

e m p l o y e e s l o v e i t . . b u s i n e s s d o e s n ' t . .

What's the roadmap for HR...

social media dilemma

employee perspectives and hr implications



A RESEARCH REPORT BY

THE STRATEGIST[®]

SOCIAL MEDIA DILEMMA

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executive summary



The digital revolution in the form of social media (herein-after referred as SM) is getting more and more entrenched in the fabric of our personal and professional lives. SM through its applications (e.g. Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Flickr, etc.) has converted the hitherto one-way communications provided by the traditional media into a two-way interactive platform for the individuals, groups and the organizations to create, share and discuss the contents of the communications. SM is now a global phenomenon and India Inc. seems to be catching up with the global trends at a much faster pace than ever.



The growth and popularity of SM in different domains of business is astounding, as many organizations are now embarking on the bandwagon of engaging in the conversations about their company, products and services with the external as well as internal stakeholders. With SM getting more deep-seated within various business functions, the Human Resource (HR) functions and professionals are looking at it as a means of creating an engaged and productive workforce. SM has opened vast opportunities for HR to leverage this interactive platform and to gain on several fronts in HR like recruitment, employee communications, learning & development, employee engagement and so on.

We at THE STRATEGIST conducted a first-hand preliminary survey on employees to peep into this window of opportunity that SM entails from the employees' perspective. In the following pages, we introduce the concept of SM and discuss the findings from the study to identify the trends in SM usage in general and at the workplace.

We use these findings to draw certain implications for the organizations from the HR perspective and suggest a way forward for the HR to leverage this powerful yet untapped medium of communication, engagement, innovation and growth.

The top 5 findings & implications can be summarized as :

1. Have we failed to satisfy the need for socialization at workplace and thereby encouraging use of social media at workplace ?
2. The usage is not only limited to connecting but also helps an individual in learning.
3. Before deciding to join the organization or not, prospects check the status of company on social media. This in turn, influences their decisions.
4. Employees believe that recognition of their efforts on social media is a real big booster for them.
5. Alumni management is the next big step in usage of social media.

Before going into the details of the study, we first present the research methodology and introduce social media.

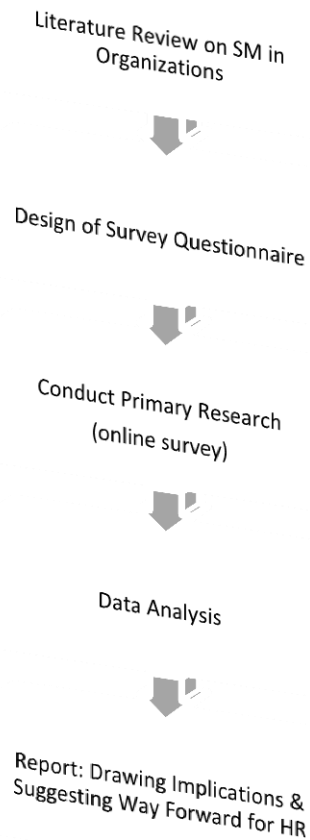
The present study began with a literature review on SM. We specifically explored the concept of SM, its usage by organizations around the world, and its usage by HR departments in specific. The literature review revealed that most of the studies pertained to SM from an organization's perspective (what organizations do or want to do with SM) and very few looked into the employees' perspectives (what employees want from SM in organizations).

Also, there are limited studies on the usage of SM by HR in Indian organizations. Study by Wipro Consulting Services (2012)¹ has looked into the usage of HR in Indian firms across five industries, but even that was from an organization's perspective.

Hence, it was decided to study SM from employees' perspective and based on that, draw certain implications for HR to leverage SM in organizations.

A survey questionnaire was designed to understand how the employees look at SM, its purpose and usefulness in the HR domain.

The survey link was mailed to the employees from selected companies which agreed to our request. The link was active for 10 days. We received a total of 298 responses out of which 26 responses were dropped due to partial fills and 272 complete responses were considered for analysis. The findings and the analysis were used to draw implications for HR. Finally, practitioners' insights were used to suggest the way forward for the HR in the usage of SM.



introduction to social media



What is Social Media?

"Social Media is a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of User Generated Content."²

- Kaplan and Haenlein

The internet-based applications include social networking sites (Facebook, Hi5), collaborative projects (Wikipedia), professional networks (LinkedIn), blogs (BlogSpot), microblogs (Twitter), content sharing applications (YouTube, Flickr), bookmarking sites (Reedit, Digg) and virtual gaming (World of Warcraft) among others which vary in terms of scope and functionality.

Web 2.0 is a platform which allows the applications and its contents to be continuously created, modified and discussed by users in a collaborative way, unlike Web 1.0 in which the applications and contents were created and published by specific people and consumers only used it for various purposes.

User generated content or UGC refers to the media contents created by end-users.

SM is different from traditional media: In traditional media (like newspaper, television and radio) the audience is merely a content consumer and plays no role in what is being said. In contrast, the audience plays an active role in creating, modifying and sharing the content on social media and hence is a content creator as well as content consumer switching between both the roles.

Therefore, the users of social media are also called as prosumers³ (producing consumers).



















Benefits of SM include: speed (virtually real-time responses), global reach, wider reach (variety of users), minimal cost, saves time, easy access, easy scalability, more informal, less hierarchical, more decentralized with multiple points of production and utility, provides flexibility to work, doesn't require complex technical skills, user-friendly, leads to democratization of knowledge, empowerment of individuals and fosters collective responsibility.

