

Strategic Communication Professionals' Perceptions of Social Media Policies in the Workplace:

A Thematic Analysis

Final Master's Thesis

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December 15, 2015

Introduction

The Internet is an integrated part of everyday life as email, web searches, and social media websites are visited more than ever, including in the workplace. A 2014 Pew Research survey reported that 94% of employed individuals use the Internet, working in a variety of positions in both technology and non-technology related organizations (Purcell & Rainie, 2014). People use the Internet to connect with others and things they are interested in. With the increase in accounts on websites such as Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn, social media have evolved into tools for relationship management, both personal and professional. As users spend more time connecting online with friends and brands on these social media networks, their high levels of comfort using these platforms increases their opportunity to create new connections and expand their personal networks (Kimball & Kim, 2013). As people desire to become more connected and demand increased access to information on platforms like social media, new challenges arise in terms of deciding when using social media is and is not appropriate.

Social media blurs the line between professional and personal use, as social media platforms allow for the intermingling of networking, opinions, and relationship development. Companies may not only worry about how employees conduct themselves on public social media platforms, but also how they are using these platforms at work. The use of social media use at work is not an uncommon occurrence for people with daily Internet access, and employers are faced with new challenges as they decide where the boundaries lie when dealing with social media, online professionalism, and appropriate at-work Internet use (Kimball & Kim, 2013; Binder & Mansfield, 2013). In order to increase their awareness, companies are looking to monitor and regulate how employees use their time and new technology resources. Social media consists of platforms that companies are increasingly starting to monitor alongside everyday

Internet use due to the potential risks that arise (Ribitzky, 2014). Social media increase a company's potential for liability and uncertainty within the workplace (Center of Business Ethics, 2011). In 2010, one in five employers had a social media policy in place to govern their employees (Lyncheski, 2010), which was during a time when Facebook and Twitter were still fairly young platforms and Instagram was just introduced as an iPhone application (Frommer, 2010). A Pew Research survey reported that 45% of employers have rules in place about what employees can say online, a percentage that's doubled since 2006 (Purcell & Rainie, 2014).

Social media policies often live within a company's employee handbook or within an organizational code of ethics. According to a Proskauer global survey (2014), nearly 90% of businesses are using social media and nearly 80% have social media policies in place. Social media policies often give guidelines about appropriate personal social media use, especially since a company may also have active social media profiles. These policies can include regulations about what an employee can say on behalf of a company if that company is active on its own social media accounts. However, when a company employee is charged with the responsibility of managing a company social media profile, the lines are often even more blurred. Management of a brand's external messaging and marketing will usually fall to the strategic communication professional within an organization.

Because they are both proficient in social media and active on social media websites per job responsibility, strategic communication professionals have unique positions within their companies, and often times, special access. Research has previously addressed social media policies in regards to best practices and recommendations (Dodd & Stacks, 2013; Ritzby, 2014; Poerio & Bain, 2012; Smith & Burg, 2012) in addition to ethical and legal implications of these policies for strategic communication professionals and their daily job responsibilities (Stewart &

Coleman, 2013; Hall, 2013). In order to develop the understanding of the strategic communication professional's role within a company and as a daily social media user, the purpose of this paper is to examine how strategic communication professionals define and engage with social media on a daily basis and their opinions regarding an employer's regulations or expectations of their social media use. Using perspectives from utilitarianism theory of ethics, this paper makes conclusions regarding how employer policies and expectations shape the way in which a strategic communication professional use social media in their daily lives.

Literature Review

With the increase in use of the Internet for means of communication, there has been a revolutionary shift in how people are interacting with one another (Dryer, 2010). Internet communication has transformed significantly with the introduction and growth of social media websites. Boyd and Ellison (2007) defined social media in its infancy as “web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system” (p. 211). With the overlap of profiles, connections, and information, social media blurs the line between professional and personal use. Carroll, Romano-Bergstorm, and Fisher (2013) define social media similarly, as “Internet communications platforms where more than one user can publish/post information within a community of users.” These platforms are not only widely used by Americans, but they also create new opportunities and challenges on a global scale. In 2013, an *eMarketer* article reported “nearly one in four people worldwide will use social networks” (“Social Networks Reaching,” 2013). The way in which people communicate, consume products, and conduct business is changing to meet the fast pace of technology's development. A Global Web Index

report (Mander, 2015) stated people around the world typically spend nearly 2 hours on social media each day. Thus, users are integrating their lives more and more with an online experience. A 2014 digital consumer report conducted by Nielsen reveals that most American consumers' "everyday lives and... digital lives are now wholly intertwined" (Nielsen, 2014, p. 2). With the seamless development of a digital reality, social media make distinguishing professional and personal identities online much more difficult.

Employees and Internet Use

Not only has the Internet impacted how people interact in their social life, but its use has also changed within the workplace. As communication changes and evolves, the distinction between professional and personal spaces becomes more and more blurred. In 2008, a Pew Internet survey revealed that one out of ten Internet-using employees reported visiting social media websites during work hours (Madden & Jones, 2008), which was before the creation and adoption of many of today's mainstream social media platforms. As Internet usage and social media adoption has grown, companies recognize the ambiguous online environment that these technologies bring. Many security and information-sharing risks exist alongside the use of new technology, exposing an organization to new threats that could ultimately outweigh the benefits of technology adaptation (Short, 2008). In order to increase their internal awareness, companies are looking to monitor and regulate how employees use their time and technology resources. Companies are not only increasing monitoring of daily Internet use, but how their employees are using social media (Ribitzky, 2014).

In 2008, Pew Internet defined employees with access to online technology as the *wired and ready worker* and, at the time, they represented 96% of employees who used communication technologies such as the Internet and email (Madden & Jones, 2008). As social media become

more popular, new online habits developed the *wired and ready worker* into an individual who expects Internet access 24 hours a day across multiple devices. The rise in social media and daily uses has transformed Internet usage to a point where visiting social media websites is now the top online activity, even in comparison to using email (Adler, 2014). Because of this, companies are now charged with finding ways to understand and monitor how their employees are using Internet and social media while they are at work. The increased use of social media creates a large impact on employers, both in terms of productivity management and policy. Companies are still trying to determine whether non-work related Internet use is harmful or useful for organizations and their employees' productivity (Çiftçioğlu & Sarac, 2014).

Social Media Regulation and Policies

In the early 2000s, companies began using specialized software in order to monitor employee email and Internet usage (Towns, 2004). As of 2014, nearly 80% of companies monitor email, Internet, and phone usage of their employees (Ribitzky, 2014). The introduction of social media changed the landscape of employee monitoring, as monitoring has become even more of a necessity considering the information and time employees invest into non-work related Internet usage. Companies create corporate policies or codes of ethics in order to regulate employees and guide their workplace behavior. Research defines these codes of conduct as “articulation of the ethical values embraced by an organization” (Stevens, 1996, p. 71). Often stemming from pressures of legal demands for more ethical business practices (McCraw, Moffeit, & O'Malley, 2008; Murphy, 2005), these codes of ethics are put in place to limit misconduct and outline the necessary rules to help facilitate and respect the culture of a company. As companies have increased in size, developing these policies and ethical codes has become essential to their ability to communicate expectations (Murphy, 2005). Codes of ethics

range in length and are housed in employee handbooks, corporate policy books, or serve as standalone documents (Stevens, 1996).

Observed misconduct has reached an historic low in workplaces (Center of Business Ethics, 2014), which could correlate with the increase of employee conduct codes and regulations. However, social media pose new risks for work environments and companies who want to continue to preserve their security and culture. Depending on the type of issue that social media can pose, social media policies are put in place to promote safety, security, and employee morale (Diercksen, DiPlacido, Harvey, & Bosco, 2013). Having these guidelines and policies in place can help a company facilitate an efficient workplace that is enjoyable for both employer and its employees. Additionally, despite the 20% increase of social media policies in the workplace globally from 2013 to 2014, nearly half of companies revisited and updated their policies (Proskauer, 2014). Although policies are utilized more by employers, many of them are outdated or neglected over the years. Gaps may occur in policies as technology and uses of social media change.

In most cases, a company can legally regulate its employees' use of time and technology while at work (Towns, 2004). However, as the type of information a user gives to construct a profile increases, job information and work email addresses may create new ambiguities in how a company regulates its employees' social media uses. Additionally, the easy accessibility and availability through mobile apps on personal devices poses some additional challenges. Social media are considered 24/7 technologies (Binder & Mansfield, 2013). Privacy becomes a concern when social media allow their users to post job details and personal information all within a single platform with a range of possible audiences. Employers can use policies to protect themselves against lawsuits and breach of privacy, while employees can refuse to give their login

information to employers or hiring managers when applying for jobs (Poerio & Bain, 2012).

Thus, there are certain measures already in place that have begun to address the plethora of issues that stem from an online platform that allows the mingling of professional and personal interests.

