professionally, and noted the differences. I recorded each interview in their entirety, as Lindlof and Taylor suggest (2011, pp.164). Because I had access to my entire interviews via recording, I was able to transcribe them verbatim. None of my research included a vulnerable group and all of the employees at Sunrise PR



are over the age of 18. Everyone who was a part of the study received a consent form to sign, as well as receiving their own copy to keep for their records. Each participant's identity is protected in this study, and I have changed their names to protect them.

## **V. Findings**

### *Narrative*

On a Friday afternoon at the end of February, I strolled into Sunrise Public Relations drinking a latte and ready to observe the people at the firm as they sat at their desk using social media. I never expected to be so welcomed and submerged into the work they do with social media. I was invited in and questioned about what my research project was about, and how I would like to proceed for the day with my observations. It was a small office with a small staff, and everyone there seemed eager to be a part of the observation.

As soon as I walked in, I noticed that the man who appeared to be the oldest person in the room had the most electronics up and running simultaneously. I then knew that I would be leaving with results that I never expected to find. I was anticipating a seemingly obvious result: older generations would not be excited about using social media daily as a tool at work. Instead, I found that the oldest man in the room was the most enthusiastic about it. This helped to shape social media into the culture of the organization, and led me to look deeper at the connection between organizational culture and the use of social media in the workplace.

This research was guided by a curiosity about generational differences and their effect on social media use, the importance of pushing employees to adapt social media

skills, and a curiosity about whether or not resistance to use social media in the workplace causes conflict. The following sections piece together the five themes that were found in my research to describe the use of social media in the public relations firm.

*Thematic*Office Culture

The office culture at Sunrise PR was definitely something to take notice of. Their culture was analyzed by examining their company theme, their office space, their lack of hierarchy, their relationships between co-workers, and their dedicated work.

Perhaps one of the most interesting pieces of their culture is the firm's embrace of the theme of the building they work in. The building is titled, "The Cyrk" which is Polish for circus. The building's owner was from Poland, and has a collection of the infamous Cyrk posters painted during World War II. The firm took this on as a theme for themselves and adapted it into their brand. Each employee created their own circus job title (i.e. Ring Master, or Fortune Teller) and the firm created business cards that look like circus tickets. The official job titles that each employee had did not really seem to have anything to do with their circus job title. The only person that had a connection between the two was Steve, one of the co-founders. His official title was Co-Founder, and his circus title was Ring Master, which coincide, as the Ring Master is the director of the circus. Megan gave some insight on this:

We definitely like to have fun here. Of course we get all of our work done, but there's no harm in making this a fun place to be! We have these cute business cards with our circus names. Making those names was a good way to allow some creative flow with each employee. But we are in the process of making normal business cards for each of us to appeal to clients who really aren't into the quirky side of us.

This circus theme definitely shines through each employee, and each employee's attitude conveys that creative theme.

"The Cyrk," the building where the office is located is a very modern, clean-cut building. The space felt as though whatever business was in it, it had to have a modern style and feel, and a lot of color. Floor to ceiling windows went around the office, allowing a lot of natural light in. The bold orange painted on the entire back wall of the office really popped when the light came in. Megan talked about how they had really found the perfect building.

When we decided to move from our old office, we looked long and hard to make sure we found the perfect space. When we found this building we fell in love with its background, and all of the Cyrk posters that Bonnie (the building owner) had hanging. We thought we would really fit in here, especially if we took on the circus theme.

The organization needed the perfect space to work in, as they wanted to generate a fun and creative work environment for everyone. All of the natural light that this building provided and its interesting background story gave this to them.

The firm's hierarchical structure was a very linear model; they put everyone on a fairly equal playing field. Steve was a co-founder of the firm, but he did not appear to have any more pull on final say than anyone else did. Everyone's ideas and opinions were welcomed in the office and everyone listened to each other. This seemed to come from their organizational culture of keeping a low stress level in the work environment and trying to make work a happy place to be.