Risks associated with SM include: data security, legal ramifications, virtual complaints and protests, reputational damage, productivity loss, cyber-bullying, textual harassment, SM addiction, digital Darwinism⁴, anti-social media⁵ and risk of becoming asocial. SM is like a double edged sword, organizations gain with its viral nature⁶ (contagious, grows exponentially and is self-propelled) if the contents on SM are positive, but lose instantly and enormously if the contents are negative.

The SM revolution owes its genesis to the GenY⁷, young tech savvy population; who are also called as 'digital natives', 'screenagers' and 'millennials', who have this perpetual need to stay connected through technology – to communicate, connect, comment and contact.

different categories of social media

Suggestive illustration for understanding (the list is not comprehensive)

Publishing Media	   
Content Sharing	  
Discussion Services	 
Social Networks	 
Microblogging	
Live Streaming	
Virtual Worlds	 
Social Games	
Location Based Networks	 

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building blocks of social media

Kietzmann et al. (2011)⁸ developed the honeycomb framework (see figure below) to explain the functional building blocks of social media, in which, each block represents the specific SM users' experience. The SM applications use a combination of these functional blocks e.g. LinkedIn focuses majorly on identity and also on relationships and reputations, whereas YouTube focuses mainly on sharing and also on conversations, groups and reputation.

These blocks help the firms in understanding the engagement needs of the audience, and in sensing the social media ecology of its external and internal consumers and hence helps them in deciding the SM strategy and SM mix for the organization.

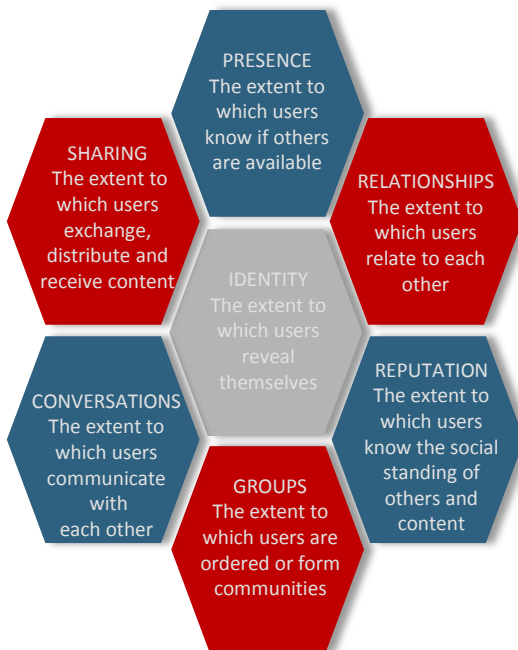


Figure: The Honeycomb of Social Media Functionality

relevance of social media in today's business context

Social Media has revolutionized the business landscape by its influence on the way individuals, communities and organizations communicate with each other. Organizations are consciously spending their efforts and budgets to invest in the powerful SM so as to gain strategic advantage over their competitors. Jeanne C. Meister and Karie Willyerd (2010) in their book⁹ "The 2020 workplace: How innovative companies attract, develop, and keep tomorrow's employees today" have indicated that the following 10 global forces are expected to drive organizations on to the SM bandwagon:

1. Changes in the workforce demographics
2. Emergence of knowledge economy
3. Increasing rate of globalization
4. Increased digitization of workplaces
5. Emergence of mobile technology
6. Emergence of a culture of connectivity
7. Emergence of a participative society
8. Increasing focus on social learning
9. Focus on corporate social responsibility
10. Workplace being populated with millennial

These global workplace forces indicate that SM will no more be an option but a necessity for the companies to stay in competition. Therefore, it is prudent on part of companies to take a stock of the SM needs of their stakeholders - both external and internal and accordingly embark on their SM journey which is full of opportunities as well as risks.

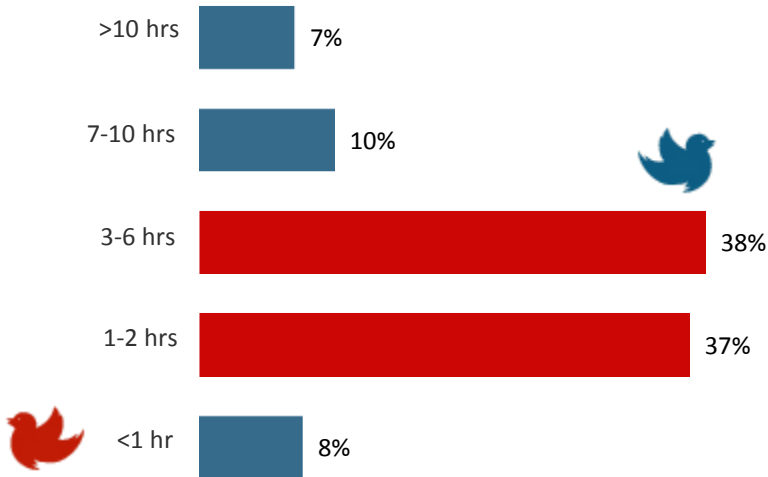
In some functions (like sales, marketing, corporate communications, public relations) social media has taken over the conventional/ traditional media's reach as well as impact. More and more organizations are joining the conversations about the company, its products, services, brands, image and also the conversations by internal customers in terms of company's culture, policies, leadership, work structures and so forth. In order to leverage this platform of SM, it is critical for HR professionals to understand the nerve and pulse of the social media users – how they spend time, what contents they create and share, for what purpose, and which SM application satisfies which needs of the SM users and how. This will help HR to categorize SM needs and SM mix for the organization in general and HR in specific, using the Honeycomb framework discussed earlier.