When personal and professional interest intertwine the same social platform, employer regulations may often become difficult to enforce especially in terms of social media use outside of work and at-work use on a personal device. In the United States, 64% of adults have a smartphone device and 91% of them between the ages of 18 and 29 use social media on smartphone devices regularly (Smith, 2015). Mobile applications are increasingly changing the Internet user's experience by giving everyone more access to information and connectivity. Companies are utilizing their corporate social media policies to regulate how employees represent themselves and distribute their personal information regardless of the personal time or device used. Eleven percent of Americans report that their employer requires them to promote themselves through social media or other online tools (Madden, 2014). Twenty-four percent of employees report that their employer has guidelines in place that address how they present themselves online, including information about what they can and cannot publish online about themselves (Madden, 2014). Of the nearly 500 public, private, and nonprofit organizations that were surveyed in 2011, 31% had policies in place for regulating social media use outside of work (Center of Business ethics, 2011).

Internet law fails to adequately address social media use and the possible legal ramifications (Stewart & Coleman, 2013), so companies are developing policies in order to fill the legal void that exists. When the policies are developed, the lack of legal regulation to guide policy formation can sometimes fail to recognize the rights of the employee and employee

privacy becomes an issue. How an employer tracks and monitors its employee's social media use may cause issues in privacy, but it may also allow the employer the benefit of protecting itself from harm such as slander and destruction of reputation.

In the United States, there is no comprehensive legislation that addresses privacy (Loeffler, 2012). The Federal Trade Commission has been the primary federal agency responsible for protecting people's personal information and consumer privacy (Protecting Consumer Privacy, n.d.). However, privacy is often difficult to conceptualize in new technologies and within the realm of employment. When an employer's equipment, property, or technology is used, the right to privacy is usually up to the employer's reasonable discretion and is within their legal right (Abril, Levin, & Riego, 2012). Public employees can also have Fourth Amendment rights regarding privacy protection in the workplace. The Fourth Amendment protects individuals from "unreasonable searches and seizures" by government agents if there is no "probable cause" (U.S. Const. amend. IV.). Despite the different types of regulations and court decisions that exist to try to define and enforce employee privacy at work, previous legal interpretations are often a far stretch to create practical precedents with social media. Thus, with the gap in knowledge, companies use their policies as a way to communicate their expectations of employee social media use.

As companies outline acceptable social media use during work hours, privacy issues can also emerge when employers expect their guidelines to extend to personal time and profiles. In fact, employers have fired individuals for "improper" social media use that was not posted during work hours, but included information about the employee's job or work responsibilities (Binder & Mansfield, 2013). Social media platforms and their more public nature make them different than other Internet technologies like email. Instead of having an intended receiver,

social media are often shared to a group or a general audience (Naito, 2012). This often creates concern for employers, as the information on social media is more open and accessible to the public than interpersonal communication between two or a small group of individuals.

Beyond their ambiguity in legal interpretations, social media in the workplace have also created new issues that clash with labor and employment laws. In some cases, employees may take their opinions about work conditions and unsatisfactory feelings about employers to social media, resulting in angry posts that may lead to heated comment threads with others including co-workers. Some of these types of behaviors are protected by labor regulations, but often the determinations and tests used to enforce these laws are outdated and not as applicable (Long, 2015). The National Labor Relations Act “protects the rights of employees to act together to address conditions at work, with or without a union” and includes “work-related conversations conducted on social media” (“The NLRB and Social Media,” n.d.). Thus, employers have some legal protection through federal labor laws to discuss work conditions with co-workers on social media (National Labor Relations Board, n.d.). However, these regulations limit conversations if they do not include co-workers and if they do not result in some sort of group action. Thus, a social media post made in frustration about work conditions with no engagement from another co-worker would likely not be protected and consequences would remain up to the digression of the company and its social media policy. Some researchers argue that the National Labor Regulations Act and its memos are often difficult to apply to content on social media, as its previous implications and tests are simply outdated in today’s world (Long, 2015). As with privacy, labor regulations are just beginning to address how personal social media use can exist peacefully within a professional world.

Frustrated employees posting on social media can become one of the biggest concerns for companies (Long, 2015) and there is a rise in the number of employees fired for social media posts (Weber, 2014). Companies wanting to preserve their reputation and relationships want to protect themselves from negative online commentary by employees and can use their policies in order to this. However, angry or opinionated content may be published while an employee is away from work and on a personal device, making it more difficult for the company to have legal grounds for its disciplinary actions. There is much ambiguity on whether a company has the right to fire employees for this kind of behavior or if these are wrongful terminations.

The term *Facebook Fired* developed as more and more instances of employees were terminated, from school teachers to flight attendants, based on posts or comments made on Facebook (Hidy & McDonald, 2013). Although different sets of standards and protections are in place for private and public employees, acceptable and appropriate social media posting is still something that courts are trying to figure out. Additionally, because of the absence of Internet and labor laws that regulate employer and employee social media relationships, organization policies are the current first step to regulate social media mistakes (Dodd & Stacks, 2013). In their study about crafting social media policies, Schmidt and O'Conner (2015) recommend that companies must be careful that their policies are not ambiguous, vague, or overbroad.

Because of the vast breadth of social media and the inclusive range of platforms, they are often hard to define and regulate for the purpose of a policy. Social media discrepancies with employees may often be handled on a case-by-case basis, which can challenge the policy formation and enforcement process. A company's well-intentioned goal to create a blanket policy for all social media use may not always be appropriate. However, especially in terms of private companies, policies exist to protect an employer against harmful employee commentary

online. The type of social media platform and its audience may also present additional challenges to companies, especially since platforms are constantly changing and developing. The degree in which social media are intertwined in the workplace is another concern for policies (O'Conner and Schmidt, 2015). A company that prides itself on a savvy online presence and encourages social media use by employees might have a harder time creating and enforcing a policy.

As companies define their own online identity, social media become a key component for marketing and branding strategies. When social media reached popularity at the organization level, companies turned to employees who were already familiar with brand management and media relations (Dodd & Stacks, 2013). Those in marketing and strategic communication positions were often at the forefront of social media management for their employers due to their experience in other related areas. As strategic communication professionals began experimenting and learning about how to create a company's voice online, their personal profiles and social media use may have played a significant role in the marketing strategy. In some cases, these professionals were also the authors of social media policies in conjunction with other departments like legal and human resources (Supa & Kelly, 2012).

Companies may even desire their top level executives to maintain social media profiles in order to create relationships with partners, investors, and other stakeholders (Karaduman, 2013). Thus, personal and professional branding are often intertwined for employees such as executives and strategic communications professionals who define themselves by their positions. Companies can see this strategy as a bonus because social media users are willing to communicate with brands when a representative actively engages with them (Karadunman, 2013). However, how to regulate employee actions is harder to communicate the more active they are. When profiles become popular and key to both an employee's and employer's online

identity, social media ownership becomes another concern. Lawsuits involving ownership of successful social media profiles can occur when employees separate from companies and wish to take their followers with them. Ownership discrepancies can occur in a variety of situations, including when an employee's personal account promotes a company or a professional account develops through a communication employee's identity (Myers, 2015). The outcomes of these situations vary, but a social media policy is often crucial to dictate the outcome of the lawsuit. Because of these types of situations, employees are faced with an added fear in combining their professional identity with their personal one.

Facebook, a personal networking site with a purpose to connect people and make content sharable (Facebook, n.d.), accounts for one of the most widely used social media platforms. Its use ranges from relationship development, to company endorsement, and content sharing. American adults spend an average of 21 minutes per day on Facebook ("Facebook ad dollars move mobile," 2014). Using this specific platform to boost their feeling of connectedness, people use Facebook and other social media platforms to manage their relationships with each other (Winerman, 2013). However, the use of Facebook and other social media websites has spilled over into the workday as Internet-using employees seek ways to balance the draws of their personal consumption with the demands of their job.

The nature of social media often reflects growth in online social relationships ranging from friendships to professional connections. With this increase of the use of social media, people are continually seeking to develop and maintain their relationships in a digital world. However, the engagement in social connections doesn't differ much than in the work atmosphere. The workplace has always fostered social connections – both formal and informal (Human 1.0, n.d.). Thus, building relationships online should not be a surprise to organizations.

The biggest difference is the permanence of content on social media. Information posted on a social media website could essentially last forever in comparison to a co-worker telling hearsay. Because social media posts are written and published online, there is more likelihood a post is seen by multiple users. However, employees can use social media to develop relationships online as they do in person.

In a desire to connect better with consumers and their habits, companies now maintain a variety of social media profiles across a wide breadth of platforms. In 2014, 80% of Fortune 500 companies are on Facebook and 83% have Twitter accounts (Barnes & Lescault, 2014). Companies and brands are meeting consumers on these platforms and finding ways to engage online. According to an *eMarketer* report (2015), advertisers will spend more than \$23 billion on social media advertising in 2015. In order to meet the needs of its consumers, companies must maintain an affluent online presence and sound knowledge of social networking.