This brings me to the co-worker's treatment of each other. While the two co-founders are father and daughter, it felt like the family dynamic extended to everyone in the office. This was probably an easy thing to do due to the fact that they had fewer than ten employees. Everyone seemed concerned with being kind to one another, and not insulting or hurting someone's feelings. For example, I sat in on a meeting between three of the employees who were discussing how they were going to revamp their website. While the leader of the meeting voiced all of her ideas, the other two listened patiently. At the end, rather than saying they did not like her ideas, the other two suggested other ideas in a positive way by saying things like, "I really like where you're going with that, but maybe we could add this to it." Because of the positivity, the presenter did not feel as though she was being attacked, and everyone left the meeting happy and in agreement.

The circus theme of this organization was a very interesting aspect that seemed to tie the culture of the organization together. They even dressed up as their circus titles and took picture for their website. The circus theme seemed to guide the organization to integrating their brand into their culture and into technology.

### Client Work

A lot of time is spent working on client related things. Steve's daily routine includes checking on client activity in the mornings to see if anything has changed, and looking at things that may affect clients. This was an important step to take in the morning, as he needed to check for any thing that may have happened over night that might require damage control of some sort for a client.

Client work at this firm was taken very seriously, and employees had strong opinions about how it should be done. This public relations firm has won several awards,

including two from the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA), so clearly they do impressive work. A resonating opinion between all of the employees was their thoughts on client's social media pages. Currently, the firm handles social media pages for their clients, but they wish clients would take the time to learn how to use them properly so they could manage them on their own. Steve was one of many who expressed this:

It's always frustrating when we look at clients on social media and you go back and see what they're doing, and they're saying things like 'Happy President's Day.' Well great, folks will know that you understood today was President's Day, but that's not relevant at all so you're just making noise, not communicating something important or something of value.

Everyone at the firm agreed that having to manage the Facebook pages of clients was a time consuming job. Patrick believed that the best use of a client's money would be for them to have Sunrise teach them rules and guidelines, and train them how to use the social media tools. He believed that it would serve them better to do it themselves because they are going to know what the best content to create is.

#### Time Spent on Computers/Social Media

Employees at Sunrise spend almost all of their day on a computer, and a fair chunk of that time is dedicated to social media related work. All employees admitted that the use of social media during the day for clients sometimes leads them to logging into their personal social networks. I talked to everyone at the organization who was working with social media about this, and they all confessed that it does happen sometimes during

the day. Patrick freely admitted that he occasionally slips into personal accounts, but that it was not that big of a deal.

Our business is laid back. If you have to slip into personal stuff whether it's taking a phone call, or going to the store for some reason, or checking your social media accounts it's not really that big of a deal. Frankly I wouldn't want to work for a company where that would be a big deal.

Megan echoed this feeling as she too logs into her personal accounts occasionally. She believed working on the computer strictly on business related things all day was unreasonable.

I'm all for being productive and getting work done while I'm at the office, but it is just unreasonable to expect that every employee is going to be doing work related things on the computer every second of the day. You just need a break sometimes.

Even Steve, the oldest at the company, is active on Facebook and LinkedIn on a daily basis, sometimes checking them at work. This speaks to the organization's culture. With their lack of hierarchy, which is explained by Keyton's power and politics lens, also comes the idea that everyone can be their own boss, and therefore can decide when it is an appropriate time to slip into some personal things (i.e. checking their social media page).

Some of the time spent on social media at the firm is updating Sunrise's own social media accounts. This is everyone's least favorite task as it is time consuming, and therefore it is not done as often as it should be. Patrick revealed that it is important to

update their pages daily, but that it does not always happen. Sunrise is looking forward to the arrival of their new intern in the coming weeks to take care of tasks like this.

### Importance of Social Media

Sunrise Public Relations sees social media as a very important tool in the public relations world. The employees feel that it is crucial to be constantly updating their own social media pages. As they discussed revamping their company website, they spent a fair amount of time figuring out how they could do a better job of driving traffic from their website to their social media pages. When the meeting was done they went away still trying to come up with ideas about different icons they could use, and how they could point people in that direction.

Both Steve and Patrick firmly believe that the rise of social media in the workplace has contributed to the rise of public relations as an industry. Patrick really delved into how social media allows a business to be its own media outlet.