the findings



social media takes up 25% of our waking life

Average time spent on social media



Observations

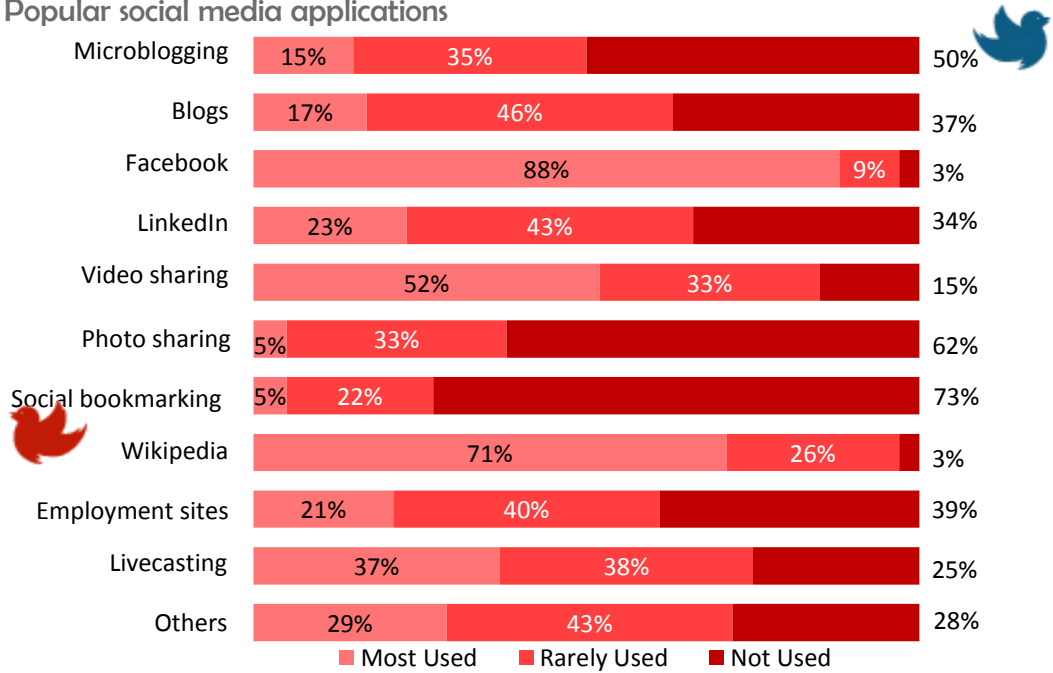
- More than half of the respondents (55%) shared that they spend at least three hours and more on SM sites.
- 37% of the respondents spend one to two hours on internet.
- On an average, a person spends 25% of waking hours on the SM sites.

Implications

- Does the company policy allows employees to spend few hours on SM sites?
- Can HR compare the performance statistics of employees from companies that allow use of SM sites in workplace to those who restrict such sites at workplace to draw some conclusions?
- If more than 75% of the respondents are spending between an hour to six hours on social media websites, can HR departments potentially use this time for a more constructive and productive purpose to attract, engage and retain talent, rather than block access to SM sites?

wikipedia & facebook are most popular

Popular social media applications



Observations

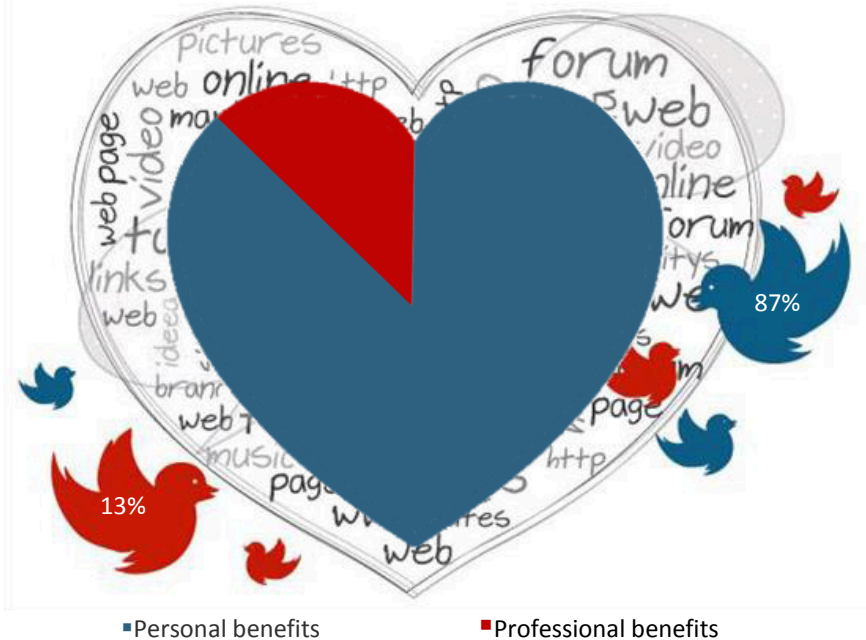
- Facebook (88%) and Wikipedia (71%) are the most popular applications.
- Video sharing (e.g. YouTube) and Livecasting (e.g. Skype) follow in popularity.
- The least popular are the bookmarking and photo sharing applications.
- Twitter, LinkedIn and employment sites are not very popular but are being visited.