Because of the increase of social media marketing, there is also an increase in the need for employees to manage and strategize these marketing efforts. Strategic communication professionals are likely to get caught up in social media issues because they have special access to an organization's accounts and pages. Argenti, Howell, and Beck (2005) define strategic communication as "aligned with the company's overall strategy, to enhance its strategic positioning" (p. 83). Although the definition continues to develop, communicating strategically to manage opportunities, perceptions, and change is greatly valued by organizations (Thomas & Stephens, 2015). Professionals in strategic communications positions often work in a variety of organizations and have a range of responsibilities including marketing, event planning, social media, development, and community relations. Although these positions may have different titles, their responsibilities to strategically communicate remains the same, often involving tools

and resources to connect with consumers, target publics, and stakeholders. These types of positions are also heavily identified with the role of brand ambassador. Andersson and Ekman (2009) define a *brand ambassador* as someone who “is seen by coordinators as constituting a credible testimony of the distinctive character of the place and its attractiveness, and can through the word-of-mouth effect influence others through their networks and relationships” (p. 43). As the strategy or voice around many social media initiatives, strategic communication professionals often hold the credibility and influence of an organization in a variety of ways. Additionally, with the rise of social media as a mainstream communication tool, strategic communications professionals often have daily access to manage, monitor, and edit profiles and accounts on behalf of their organizations.

Strategic Communication Professionals and Social Media

Despite the opportunities social media bring to strategic communication professionals in communicating with others, there are just as many opportunities for vulnerability and danger. According to Stewart and Coleman (2013) in their chapter about the legal and ethical uses of social media for strategic communications, “Businesses that use social tools enter a culture of interaction and sharing, a culture quite different to traditional advertising and public relations models” (p. 194). This culture shift creates gaps within the communication profession. Consumers want large amounts of information at a fast pace, which brings new challenges for professionals to learn and master new tools, and to do so in an ethical way. Strategic communication professionals must educate themselves using experience and industry resources on how to best conduct themselves while at work and while using employer social media profiles. Often times, these professionals are responsible for not only their own training, but also the training and educating of other employees and departments with even less social media

experience. Ethics play a significant role in guiding how employees engage with social media, especially when companies lack a policy or regulation for guidance.

Professional organizations like the American Marketing Association (AMA) (n.d.) and Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) (n.d.) have codes of ethics in place to help professionals navigate the unknowns of communications. Ethics, in any media-related field, are not always plain black-and-white. Professional organizations encourage the practice of ethical decision-making by putting forth codes and principles that the organization values as a way to guide professionals. According to the AMA website, its ethical norms state that a marketer should “do no harm, foster trust in the marketing system, and embrace ethical values” (“Ethical Norms,” n.d.). The AMA organization elaborates on its ethical values by listing out different core categories to help guide marketers in how to ethically fulfill their roles. Of these categories, the ethical principles emphasized include honesty, responsibility, and transparency (American Marketing Association, n.d.). The AMA recommends that marketing professionals adhere to these principles in their daily activities. According to the PRSA code of ethics, its values are advocacy, honesty, expertise, independence, loyalty, and fairness (PRSA, n.d.). Its code addresses each value with detail, stating that “the level of public trust PRSA members seek, as we serve the public good, means we have taken on a special obligation to operate ethically” (“PRSA Member Code of Ethics,” n.d.). These values can help guide ethical public relations practice and ethical decision-making, but are not as helpful in developing professionals in how to critically think about ethics and challenge unethical behavior, whether it’s behavior from other employees or the organization as a whole.

Although industry-specific professional codes of ethics exist to help guide and lead strategic communication professionals, they often don’t address specific issues strategic

communication professionals face in their daily work, especially with evolving platforms like social media. In some cases, strategic communication professionals experience challenges to their own personal ethics as they navigate new online territories that often blur the line between representing oneself personally, professionally, and as a representative of an organization. According to McNeil and Pedigo (2001) in their article about ethical challenges and business operations, an ethical dilemma is a situation in which the ethical decision-making process is complex. Ethics are easier to identify in abstract terms, but much more difficult to apply in specific situations when relationships and business outcomes are at risk (McNeil & Pedigo, 2001). Strategic communication professionals may have no other ethical guidelines other than policies and conduct codes put forth by their employers. For example, a professional may face an ethical dilemma when he feels that his employer's policy infringing on his rights and personal expression, but he feels obligated to abide by the regulations in order to stay employed. A strategic communication professional may also value the success of his employer above his own luxury to speak freely on personal platforms, making any opposition to employer policies less likely. Ethical dilemmas within the workplace are often ambiguous and require expertise and analytical skills to develop appropriate action.

Ethics and Utilitarianism

According to Farrell and Farrell (1998), an ethical dilemma arises "because there is perceived to be a conflict of rights, obligations or objectives for oneself and/or others" (p. 588). Although social media policies housed within codes of ethics may address social media use during work hours, some companies are also including content that regulates social media outside of work and on personal devices. Research has begun to address these issues in terms of

employer and employee privacy, but there is little research on the ethical ramifications of employers who restrict their employees' social media use in a personal arena.

Researchers have also analyzed Internet usage and social media policies in terms of professional ethics, especially regarding employer and employee privacy (Smith et al, 2012; Poerio & Bain, 2012; Stevens, 1996). However, ethical theory is often not included in privacy research, especially regarding regulation of employee social media conduct and labor regulations. Because this paper seeks to help to define what organizations *ought* to regulate, a utilitarianism perspective was selected as the appropriate theoretical lens to analyze how strategic communication professionals feel regarding their employers' social media policies.

Utilitarianism is a theoretical perspective that evaluates the consequences of actions as opposed to an evaluation of whether an action itself was ethical (Adler et. al, 2008). Thus, the perspective of utilitarian ethics is that "actions are ethical if they produce the greater good" (Adler et. al, 2008, p. 486). Mill (1861), as one of the first contributors, wrote about utilitarianism and the value of happiness and pleasure that exists within this moral theory. Thus, utilitarianism argues that the ethical decision is one that benefits the majority. Additionally, Mill (1859) also wrote about liberty as part of utility, associating freedom of speech with utility. Happiness, pleasure, and liberty are all important terms in considering social media and an individual's motivation for use.

Previous research has argued the use of social media as a practice of freedom (Bonenfant & Farmer, 2014). According to Mill (1859), freedom of speech is essential to the existence of a progressive being and that "silencing... expression of an opinion is that it is robbing the human race" (1859, p. 76). Bonenfant and Farmer (2014) make a connection between the freedom of expression and self-writing to the abilities and structure of Facebook. Social media sites, as

websites designed with the ability to post status and share opinions, has an inherent and fundamental element that allows freedom of expression and speech.

Overby and Lee define utilitarian value as “an overall assessment of functional benefits and sacrifices” (2006, p. 1161) Utilitarian value is often examined on the Internet in terms of online shopping and user experience. Previous research has examined a user’s Internet experience in relation to how pleasurable an online experience relates to the consumer’s satisfaction (Wang, 2010; Scarpi, 2012). There is a connection between the online experience of shopping and social networking and its ability to bring pleasure to a large majority. In fact, one could argue that both their utilities serve a similar purpose.

Although companies should have a right to protect themselves and their brands, individuals have a right to expression and happiness. It’s not uncommon in today’s world to see employees, especially executives and strategic communication professionals, identify themselves by their position within a company on their personal social media profile. This action can also create confusion about appropriate use since it’s a personal social media account, but it’s used in a professional atmosphere. If an employee is encouraged to use their social media accounts for business purposes, he or she may log in to their accounts during work hours in order to network or conduct business-related research. These actions may make a social media policy even harder to enforce. Although professionals in strategic communication departments continue to oversee management of a company’s social media identity (Dodd & Stacks, 2013), ethics comes in to play when there is ambiguity about how a company should regulate social media use, but also endorse social media as a marketing strategy. Policies can differ from company to company, but how an employee views the policy plays an important role in its acceptance and successful

implementation.

Research Questions

Previous literature has identified best practices and ethical challenges for strategic communication professionals using social media in the workplace but fails to address how these professionals feel that their daily use may be affected by the increasingly social media-driven work environment. Employers create policies in order to define how employees should use social media, but strategic communication professionals, in particular, provide another layer of ambiguity regarding policies because they are often involved with the company's social media identity as part of their job description and, in some cases, have heavy involvement in policy creation. In cases where employees may be banned or blocked from social media use, strategic communication professionals are granted access so that they can carry out their marketing and consumer engagement strategies across platforms. Strategic communication professionals create a unique population for analysis because of their professional involvement with social media creation, management, and monitoring or oversight on behalf of their employers.