In the new media landscape, the way that the new technologies and the way that the Internet has become available basically everywhere, a business is able to be their own media channel. So if they can build up their social media networks it's like they can broadcast their own messages, and people can learn about them for the first time that way.

It was clear that social media was an important part of this firm's dynamic, and employees wanted to make sure that they paid attention to it. Along with this, it was a shared belief that there was not one "silver bullet" of all social media outlets. There was a consensus between employees that each one played a different role, and they



could all be important. Depending on what you are trying to do, different social media tools may be prominent at different times. For example, LinkedIn is a good medium if you are in the job search business, whereas Facebook and Vine could be used for an ad campaign.

The way these employees talked about social media and the ways they use it every day created one major assumption about social media itself. A conclusion can be drawn that there is only one way to use social media properly in the business world. The employees that were interviewed both felt strongly about how often and the way you should post on Facebook as a business. They had the exact same opinion, making it seem as though that was the only correct way. There was a general consensus throughout the office about clients posting frivolous statuses that had nothing to do with the business. No one wanted to see one of their clients posting things like “Happy Friday,” they wanted to see relevant and interesting things pertinent to that business.

### Generational Differences

Findings in the generational differences with respect to social media were somewhat shocking. When I first entered the firm and saw the oldest employee working with the most electronics, I knew I would be surprised by my results. Steve, the co-founder and 71-year-old man was constantly using his Mac desktop, MacBook Pro, iPad, and his iPhone. When interviewing Steve, he talked excitedly about social media and how Facebook has been a player in his everyday life. Steve found social media to have both an important professional and personal value. The ease of being able to stay connected to friends and family all over the world is a great asset to him personally. Steve divulged that LinkedIn is another prominent tool in his life, but as for media such

as Twitter and Instagram, he is not as involved. Professionally, Steve sees this as an exciting time for him to be involved in communications as the social media platform is growing rapidly, and is a big part of the communications industry.

Patrick, a 32-year-old male, did not feel as strongly about social media as Steve did. Like many in his generation, Patrick uses Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Google + Instagram, Pinterest and various blogging platforms. Patrick confessed in his interview that he wishes he spent less time on social media personally, simply because he feels he should spend less time in front of a laptop. Professionally, Patrick views them as important tools that help with research and continuing to learn about new technologies. Patrick still sees some resistance to using social media in the workplace in some older generations because they think its something that teenagers do. He sees Steve as a kind of anomaly in being so supportive of it in the workplace, whereas the majority of people in Steve's age range aren't as enthusiastic.

My stepdad is 62 this year, and he is the biggest social media skeptic in the world. He has a business that could really utilize it, but he only looks for reasons as to why they are a waste of time and money. Sometimes he'll say, 'Well the Twitter business model isn't sustainable and therefore I'm not going to use it' and I'm over here like what does that have to do with using it for communication purposes? So I think some people in that generation just don't even want to get involved with social media.

It could be determined that some older generations are more fascinated by and willing to use social media simply because they did not grow up with the social media tool, whereas other people do not want to accept it because it is something new they have

to learn and they feel their old techniques work just fine. The younger generations that have grown up with these technologies are so used to them, that they are not a special phenomena.

From this research, you could draw the conclusion that some people in older generations see social media only as only having a relational or identity dimension. Whereas others, such as Steve, see it's pragmatic value in an organization context. If you see no pragmatic value in using social media, then incorporating it into your work would be impossible. Many organizations today are seeing the indisputable value of using social media as a tool in the workplace. Some who come from older generations may be skeptical of its use, while others seem excited about the communication doors that social media opens in the public relations world.

## **VI. Discussion**

The findings in this study show that generational differences do not affect the use of social media as previous research has indicated. It is important to take away from this research that social media has become popular among older generations and many people of those generations are effectively using it every day. It is possible for two people in the same generation to have opposing views on using social media in the workplace. Instead of finding if organizational leaders need to push employees to use social media, my research was redirected to finding that the employees within the public relations firm needed to encourage clients to use their social media pages often and correctly. There was nothing in my research that revealed anything about conflict in the workplace as a result of resistance to social media.