Implications

- Can HR look at the functionality of popular applications to identify the engagement needs of employees and see if the same can be provided via company specific SM applications?
- Wikipedia, a collaborative encyclopedia is a popular application which implies that employees are using social media for seeking information and also enhancing knowledge. Can HR distinguish between various categories of social media being used in the workplace (e.g. based on honeycomb model discussed earlier) and allow access to ones which are knowledge-based?

have we failed to satisfy the need for socialization ?

Perception of social media benefits



Observations

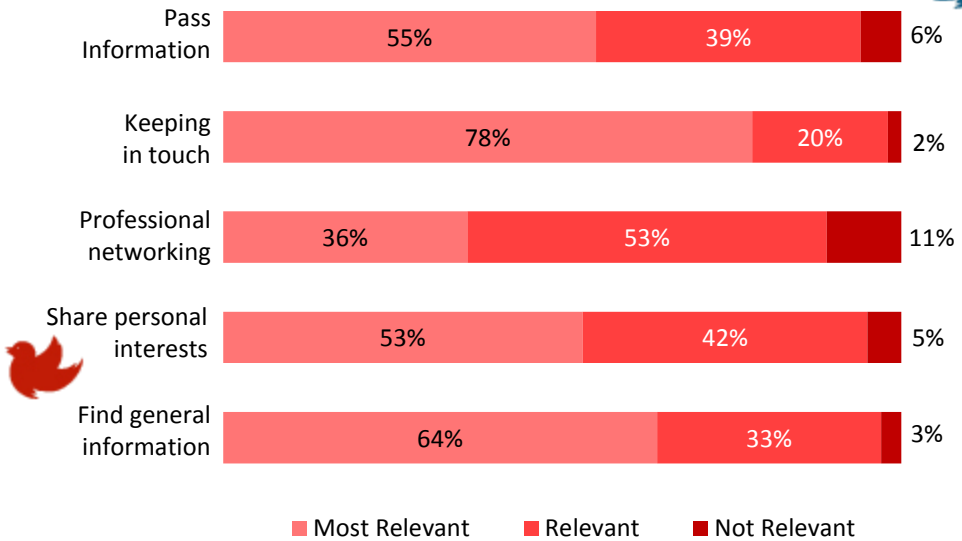
- Majority of respondents (87%) perceive that SM sites are meant for deriving personal benefits
- Only 13% see the utility of SM applications for professional benefits

Implications

- If employees are using SM mainly for personal benefit, can HR tap into this space to understand the gap in terms of need for socialization which the company has failed to create?
- Can HR make the employees see the professional benefits of SM applications?
- Can HR convert the time spent on SM sites for professional benefits (learning and development, innovation, employee engagement) and aim for an increase in productivity?

need to stay connected & keep learning – key purpose

Purpose of actual social media usage



Observations

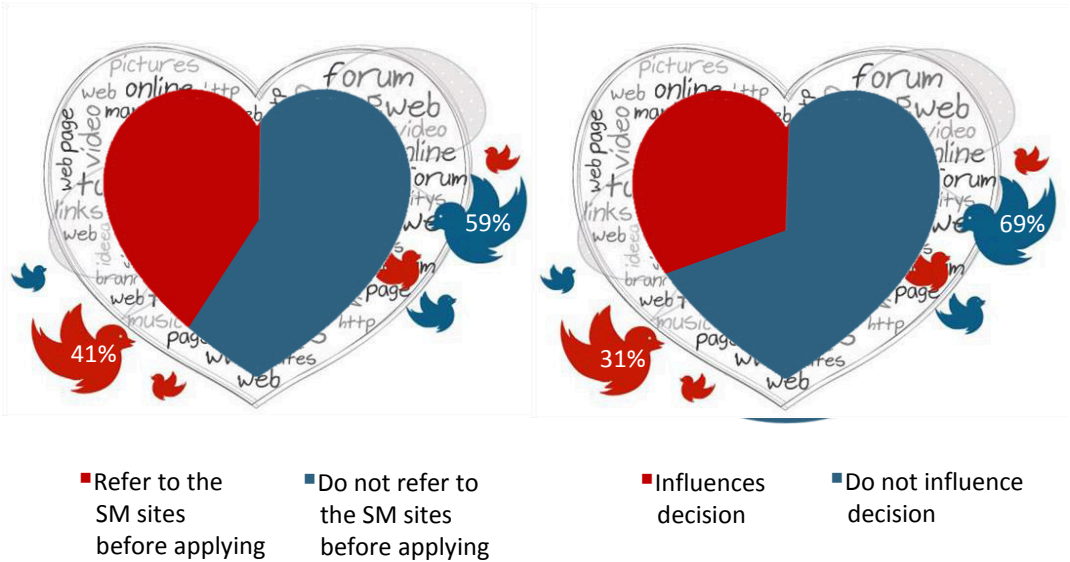
- Majority of respondents shared that they use SM for staying in touch with friends and relatives (corroborated with the popularity of Facebook)
- Also very high percentage of respondents use it for finding general information (corroborated with the popularity of Wikipedia)
- Other needs satisfied by SM sites are passing information and sharing personal interests
- Limited usage for professional networking

Implications

- The participants of this study qualify as 'digital natives', who are tech savvy and have an inherent need for staying connected, collaborating and participating through technology.
- How can HR meet these needs through internal SM applications or allow them to satisfy these needs at workplace?
- How can HR leverage the Willingness to Participate (WTP)¹⁰ of the employees?