Because of these reasons, this study's research questions focus on how an employer's regulation of social media affects a strategic communication professional uses, perceptions, and actions on social media.

RQ1: How do strategic communication professionals define and use social media in their daily lives?

RQ2: How do strategic communication professionals believe their social media use is regulated by their employer?

RQ3: How do strategic communication professionals feel about their employer's regulations or expectations of their social media usage?

This paper analyzes perspectives from strategic communications professionals to understand how employers' regulations of social media use can shape their habits and identity. Using a lens of the utilitarian theory of ethics, this paper also analyses how strategic communication professionals describe their policies in comparison to how these policies should be structured.

Methodology

To answer these research questions, interviews were conducted in October and November 2015 with 30 professionals in marketing, communications, event planning, community relations, social media management, and non-profit development positions, collectively referred as *strategic communication professionals*. Due to their unique position within a company to manage company image, brand message, social media profiles, or a combination of these responsibilities, strategic communications professionals were selected as the population. Participants were recruited through snowball sampling. Snowball sampling is recommended when populations are harder to find because the population has a specific knowledge or expertise (Jugenheimer, Bradley, Kelly, & Hudson, 2010). Snowball sampling is used for this study because the sample population needed to have specific knowledge and expertise including employment within a communications or marketing-related field and daily use or management of social media in professional and personal ways. These factors would be difficult to know without the recommendations from other participants.

The method of semi-structured interviewing was selected in order to create a meaningful give-and-take dialogue about employers, their social media policies, and employees' opinion regarding these policies. Semi-structured interviews are partially structured, but allow for new ideas to flow during the conversation (Sommer & Sommer, 2002). A set of interview guidelines

was created with a suggested set of 16 interview questions, but was provided to serve as a guideline (see Appendix A for guideline questions). If a participant's employer did not have a policy in place, the interviewer could ask less specific policy-related questions and instead ask the participant how he or she felt about an organization's regulation of social media.

Entry-level, mid-career, and senior employees were included in the sample population in order to compare responses and perspectives from different levels of tenure and leadership. Participants were recruited from a variety of organizations, which were coded into five categories: corporate, agency, municipal, university, and non-profit. A total of 43 participants were contacted for participation in this the study via email and LinkedIn messaging. Initial participants were recruited from university alumni and public relations professional society networks and additional participants were referred by the initial participants. Of the 43 people contacted, 30 responded, signed the appropriate consent forms, and proceeded with interviews. A consent form was created by the researcher and approved by the researcher's university for protection of the participants. Twenty-five participants were interviewed over the phone and five were interviewed via email. A list of participants and demographic data is listed in Appendix B. Interviews occurred before the work day, during breaks and lunch time, and after work hours as to not interfere with the participant's work day. Phone interviews were audiotaped and lasted between 10 and 20 minutes in length.

Because nearly 30 percent of participants requested anonymity and most all participants analyzed their employer's policies critically, participants were identified in this study by an identification number along with their age, position title, tenure, and organization type to protect their identities. During the interviews, participants were first asked the listed demographic questions. Then, they were asked to define social media, the social media platforms they use,

how they use social media, and if their organizations had a governing social media policy. Based on the participant's answer regarding whether an employer had a policy in place, participants were asked about the policy, what is included in the policy, how it was enforced, the participant's feelings about the policy, and whether or not the participant thought the policy was effective and ethical. If the participant said his or her organization did not have a policy in place, the interviewer then asked follow-up questions about how the organization regulated social media and if the participant felt that process was effective and ethical.

To analyze results, audio responses were played back and email interviews were reviewed. A table was created and each participant was categorized by an identifier number and corresponding demographic information. Responses were generated into text and categorized into sections based on themes in social media definition, social media use, policy existence and enforcement, and the participant's feelings about the social media policy or regulation. Any organization names or specific programs are represented in this study generically by phrases like "the company" or "the program" in order to protect participant's identities.

Once the data was organized into a table, the process of thematic analysis was used in order to find patterns among responses regarding social media use, policies, and employee opinion regarding policy and regulation ethicalness. Seven categories were created for thematic analysis: social media definition, social media platforms, social media use, written policy existence, policy/regulation description, feelings about policy/regulation, and other comments. Each category was then analyzed for overlapping patterns and themes within the responses.

Results

Texts generated from interviews reveal (1) how 30 strategic communication professionals defined and used social media, (2) how they described social media policies and employer expectations about social media use, and (3) how they felt about policies in regards to their effectiveness and ethicalness to protect the organization and regulate employee behavior. Participants ranged from 22 to 60 years old in entry-level to manager and director strategic communications positions with tenure from less than one year to up to 17 years.

RQ1: Social Media Definition and Daily Use

Participants defined social media in common ways and using similar words, including “online,” “digital,” or “virtual,” defining it collectively as a “platform” in association with actions such as “share,” “connect,” “communicate,” and “network.” Participants also referenced social media in terms of their acceptance in society and their enjoyment factor. A university’s marketing coordinator described social media, stating that “it’s just fun...and a good way to keep in touch.” A university digital marketing and social media specialist commented that social media “is what I do and I don’t really think about.” A municipal communications director said, “I know it when I see it.”

Participants also described social media within a strategic communication context. For instance, an interactive marketing representative from a corporate organization stated that social media are “external properties that can get feedback from prospects and clients; Ability to listen and help clients and shape our branding.” An agency’s associate director defined them as “any type of advertising [and] any engagement outside of traditional platforms.” A non-profit community relations associate defined it as “a social platform to boost awareness for all demographics and people.” Out of 30 social media definition responses, six participants defined social media solely in terms of a brand or marketing perspective and two referenced social media

within a strategic communications context that related back to his or her job responsibilities.

Additionally, two participants defined social media by its channels, listing platforms as a way to describe the medium in its entirety. There were no recognizable patterns regarding how social media was defined in relation to the organization type that the participant worked for.

Use of multiple platforms. When asked about the social media platforms they used on a daily basis, participants overwhelmingly listed Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and LinkedIn as the most used. Beyond these references, participants also brought up use of Snapchat, YouTube, Pinterest, Tumblr, Google+, Periscope, and blogging. Participants either listed social media channels outright or included short descriptors about how and when the usage occurs. For example, a corporate social media analyst said, “Personally, I mostly use Twitter, Instagram and Facebook and in terms of professional, for myself, I’m also on LinkedIn. Here at work, I touch about eight or nine different platforms.” A corporate director of business development explained, “Personally, I use LinkedIn, Facebook, Snapchat, Twitter, Instagram, and yeah, I think that’s all and for work, I use LinkedIn, Facebook, Twitter, snapchat, and I guess Instagram. So, yeah, all the same stuff.” Participants often categorized their use based on the professional or personal contexts they found themselves using the platform.

When talking about LinkedIn in particular, participants often lumped LinkedIn into its own social media category, some not even considering it a social media platform by definition. For example, an agency public relations manager said, “I’m on LinkedIn. I don’t know if I would even consider that social media. I don’t really use it to take in any media.” An agency marketing director described LinkedIn as a separate, professional networking platform: “It’s a place where I am connected with certain clients. We’ll have a meeting and they will go find me on LinkedIn and we’ll be connected and that’s all great, but I do use it for a professional networking. Where

participants may have felt reservations about posting their credentials and company information on Facebook and Instagram, they felt completely confident about posting them on LinkedIn due to its more professional nature.

The most popular platforms outside of the four mainstream channels were Snapchat, followed by YouTube and Pinterest. Sixty percent of participants were active on five or more platforms daily with two participants who listed less than three platforms. No participants listed using only one platform. A corporate social media analyst listed 12 platforms that he used daily. Two of the three municipal participants listed Nextdoor as one of their platforms, which is a social media platform marketed as a private social network used for community and neighbors to interact online (Nextdoor, n.d.).

Mixed professional and personal uses. Although participants referenced platform use as part of their response in listing social media websites, participants were also asked explicitly about their daily social media usage. Usage was either mostly professional or recreational, or a combination of both. Out of the 30 responses, 19 participants described a mix between professional and recreational social media usage, meaning most of the participants fell into this mixed usage category.

Because of this mixed use, participants described often toggling back and forth between personal and professional accounts, using social media during the day either on a work computer or personal device, or they kept up-to-date with both personal and professional profiles simultaneously. Some participants even referenced situations in which personal and profiles merged, where they shared work information on personal profiles to help boost engagement or awareness. A municipal director of communications stated that, “Part of my job is to promote things happening at the city, so there would be lots of times that I will use my personal profile to

also promote things that are happening at the City.” A corporate digital marketing coordinator explained, “I occasionally get on my personal Facebook to share something I did that was work related when it benefits the company to share it to my network.” A municipal public relations coordinator explained, “I get on my personal when logging on.”