This research should be looked at through the lens of organizational culture, as it can explain the firm's structure, along with their stance on the use of social media. According to Cheney, "the culture of an organization is embedded in and expressed by patterns and habits of communication" (Cheney et al., 2011, pp. 75). As discussed in the theory section above, it is also helpful to view this research through four of Keyton's lenses: symbolic performance, narrative reproduction power and politics, and technology. Narrative reproduction, along Cheney's idea that organizations often have many values that are not noticed until they are violated (2011, pp. 75), can be used to explain the organizations implementation of their circus theme. This particular organization violated the norm of having a professional business card. Their culture welcomed the circus theme, which came from the history and story of the building and it's owner, steering away from a traditional approach. This is also shown in the identification level of organizational communication. This level "refers to the appropriation of and commitment to a particular identity. A culture needs its members to identify with its basic values" (Cheney et al., 2011, pp. 79). Employees are fully on board with their identity as a circus, which makes the norm work. The organization also encompasses its circus theme within its social media pages (including the organization's website). They do this with the kind of language they use along with graphics depicting circus images. This theme being represented on the organization's social media pages allows potential clients to see what the organization is like, and gives a glimpse into their mission of having an enjoyable work environment.

The organization's linear model of hierarchy can be explained in the control level of organizational culture. "Although culture isn't often thought of in connection with control

or power, even the more ancillary aspects of an organization may be quite revealing about power relations at work. Culture controls in part by identifying what is seen as normal – and therefore what is allowed or prohibited” (Cheney et al., 2011, p. 79). This can also be looked at through Keyton’s power and politics lens. The company’s lack of hierarchy is accepted by individuals within the organization, and allows them all to speak freely and share ideas without the fear of being immediately shot down. Because employees are on the same level of management (due to the lack of hierarchy), employees noticeably enjoyed completing their work, and seemed to manage themselves well.

Keyton’s technology lens also does a good job of explaining the importance of social media to the organization. “When an organization’s image, identity, and market are dependent upon the production or selling of technology, its vision and values will likely be associated with this technology” (Keyton, 2014, pp. 558). While this organization is not selling a technology, it is frequently using different social media outlets, and stays consistent with the way each of these is used for both their business and their clients.

Consistent with Johnson’s (1997) findings in his interviews, there is resistance to use social media due to lack of understanding in older generations, per Patrick’s testimony of his stepfather. Contrasting this, we have the example of Steve, who took the social media platforms by storm and learned to use and love them. The results in this research really agreed with Croft’s (2007) research. Croft discusses how the success in a public relations firm lies in whether or not they are able to keep up with the changing social media trends. Croft feels that the public relations firm who is able to acquire the greatest understanding of social media is going to be the most attractive to potential clients (Croft, 2007, p. 17).

In an interesting twist, these findings opposed the conclusions outlined in a study done by Lester, Standifer, Schultz, and Windsor (2012). They state that the actual difference between these three generations was that “the extent to which a generation values technology is logically driven by the extent to which technology was available, reliable, and understood as they were growing up” (Lester et al., 2012, p. 343). This research would suggest that growing up with a lack of technology could make using it as it develops more appealing to a member of an older generation. While Generation Y may be savvier with the latest technology due to the fact that they grew up with it, they may not be as interested in it because it has always been there.

This research is unique in the fact that there is a large gap in existing literature between the variables generational differences and social media. These findings are important because they tell us that older generations are just as capable of using social media outlets, and are sometimes more enthusiastic about them than people from Generation Y. This could tell us that older generations may be more passionate about these tools because they did not grow up with them, and they still have an opportunity to learn about and use them.

It is also significant to understand how vital social media is as a tool in the workplace, and that adopting the media as an everyday tool is increasingly important. The more public relations specialists that adapt the use of social media tools, the more successful their firms will be. Social media is still a growing medium that is changing every day. It is important to keep up with these changes, and understand how to use these platforms effectively in the public relations industry.

There are still many gaps in the literature and future research on this topic would be valuable. By continuing research on this topic, researchers should be able to better understand how specific generations view the different social media platforms, and which ones are the most useful.

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