i trust social media for taking decision – join or no

Pre-employment usage of social media and its influence



Observations

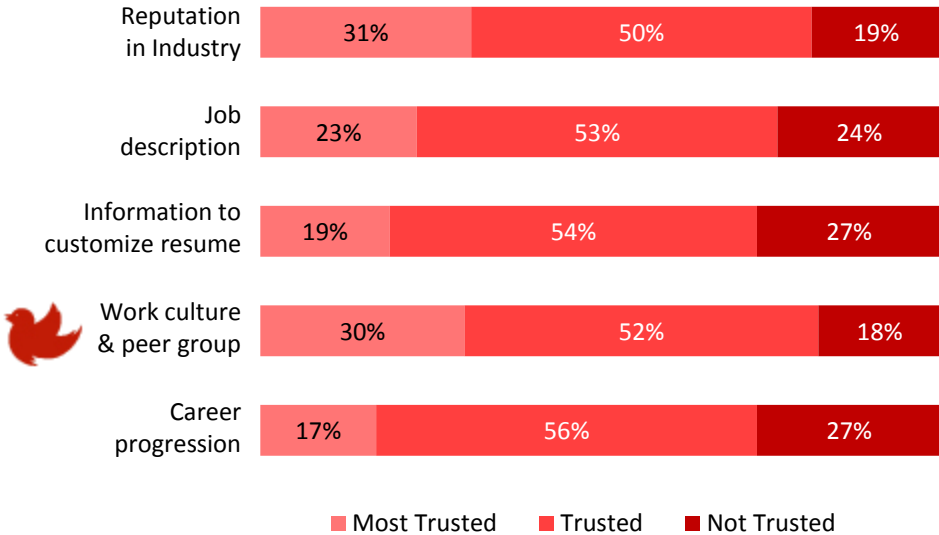
- 41% of respondents were affirmative in referring the SM sites before choosing to apply for a job while 59% do not refer
- 31% of respondents who refer SM, shared that information and feedback from SM sites influenced their decision to join the company while 69% shared that it does not influence the decision
- This could be due to the absence of many companies on the SM and also the credibility of the source of information.

Implications

- Though the above percentages are low, these cannot be ignored. There is an increasing trend with many job applicants referring to various SM sites (not just the company websites) to gather different types of information about the company and the specific jobs.
- Can HR increase the visibility and make the presence felt on SM sites, especially where the traffic of relevant talent is high?

reputation & culture diagnosis – most sought out

Nature & Reliability of information sought from social media by applicants



Observations

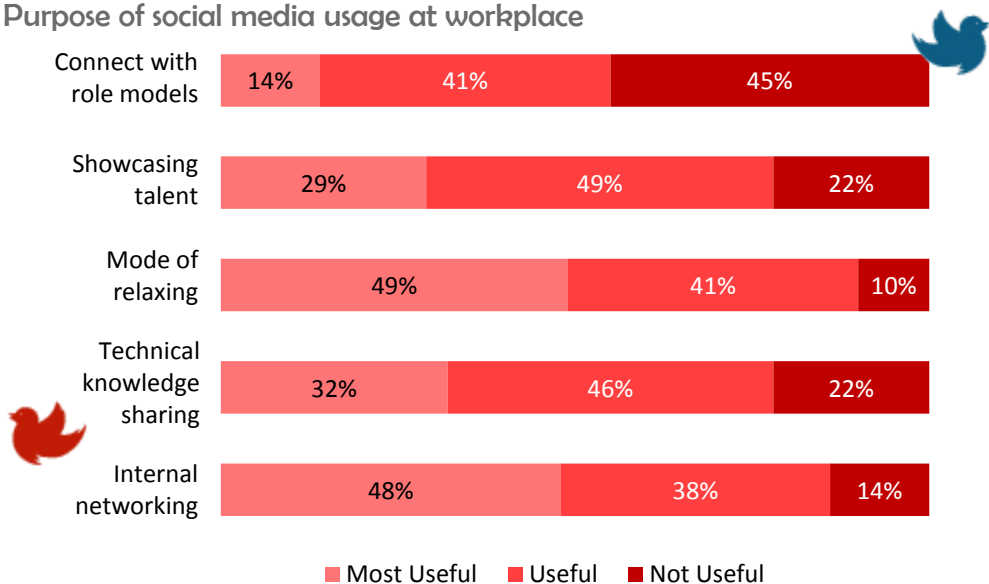
- Majority of the respondents use and trust SM sites to know about the reputation of the company in the industry and its work culture
- Many respondents shared that they trust SM to know more about the job description of the role for which they are applying
- Few respondents shared that they use it to find about the career progression information and resume adaptation information

Implications

- How much HR contributes to represent genuine and positive content on SM traffic about the company, its work culture and the specific jobs?
- How frequently, proactively and consistently does HR need to monitor SM?
- Does HR monitors the Employer Brand in SM circles ?