Platform functionality. Participants frequently mentioned platform functionality in reference to how they used social media. Especially in terms of Facebook, participants explained how their personal profile linked to their employer account, describing the process of how an individual must first log into a personal account in order to access a work account. The linkage was usually what caused overlap in daily usage, whether the participant was supposed to be on personal social media accounts or not. A corporate public relations and social media coordinator explained that her personal account was linked on Facebook, which she was constantly on all day. She stated, “My personal usage is interwoven, even if I'm not allowed to engage with anything personally during work hours.”

Participants said the mobile device also affected how they used social media, especially for platforms like Instagram and Snapchat that require the use of a smartphone or other mobile device to manage. A university's social media specialist explained decreasing her personal use because profile login was difficult to switch between accounts, especially on a smartphone. She said, “I have my own personal [work] login information on Instagram and Twitter and I honestly hardly use them for myself anymore because I'm always logged into [my work] account and it's such a hassle to log out and log back in.” More than 20% of participants mentioned personal mobile device usage for work profiles, and more than 76% of participants mentioned the use of Instagram daily, a completely mobile-driven platform. No participants mentioned the use of a

work smartphone or tablet for work-related uses. When participants monitored work profiles on smartphones, their use often merged with personal time or personal devices. For example:

- “I’m logged into 7 of my brands through my personal phone... I had to turn off Instagram notifications so I can't get personal notifications from my personal Instagram anymore because there's no way to not get thousands and thousands from all the other brands. My phone would be constantly lit up.” – A corporate PR and social media coordinator
- “Whether it's my phone or my laptop or iPad around and, as long as I have something, I always feel like I can check [work accounts].” – An agency account executive
- “[Social media] is from our personal phones, I link through my personal and my work account so I'll switch on and off. Twitter makes it easiest to switch from account to account, Instagram not so much, you have to sign in and sign out every time.” – A corporate director of marketing
- “When I go to conferences and events, I'm on my personal Instagram... There is personal stuff on there, but using that account is more authentic.” – A corporate community advocate

Attempts to separate personal and professional uses. The other 11 participants described their social media use as either mostly recreational or mostly professional. In terms of the recreational users, some participants admitted they do very little social media management in their job or identified their social media time more with personal activities. “I predominately use [social media] personally... with my family, since my family and I are all in different cities or states,” said an agency marketing director who also gave clients social media recommendations

that don't require her to login to client accounts. A non-profit administrator said, "I use social media more personally. I spend a lot of 'down time' using social media for personal use," despite the fact that she ran her organization's Facebook page and corresponding advertising campaigns. For participants who mostly use social media professionally, their personal social media was mentioned as limited or decreased due to their daily professional use. "I use social media on behalf of the company, not a big personal user," said a corporate interactive marketing representative. "I use social media professionally and less personally now that I use it at work," said an agency associate director.

RQ2: Beliefs about Employer Regulations and Expectations

Out of 30 interviews, 16 participants explained some sort of employer-regulated social media policy in place at their organization. However, the type of policy varied, ranging from guidelines to set up and manage an organization's account to a one-page document that outlined employer expectations of an employee's time, productivity, and behavior on social media. Although the type of content included in social media policies differed, participants still understood expectations despite the detail of the social media policy.

Marketing policies versus conduct policies. Of the 16 participants with documented policies in place, half had policies that addressed employee conduct and half described policies that addressed marketing purposes only. Only three policies addressed both marketing-related conduct and employee behavior conduct. The policies that were solely devoted to marketing guidelines included information like how to set up a marketing page or the approval processes necessary for brand creating organization-related profiles. For example, "They have a policy on how many times we can post a day," said a corporate director of event marketing. "We do have policies for using our company's Facebook," said a non-profit administrator. "The policies are in

creating social media sites and the professional use of them and that needs to be cleared through my office,” said a municipal communications director. Of all the participants, only ten percent had policies in place that attempted to address a comprehensive policy that protected the employer’s rights and explain employee conduct.

Social media policies and human resources. Responses also indicated that some participants had little to no involvement in their organization’s social media regulation. In fact, more than one-third of participants mentioned that social media regulation was out of their control and strictly left to a department like human resources, especially if an employee issue came up. For instance, participants said:

- “How employees are conducting themselves on their personal accounts, I don't have any kind of say in it or anything.” – An university social media specialist
- “[Our policy] is a little restrictive, but we have compliance and legal departments that are involved, also HR.” – A corporate communication representative
- “It's essentially a HR function to monitor.” – A corporate interactive marketing representative
- “We have HR and legal departments involved.” – A corporate social media and marketing coordinator
- “I do not [monitor social media], that would all be for HR.” – A university social media specialist
- “I do vaguely remember that HR, when obviously you start doing a job, they'll give you a list of things you can and can't do [on social media].” – A university development coordinator
- “We work a lot with HR” – A corporate social media and marketing coordinator

- “We have an HR department... and she manages all the departments within our company. If it's something bad or serious, she would be brought in.” – A corporate director of event marketing
- “Dealt with as an HR issue.” – A municipal public relations coordinator
- “We follow guidelines from our... HR department.” – A corporate community advocate

Only three participants mentioned that regulating a social media policy was a joint effort between the strategic communication professionals and a human resources or legal department. For example, a corporate social media analyst explained, “The policy was written, put together and distributed in a partnership between our Social Media Director and the HR team. So HR needed the expertise of our social media team, which I think is really important, so they worked together to put the policy together.” When an incident occurred, a municipal communications director explained the discipline process as a joint effort: “The supervisor saw [the post] and we worked with Human Resources.” A corporate digital marketing and social media specialist explained their joint education effort that included inclusion of human resources and security departments: “I'm doing more and more to educate our employees and work with our security team to make sure that they know that they are able to share and be advocates for our company and do it in the right way, so it's just a matter of educating them.” Despite these three responses, policies were either regulated through other departments or participants weren't sure who was in charge in enforcement of social media conduct.

Relaxed regulations. Of the participants who had social media regulations in place that dictated employee social media behavior, nearly half of the policies were either loosely written or lumped into an employee conduct code. For example, participant described regulations as:

- “It's a loosely written policy. They don't want you tweeting or posting all day, keep it outside of work hours.” – An agency associate director
- “It's unspoken ... they don't really have anything formal in place. When I got there, it was kind of just passed along to me.” – A corporate PR and social media coordinator
- “When it comes to employee personal use, really our professional conduct policy covers that. So we really don't see in some ways a huge difference.” – A municipal communications director
- “We follow guidelines from our... HR department, but we're really free to do what we want on social media.” – A corporate community advocate
- “The only policy is really anything you do is your responsibility... It's more said, there's nothing physical or written down.” – A corporate director of business development
- “The environment is so like, I guess, relaxed, where they don't really have it written down. But, really just encouraging us to speak up if there's something we're not sure about.” – An agency account executive
- “You are representing the organization so I think it's kind of understood throughout the company” – A non-profit community relations associate
- “I think there's definitely some unspoken rule, I mean you can't use profanity or racism or thing like that.” – An agency PR manager
- “It was kind of like an understood thing, it wasn't specifically talked about thing, it was understood.” – A corporate marketing specialist

- “There's not really like a set social media policy, but there are some policies about what you can say about [the organization] online.” – A municipal public relations coordinator

Regardless of where or how employer expectations of social media use were expressed, employees seemed to understand behavior expectations set in place by their employer. However, in some instances, participants from the same employer had two completely different viewpoints on the social media policy. For example, two participants working for the same corporate organization in different strategic communication-related departments had different experiences with the social media policy. The company's social media analyst explained, “We have one that is a little more overarching, a quick one pager and I would say, that's the most part [the company] understands that social media is a big part of their employees' life, like there is no getting away from social media. There's no way to completely require its employees to not use it.” A marketing manager from the same company who didn't work directly on the company's social media team recalled the policy different, saying, “be respectful of... and don't post anything that would look bad for the company. That's about it. There wasn't a specific contract to sign. I mean, it was kind of like an understood thing, it wasn't specifically talked about.” Although their perspectives differed about a policy's existence, they both described their employer's expectations a similar way. This was a similar pattern that happened across interviews. Despite the differences in policy details, there was a common clarity that social media use was expected to be appropriate and respectful of the organization, especially at work.

Of the 14 participants who said no documented social media policies existed in their workplace, only three participants didn't explain about any employer expectations or regulations regarding their personal social media use. For example, an agency marketing director explained

her agency had no policy in place, but said, “I do know that the company does care about social media behavior, it's obviously if the company was to catch wind of something... I'm sure it would be addressed.” Thus, 90% of all participant responses understood that their employer expected professional conduct from them, regardless if an official policy was in place or not.

Professional conduct and the role of a brand ambassador. Behaviors based on policies often fell into a “professional conduct” category that overlapped professionalism and a position workplace. Many participants saw themselves as brand ambassadors for their organization, especially because of their brand-related responsibilities.

- “If you are going to be friends with coworkers, your profiles need to be professional.”
– An agency senior account executive
- “Professionally, you are representing the organization so I think it's kind of understood throughout the company.” – A non-profit community relations
- “We can't be too crazy on [social media].” – An agency PR manager
- “While you're an employee, recognize that you're always representing the institution whether it be in person or on a social media site.” – A university development coordinator
- “I am able to keep it professional when I need to post where I'm at and what I'm doing for work.” – A corporate community advocate
- “Use your best judgement and act in a professional manner.” – A corporate social media analyst

A handful of participants mentioned that social media was blocked at their organization and that only strategic communication professionals had access because of their job descriptions. This was true for both corporate and university organizations, but not so much for agencies and

non-profits. Participants who mentioned blocked or restricted social media access for employees also referenced protection as the employer's biggest concern. A corporate interactive marketing representative explained, "Most employees are blocked from social media and can't get to their personal pages. It's essentially an HR function to monitor, and there are guidelines for representatives who work in Marketing... we must follow and encourage our employees to follow [our policy] for our protection." In these instances of blocked use, social media was seen by employers as strictly a strategic communication strategy, discouraging all employees from social media use at work and a serious disconnect between personal and professional use. Nearly 25% of participants mentioned their employers telling them to refrain from using social media on company time, whether it was stated in a policy or not. However, almost all responses explained expectations from employers for their employees to conduct their social media behavior professionally on all platforms, but only about a quarter of the employers mentioned in interviews actually used a social media policy to address it.

Social media conduct enforcement. In their responses, participants mentioned how policies were enforced, whether it was a formal process that could result in termination, deducted pay, or direct supervisor involvement, or a more informal process that involved a co-worker or supervisor reporting something they saw randomly on a shared platform. No participants reported their employer actively regulated or enforced social media by policing or monitoring personal accounts. In cases where a formal policy didn't exist, participants either (a) didn't think any guidelines are really enforced by the employer or (b) informal guidelines were enforced much like policies, and inappropriate social media behavior could result in consequences or termination. Informal information reporting was a common way that social media was reported or enforced. For example:

- “As far as I know, the cases that have gotten in trouble for [social media] aren't linked to HR, it's linked to like their boss of their department.” – A corporate PR and social media coordinator
- “There have been examples where somebody high up sees you post something during the day, they may reach out and email it to you and say this is not okay.” – A corporate PR and social media coordinator
- “We don't have to be friends with each other on social media on anything like that, but I try to tend to friend employees just so I can kind of see what's going on.” – A municipal director of communications
- “Fellow employees have seen these posts and their social channels and they've reported it to supervisors.” – A municipal communications director
- “Sometimes I do have to politely remind a co-worker of the expectations if they want to post something that is not acceptable.” – A non-profit administrator

When enforcement of social media policies was mentioned in responses, employer regulation was mostly limited to either company-owned equipment use – an organization's computer or wi-fi network – or by a less structured process that occurred when a co-worker found personal content that was deemed inappropriate by the employer and reported it. Despite both types of enforcement, most participants weren't sure how or if their conduct was regulated, so most social media behavior was explained as a more self-regulated process due to the strategic communication professional's expertise in brand representation and management.

RQ3: Feelings about Employer Policies and Regulations

Responses regarding how participants felt about their employer's social media policy or expectations fell into two categories: participants either supported having a policy in place or

they felt their employer loosely regulated their use. For those who agreed with having a policy in place, their response included why a social media policy is good, ethical, or both. Some directly addressed their own organization's policy or describe why having a general policy in place is important for an organization.

The importance of a social media policy. Half of participants agreed that an organization should have a social media policy, whether it was their current policy or a just a general social media policy. An agency's marketing representative explained her agreement with the current regulation: "I think it works...if someone were to behave inappropriately on social media, it would certainly be addressed." However, she also explained that her agency didn't have a social media policy, so what she described was just her perspective of an expectation. This was also common for participants without policies in place. Participants, especially those without policies, often described what a good policy needed in general terms alongside their feelings about an employer's current expectations. For example, a corporate social media analyst explained her vision for what a social media policy ought to be: "I think it's really important to have a policy. But that said, I also think it's very important to have a policy that allows employees to use social media under the right circumstances and for the right reasons."

Policies for protection of the organization. Participants described an organization's protection as the number one reason why a social media policy should or does exist. Those participants who agreed with an organization's protection also identified that social media was engrained in many ways, hard to monitor, and often caused a clash between the professional and personal online identity. Responses varied in addressing how organizations should combine protecting themselves while also monitoring employee usage to oversee those protections. For example:

- “I just think it's too much of a waste of time and trouble to try and police something like [social media] “ – A municipal public relations coordinator
- “I don't think there is anyone really monitoring anything like that or checking into what people are saying.” – A university digital marketing coordinator
- “I think, personally, I would have a problem if the company were to try to track and govern my personal social media accounts.” – An agency marketing director
- “I do think that [our uses] should be a little more specifically defined, especially in regards to using professional things on our personal pages.” – A non-profit administrator
- “I don't see it as something that could be monitored for everyone, all the time.” – A corporate marketing specialist
- “Employees should recognize the cost of social-media overuse and govern themselves before an employer has to step in.” – A corporate social media coordinator
- “I'm the one person that has to be on [social media], so there's a lot of trust there to assume that I'm not on my personal all the time either.” – A municipal public relations coordinator
- “I think censoring what employees do/say on social media is not ethical.” – A corporate digital marketer
- “Social media is as engrained in our lives is not something you can get away from.” – A corporate social media analyst

Thus, participants expected that organizations should remain flexible about social media uses and evolve their policies and expectations as technology changes. Some participants didn't want companies monitoring their own personal uses, but saw the importance in policies that

could define how employers expected their employees to use social media in an appropriate manner.

The ethics of social media policies. Nearly half of the participants described their employers' regulations as ethical, especially on behalf of the organization and its ethical standards. For example, a corporate interactive marketing representative explained her company's policy: "It's ethical, but it's hard to describe. The answer is yes, if the answer... is one answer, then it's ethical on behalf of [our company]." Participants often stated that although an employer's current policy was ethical and helpful for the organization, they found elements restrictive, limiting, or even unethical for their personal use. For example, an agency's senior account associate said she agreed with her policy, but didn't necessarily find its limitations on employee's personal platforms ethical. "I professionally agree with it on behalf of our brand and clients, but not personally. It's not ethical to limit what you can and can't say on a personal platform." Most participants, like the agency senior account associate, described the most important purpose of the policy was to protect the organization, its information, and its reputation, and agreed with that rationale. Despite using descriptors like "restrictive" or "limiting" in their responses, they still supported having some sort of policy in place for their organization. No participants responded that their employer's policy or expectations were outright unethical.

Social media relationships with co-workers. Participants also brought up co-worker relationships on social media in their responses and how policies never addressed them. They mentioned the types of relationships they had, including those with supervisors and executives, and how these connections subjected them to more regulation, especially in their personal lives. When participants established social media relationships with co-workers, it blurred the personal

and professional lines significantly. However, in fear of turning down or offending co-workers and supervisors, participants felt they must go along with it. For example, an agency public relations manager stated, “I think I would like...that it would be socially acceptable to not friend your bosses, unfortunately, that's not how it is now. You just kind of have to and it's sketchy if you don't. I kind of wish it was really more of a choice.” A corporate public relations and social media coordinator expressed a similar experience:

I don't really like people that I work with adding me as a friend or following me, it's envious, you just come to learn that it's inevitable. I think the first week I worked there, my boss and the CMO started following me on Facebook and Instagram. I mean what are you going to do? Say no? .So now basically everything I do is monitored and same for everybody else, but that's just kind of the way that it has to be I guess, so they can make sure people aren't goofing around.

The desire for better policies. Some participants believed that an employer policy was good and important because it protected the organization and its reputation. On one hand, participants described professional conduct expectations put in place by policies and other regulations as fair due to their affiliation as an employee. On the other hand, participants also took offense to policies that did not recognize personal freedoms; were not flexible or capable of evolving; and actively monitored or policed personal uses. Participants also believed employers should trust and show understanding about social media use, and use that as the policy's tone or foundation. They also didn't want to feel pressured to friend or create online relationships with their co-workers. If they did connect with co-workers, they understood that policies and

expectations were elevated to a higher level of importance and personal profiles may be subject to more regulation. If they chose not to connect with co-workers on social media, they didn't believe policies and expectations about person use are as applicable. What mattered most to them was the power to choose.