networking & conversations – purpose at workplace

Purpose of social media usage at workplace



Observations

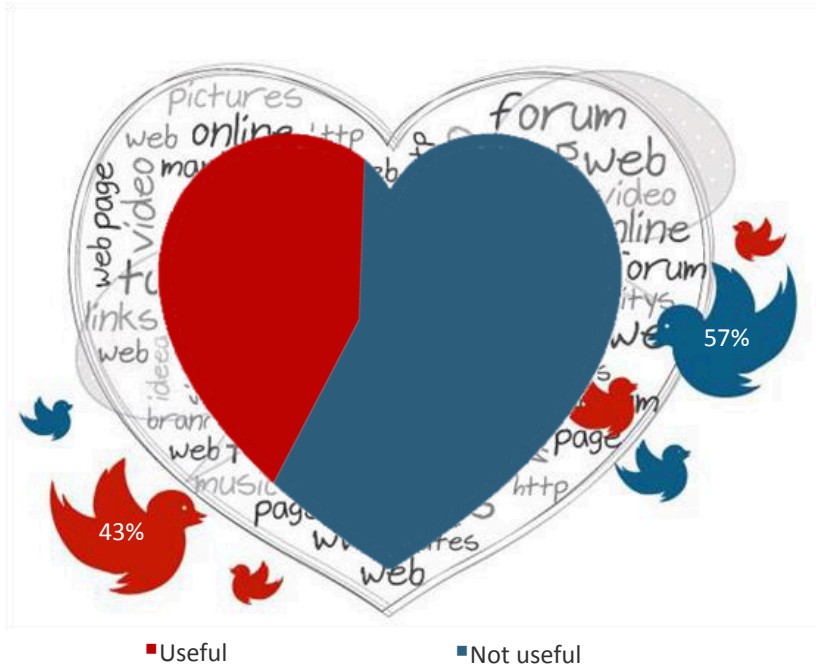
- Respondents shared that they use SM in workplace mostly as a mode of relaxing and for internal networking
- SM is also being used for sharing technical knowledge and showcasing employees' talents
- Usage of SM to connect with role models is negligible

Implications

- How can HR bridge the gap between the expected usage and actual usage of SM by providing possible avenues to employees for using SM more for collaborative learning and innovations, which in turn, contributes to the organizational performance?
- In a large global economy, where workplaces are becoming increasingly virtual, how can HR use social media to minimize the distances?
- How can SM act as an ANCHOR between the role models and their followers?

sm can connect & begin the journey before joining itself

Influence of social media on on-boarding



Observations

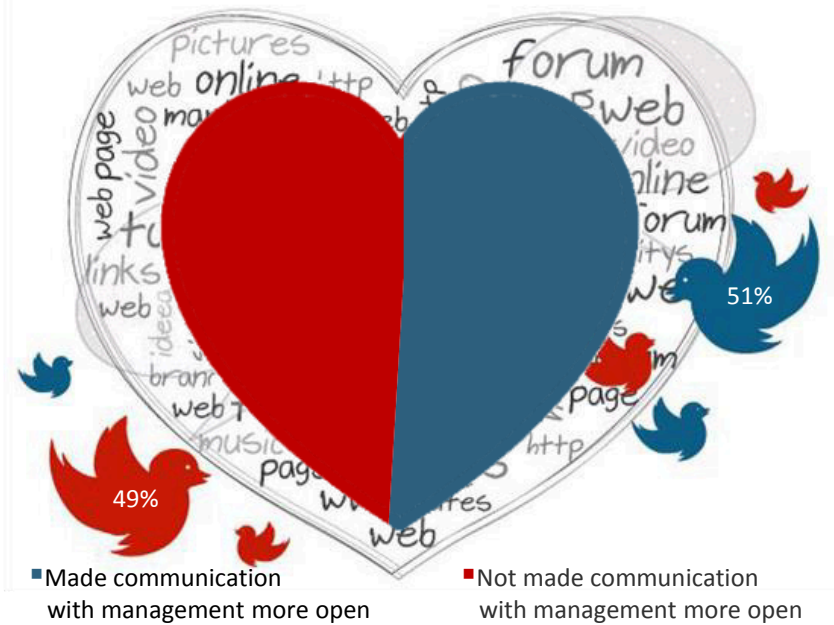
- 43% of respondents shared that SM sites will be useful during their on-boarding period for obtaining help and responses to their queries while 57% feel otherwise.

Implications

- How can HR tap this opportunity by creating SM applications, specifically meant for making the on-boarding experience positive and beneficial?
Example - companies are posting videos and keynote speeches from senior people to help new joinees gain knowledge on various aspects of the organization and its work culture.

social media underutilized for communication

Influence of social media on employees' communications



Observations

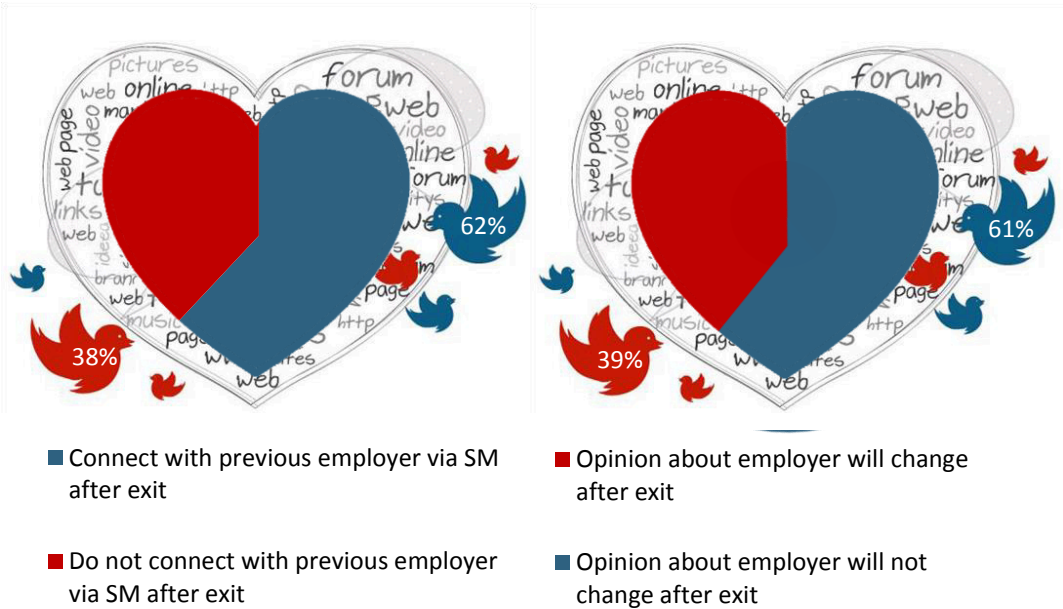
- Half of the respondents (51%) feel that SM has made the communications with the management more open. However, the other half (49%), feels that SM has not led to more openness in communications with the management