Discussion

As social media adoption has increased, accounts and profiles have become an essential part of both individual and organizational identities. The unique role that strategic communication professionals play within an organization not only affects perceptions about corporate social media expectations, but also shapes their online identity. Based on their responses, participants often recognized and understood why certain employer policies and expectations were in place in terms of organizational protection and security. Participants also valued social media in terms of recreation and personal relationship development. How strongly participants felt about each of these viewpoints directly related to their connection with the organization and how a policy served as an extension of the organization's culture. As professionals who managed and oversaw a plethora of situations on social media daily, participants communicated the importance of public perception and professional conduct online, but also saw how personal privacies became less attainable as job-related social media responsibilities played a heavier role in their online behavior.

Social Media Experiences Shaped Definition

Overall, participants defined social media similarly, suggesting that their familiarity with social media platforms both at work and outside of work shaped their definition and daily habits. Participants had a very similar concept of social media sites, similar to definitions developed through research (Boyd & Ellison, 2007; Carroll, Romano-Bergstorm, and Fisher, 2013).

Participants recognized social media as web-based platforms that allowed connectivity and identity construction. As participants used and understood social media platforms' ability to share, connect, and communicate with other individuals, they also saw the advantages and purposes these media had in both personal and professional ways. Thus, participants' uses and experiences helped to shape not only their professional strategy, but their overall understanding of social media. Because their range of daily uses shaped their perceptions, participants expressed using social media frequently and across many devices.

In terms of platform definition, participants most frequently identified their daily uses on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, which mimics the trends in overall platform usage by adults (Duggan, Ellison, Lampe, Lenhart, & Madden, 2014). Although participants used LinkedIn, the platform is differentiated from other social media sites because of its professional foundation. LinkedIn was often viewed as a strictly professional platform use because of how it was used and the type of job-related information published there. Thus, there was a distinct separation between how participants identified with platforms based on their professional uses. Other social media platforms were less distinct in use. For instance, Facebook and Twitter allowed multiple identities, which was harder for participants to separate when logging on and managing accounts unless a third-party management platform was involved to separate those uses. The linkage between accounts posed problems in separating personal and professional usage types, both on computers and mobile devices. They were given access to personal platforms to manage professional professionals, but organizations often expected participants to refrain from engaging with personal profiles during work hours. Policies and regulations often didn't acknowledge this part of the social media management process, making participants frustrated with how they were

expected to behave without any understanding about how social media platforms worked in terms of functionality.

Multiple Platforms on Multiple Devices

The same frustration was true for mobile devices, as mobile device usage was a prominent theme among participants who explained their process of daily social media use. Mobile devices not only blurred professional and personal separations due to login protocols, but they also often caused participants to check and update employer profiles around the clock and in their personal time. As new applications emerge, employers must learn how to address their expectations for their strategic communication professionals. Snapchat was listed as the most popular platform outside of the mainstream channels of Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and Instagram. Snapchat, like Instagram, is a completely mobile platform. Snapchat was created in 2011 and is one of the newer, highly-adopted social media platforms with more than 100 million active users (Shontell, 2015). As platforms like Snapchat become more mobile dependent and mobile friendly, organizations need to address these advancements in their policies and how they expect their strategic communication professionals to use them appropriately. No policies mentioned by the participants addressed the use of mobile devices, which was concerning considering how dependent some of these platforms are on mobile technologies and applications. Organizations could leave themselves vulnerable if they don't address work-related social media usage on personal devices. Additionally, with the use of so many platforms across computers, smartphones, and other mobile devices like tablets, participants were constantly inundated with social media day and night without any regulation or guidance from their employer, leaving them to fill the void with their guesses about appropriate behavior and expectations. The constant

attachment and monitoring of social media expected of participants often left little time or desire for them to connect to social media in a personal or recreational sense.

Social Media Fatigue

In most cases, participants expressed what researchers define as *social media fatigue*, where users decrease their use of social media due to feelings of boredom or disinterest because of overuse (Goasduff & Pettey, 2011; Bright, Kleiser, & Grau, 2014). This phenomenon is common with early adopters of social media (Gosduff & Pettey, 2011), like strategic communication professionals who often are charged to learn and experiment with new channels on behalf of their employer. Participants suggested that their decrease of personal uses was because either they were bored or disinterested in platforms because of their work tasks and constant monitoring, or they were fatigued due to the constant toggling required to move between personal and professional profiles. Their decreased desire to use personal accounts was an example of how social media fatigue manifested within the strategic communication profession due to employer expectations.

Additionally, participants described constant professional account management, even on personal time and when they weren't at work. Many employer expectations discouraged personal use of social media on work equipment, but failed to mention any expectations about the use of personal devices for work-related responsibilities. For fear of blurring the personal and professional lines, participants often kept platforms like Instagram logged in to an employer account on their smartphone in order to protect themselves and their brand. This specific issue not only created ambiguity in terms of policy, but also represented an example of the types of gaps that exist within current social media policies. Organizations should consider how and what social media platforms their strategic communication professionals are engaging with.

Intertwining of Personal and Professional Social Media Use

Professional conduct. Whether an employer had a documented policy not, strategic communication professionals were expected to conduct themselves appropriately on social media platforms. The role participants felt as a strategic communications professional overlapped with the role they felt a brand ambassador. Their concept of brand ambassador aligned similarly with academic definitions of the term (Andersson & Ekman, 2009). As representatives of their brand, participants often agreed with professional conduct as a way to represent themselves online without putting their employer at risk, but still allow them the freedom to engage recreationally on social media. Participants also explained instances in which they decreased their use or eliminated employer information on personal social media profiles because they felt the process of self-monitoring was exhausting, thus confirming another facet of social media fatigue. Maintaining two identities on social media often proved tiresome for participants, and the constant toggling between profiles increases the risk for possible errors that could harm the organization.

Participants' identities as professionals and strategic communicators played a significant role in how they felt they should conduct their actions online, often overpowering the desire to maintain or fight for an individual online identity that was separate from a professional one. Although research shows that employers often believe they have a duty to monitor their employees' behavior on personal social media platforms as a protective precaution (Hollinshead, 2013), participants felt strongly in their own self-regulation so that they would remain in alignment with their dual role as a brand ambassador.

Surveillance. Participants mentioned professional conduct as a way to describe their approach to online behavior. However, despite knowing a general idea of what professional

conduct, some participants were unsure how this extended to their own social media identities. Participants felt unease regarding how they should conduct themselves on social media, often resorting to self-regulation in fear of doing something wrong. They refrained from any opinions or controversies that could get them in trouble with their employers whether their profile was private or not. Because policy enforcement mostly fell to human resource departments, participants often felt they had to adapt their behaviors on personal profiles to appease their employers. Although they were unclear who might be watching their personal profiles and reporting them, participants feared violating any rules or regulations. These behaviors proved that employer policies lacked a sufficient explanation of how employers monitored the social media. Thus, as a result, participants either adjusted their behavior or avoided platforms altogether.

Uncertainty about co-worker relationships. Although none of the participants were aware of how personal social media was monitored, social media relationships with co-workers became a way in which participants considered their personal accounts more susceptible to regulations. Participants strongly believed relationships with co-workers on social media were ambiguous, often creating an ethical dilemma involving how to balance personal relationships with co-workers and supervisors. According to Stewart and Coleman (2013) in their chapter about ethical uses of social media, “strategic communication organizations offer few guidelines regarding who should become friends with whom through social media” (p. 183). Organizations seem to also stray from creating any policies that could address these relationship-related issues.

The pressure created from supervisors or direct reports to make social media connections with their employees harms the freedom involved in using personal social media profiles as a freedom of expression, especially if employees aren't sure how their actions are monitored.

There was an obvious lack of education and policy description for the appropriate supervisor behavior, as most participants in entry- or mid-level career positions expressed frustrations with supervisors wanting to engage in personal social media spaces. When these online connections occurred, participants felt a need to avoid or adjust their behavior for fear of posting or engaging something that might violate professional conduct expectations. They didn't feel they could safely deny their supervisors access to their personal social media profiles because policies did not protect their right to reject these requests.

The Need for Ethical Policies

Participants saw the overall value policies could bring to address situations within in the workplace, but they explained how current social media policies were undocumented, too vague, or didn't consider their unique needs. Despite these disagreements, participants mostly described current regulations in place as ethical. There were many factors that participants felt their policy should do to protect the employee and the organization at the same time, but many felt policies were restrictive and limiting, and geared mostly towards protecting the employer. Thus, participants felt loss of privacy and freedom over personal identity on social media due to lack in clarity in how to conduct themselves, how they were monitored, and what sort of relationships they should have on social media.

Participants' overarching agreement and protection of policies could come from guidance of professional societies like AMA (n.d.) and PRSA (n.d.) that encourage members to act in ethical ways and support their organizations through professional behavior and codes of conducts. However, some research suggests that these professional codes of conducts fail to address appropriate ethical behaviors when situations arise, as they not geared enough towards scenario-building practices (Holtzhausen, 2015). Thus, professional codes of ethics don't address

how professionals could help to form professional ethics guidelines within an organization, but more how to practice ethics in daily responsibilities. Most responses suggested that employers still struggled to create policies of their own, especially those that considered the unique role of strategic communication.

A policy, like an organization's code of ethics, is a way in which an organization can express its ethical foundation for conducting business and making decisions (Jang, 2015). When an organization lacks a social media policy, it misses an important opportunity to communicate foundational perspectives on ethical social media conduct expectations from employees.

Utilitarianism is a common business ethic approach and serves to help understand how the right actions can serve the greater good (Gustafson, 2013). In order to create ethical social media policies, employers should seek a common good and vision with their employees. Thus, a common vision would help to guide some universal expectations within organizations.

If employees' personal conduct can remain in a way that is not harmful to the organization in terms of security, reputation, or productivity, there should be no reason why employers must put forth restrictive policies about social media use. A policy that supports the greater good of the organization, but allows employees to use social media personally in a non-threatening way is in line with Mill's (1861) perspectives of utilitarian theory of ethics.

However, if a policy missing key elements regarding its purpose and how that purpose is carried out, it does not serve the organization well from a utilitarian ethics standpoint. If an organization is unwilling to see the interconnectedness of social media accounts, especially on mobile devices, then it should either supply employees with work devices or put in place more leniency regarding the positive use of personal social media uses at work that don't interfere with the common good. Social media uses by employees outside of work hours that include harmful or

libelous actions is not something a policy or an employer should ignore because it does not promote the common good of the organization. Thus, an organization should create clarity about the types of behavior it supports and how that behavior is regulated by stating its explicit expectations within a social media policy.

Many of the current policies described by interview participants lacked important perceptions about how social media worked or how dependent professional and personal activities were in day-to-day engagement. Participants said they needed more from their organizations as they navigate the indefinite worlds of social media. As social media become more and more integrated with daily life, the idea of privacy and personal space is becoming more obsolete. Professionals who do not speak up about ethical issues and increase their involvement in policy formation may feel as if they are accepting terms of employment they don't agree with. Participants should be proactive in bringing their experiences and talents to the policy formation process so that employers can recognize a common vision and shared ethics.

Conclusion

Professional codes of conduct within the workplace have received both support and skepticism in research over the years (Pitt & Groskaufmanis, 1990; Schwartz, 2004), and participants' opinions about social media policies followed a similar pattern. Some participants felt it was necessary to have documentation of employer expectations, while others knew that professional conduct was expected of them no matter what was documented in a policy. A professional conduct code is often the foundation of an organization's ethics (Jang, 2015) as well as an extension of their organizational culture (Webley & Werner, 2008). As with these preliminary codes of conducts put in place, social media expectations within organizations often reflected an organization's foundation and culture.

The strategic communication professionals interviewed in this study were cognizant of the role social media played in their daily life and how these platforms touched their online identity. The purpose of this paper was to understand how employer policies affected the opinions and uses of social media by strategic communication professionals, especially considering the unique role they play within an organization. Findings from this study support the concept of social media fatigue (Bright, Kleiser, & Grau, 2014) from participants who were expected to be active on social media on the time across multiple devices. The constant ambiguity regarding social media regulation caused these professionals little to no outlet for personal expression online.

When strategic communication professionals see themselves as brand ambassadors for an organization, it becomes harder for them to separate their professional role from their identity, especially on social media. Without clear policy statements that articulate employer expectations, strategic communication professionals may often find themselves in ambiguous stations, unsure how their actions are being watched and monitored. Much of the existing literature and analysis on social media policies become quickly dated, making the ability to evolve and stay current on these issues difficult. The lack of legal guidance also contributes to the ambiguity of policies expectations, making an ethical framework important to how employers address their policies and the professionals using these platforms in their daily routines.

Strategic Communication Professionals Need to Take Action

Although research reveals that businesses are increasingly implementing social media policies within the workplace (Proskauer, 2014; Purcell, K. & Rainie, L. (2014), responses from this paper indicated that policies are not always sufficient. A surprising number of interview responses indicated that participants were not actively involved in the policy implementation or

management process although their uses and experiences made them the most educated in the use of these platforms. This paper supports the recommendation that organizations need stronger social media policies in order to provide ethical guidance about their expectations.

As experienced users of social media, strategic communication professionals should play a larger role in policy creation and enforcement. Although professional conduct may fall within a human resources department, specific issues may not always translate the same to social media. Strategic communication professional must stress the importance of their involvement in the policy process. If they are more involved in the education process and interact with a hands-on approach, policies are more likely to be implemented and adopted by employees (Webley & Werner, 2008).

Implications

As companies navigate the uncertain and ever-changing world of social media, this paper recognizes the importance of having an employer social media policy, especially for strategic communicators of organization that are constantly using and exploring platforms professionally and personally. If social media policies are too narrow, they can limit their professionals' ability to manage and explore new social media tools. If they are too broad, they can leave an organization vulnerable to misconduct or harm. This paper helps to address that imbalance and put forth recommendations about what a good policy ought to address based on ethical theory. Policies should support the common good of an organization and include perspectives from all types of employees, especially those using social media every day. Employers need to consider the strategic communication professional's role in their businesses in order to craft an ethical policy.

Strategic communication professionals have unique roles within a company and, although policies are important, the *right* policy is essential to the successful adoption of that policy. A limitation to this study was a lack of analysis of social media policies and their content, which future could address through content analysis in order to strengthen this paper's findings. Additionally, responses were limited to professionals living within the Dallas-Fort Worth, Houston, and Washington, D.C. areas. Future research could address other areas in order to validate findings across geographic regions. Overall, the purpose of this paper was to understand 30 strategic communication professionals' perceptions of social media policies in order to analyze what organizations were doing well and what they can improve upon.

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Appendix A

Interview Guideline Questions

1. What is your age?
2. What is your highest level of education?
3. Please state your company, position, and tenure.
4. How do you define social media?
5. What social media channels do you use?
6. Do you use social media at work? How so?
7. Is your social media use at work more professional or personal?
8. Does your employer have a policy in place? If so, can you summarize what it says?
9. How does your employer define professional and personal social media use?
10. How does your employer enforce its social media policy?
11. How do you feel about having a social media policy in place?
12. What do you like about the social media policy?
13. What do you dislike about the social media policy?
14. Would you consider your employer's social media policy ethical?
15. Would you be able to share that policy with me?
16. Are there any other communication or marketing professionals you could refer to participate? If so, could you provide an email address?

Appendix B*Interview Participants and Demographic Data*

<u>ID</u>	<u>Gender</u>	<u>Age</u>	<u>Position/Job Category</u>	<u>Education</u>	<u>Tenure (years)</u>	<u>Organization Type</u>
1	F	25	Marketing Manager	Bachelor's	4	Corporate
2	F	24	Senior Account Executive	Bachelor's	1	Agency
3	F	25	Account Executive	Bachelor's	<1	Agency
4	F	22	Marketing Account Representative	Bachelor's	2	Agency
5	F	29	Communication Representative	Bachelor's	2	Corporate
6	F	43	Interactive Marketing Representative	Master's	12	Corporate
7	F	24	Digital Content Marketing Coordinator	Bachelor's	1	University
8	F	33	Social Media Specialist	Bachelor's	7	University
9	F	29	Marketing Coordinator	Bachelor's	2	University
10	F	25	Marketing Coordinator	Master's	<1	Corporate
11	F	32	Associate Director	Bachelor's	3	Agency
12	M	28	Social Media Analyst	Bachelor's	<1	Corporate
13	F	22	Social Media and Marketing Coordinator	Bachelor's	<1	Corporate
14	F	25	PR and Social Media Coordinator	Bachelor's	<1	Corporate
15	F	24	Digital Marketing and Social Media Specialist	Bachelor's	2	Corporate
16	F	33	Director of Communications	Master's	4	Municipal
17	M	53	Communications Director	Bachelor's	17	Municipal
18	F	27	Community Advocate Associate	Bachelor's	1	Corporate
19	M	22	Director of Business Development	Bachelor's	1	Corporate
20	F	29	Marketing Director	Bachelor's	2	Agency
21	F	27	Account Executive	Master's	<1	Agency
22	F	24	Community Relations Associate	Bachelor's	1	Non-profit
23	F	29	PR Manager	Bachelor's	1	Agency
24	F	25	Administrator	Bachelor's	3	Non-profit
25	M	27	Development Coordinator	Bachelor's	<1	University
26	F	25	Marketing Specialist	Bachelor's	2	Corporate
27	F	27	Director of Event Marketing	Bachelor's	4	Corporate
28	M	60	Senior Marketing Coordinator	Master's	11	Corporate
29	F	38	Public Relations Coordinator	Master's	<1	Municipal
30	M	24	Digital Marketer	Bachelor's	<1	Corporate