Implications

- If SM can make employee communication with top management transparent, is the top management equipped to take negative feedback from employees in their stride and address the concerns in a professional manner?
- How can HR contribute to making the employee communications more open and transparent? Example - blogs by CEOs to which employees can respond and comment and give direct feedback to CEOs.
- How can HR encourage employees to participate in the two-way communications? Example - using internal blogs to help employees understand employee benefits and discuss and rate the issues related to employees.

alumni management – the next orbit for social media

Influence of social media on employee exit

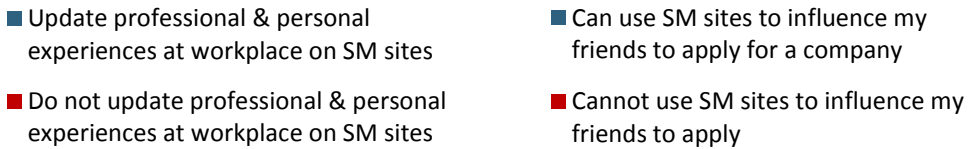


- Observations
- Majority of respondents (62%) feel that they need to connect with the previous employer through SM
 - Majority of respondents (61%) stated that their opinion about the organization post exit will remain same to that of when they were working.

Implications

- How can HR create potential goodwill (through electronic word-of-mouth) by making the exit experience a positive one?
- How can HR use SM to satisfy the need to stay connected with the organization post exit?
- Can SM be used by organizations to attract 'Alumni' back to the organization, or use them to be the 'brand ambassadors' of the organization?

Usage of social media to influence others



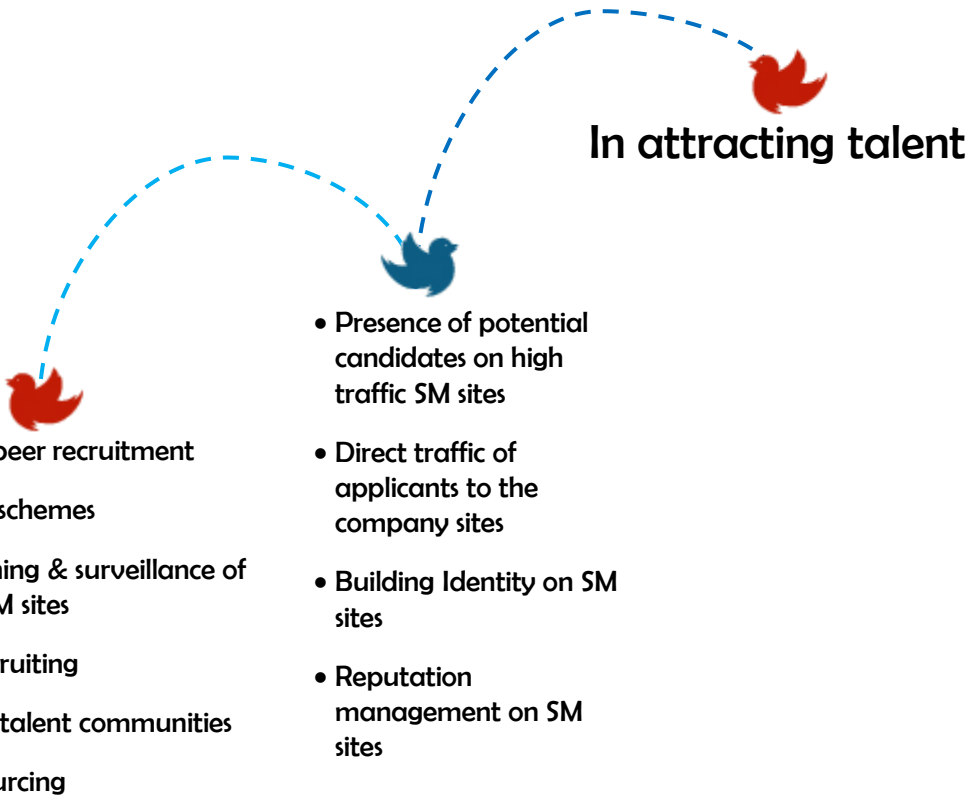
- Half of the respondents (51%) update their professional as well as personal experiences at workplace on SM sites
- More than half of the respondents (55%) feel that they can influence their friends to join a particular company by their comments and tweets on SM sites

- Is there a need for HR to monitor the content posted by employees on SM sites which have the potential to influence others (negatively)?
- Does HR educate the employees on the legalities of letting confidential and critical organizational details out in public?
- There is a critical need for HR to build guidelines of social media usage and increase the SM literacy at all levels. Where do we stand?

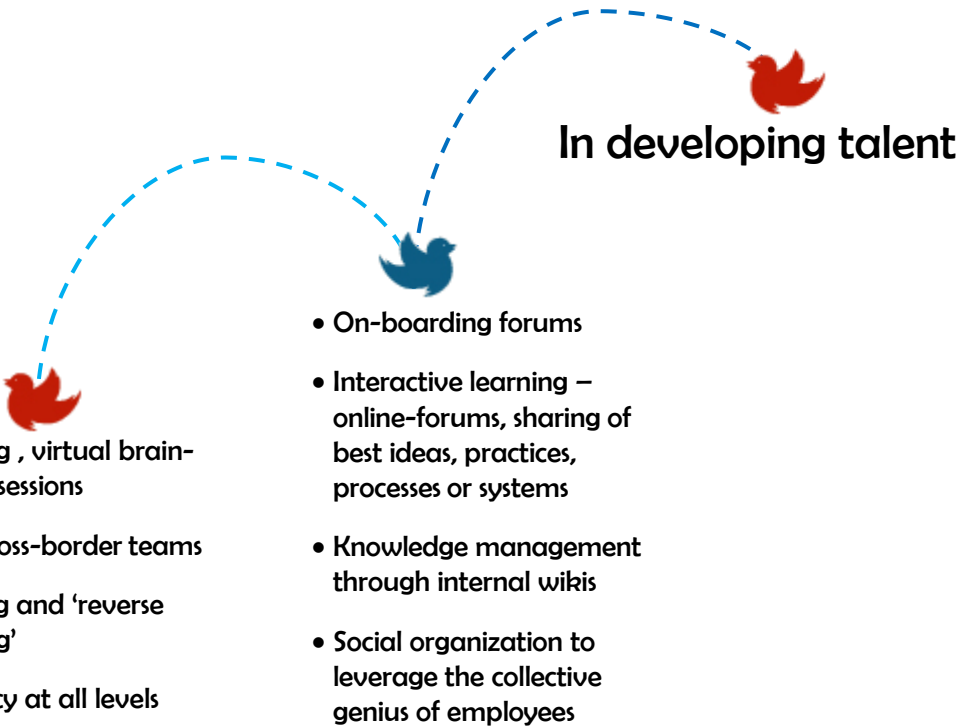
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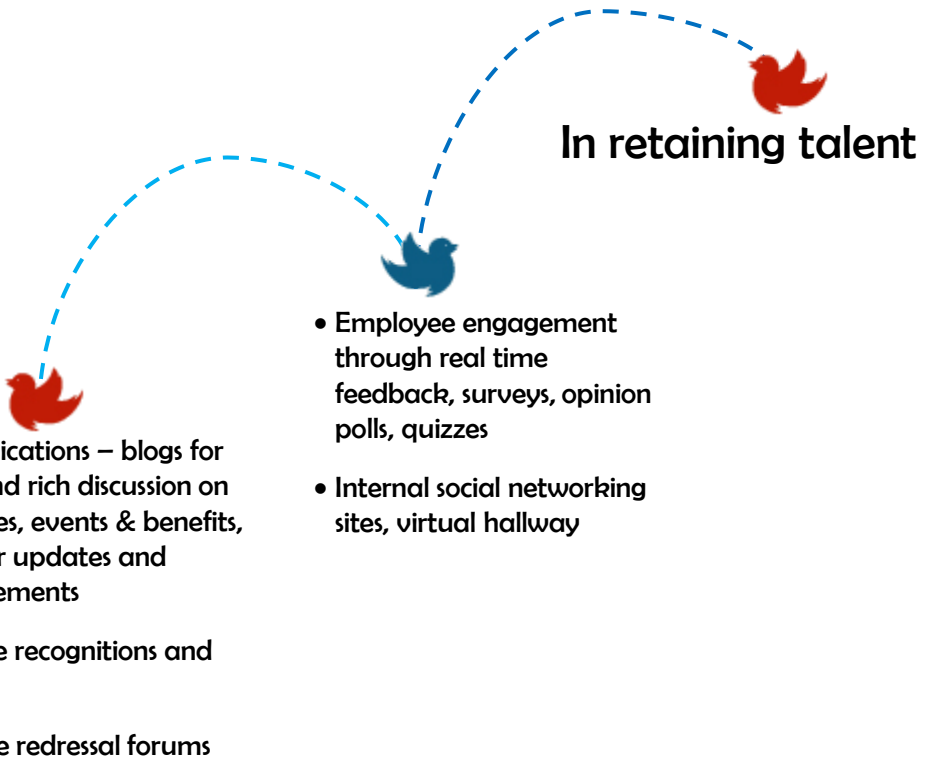
the way forward for hr



the way forward for hp



the way forward for hr



10 steps to get ahead with social media

1. Understand the SM engagement needs of the organization, HR and employees.



2. Understand the organization, HR and employee readiness for SM.

3. Decide the SM landscape for HR and SM mix for various HR functions (recruitment, employee engagement, L&D etc.). Leverage the existing SM applications for HR.



4. Allocate efforts and budget to SM in HR.

5. Align the SM in HR with the overall SM in organization and align SM within various HR functions. Mix SM with conventional HR systems to create an interesting combo.

6. Train and empower the HR staff and employees at all levels for SM usage.

7. Implement in phase-wise manner (preferably baby-steps). Do not flood with SM applications and conversations.

8. Monitor the usage of SM applications (strength, sentiment, passion, reach, conversation velocity) and conduct the HR analytics.

9. Review for changing (additions and deletions) the SM applications based on the ROI of SM usage.

10. Keep the human touch. Don't make social media asocial.

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