

# Social Media Content Analysis in the Higher Education Sector: From Content to Strategy

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## ABSTRACT

*Social media has become one of the most prolific fields for interchange of multidisciplinary expertise. In this paper, computer science, communication and management are brought together for the development of a sound strategic content analysis, in the Higher Education Sector. The authors present a study comprised of two stages: analysis of SM content and corresponding audience engagement according to a weighted scale, and a classification of content strategies, which builds on different noticeable articulations of editorial areas among organizations. Their approach is based on an automatic classification of content according to a pre-defined editorial model. The proposed methodology and research results offer academic and practical findings for organizations striving on social media.*

*Keywords:*

*Content Analysis, Editorial Model, Higher Education Sector, Social Media, Strategy, Text Categorization*

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## INTRODUCTION

The undeniable growth of social media environments has been introducing profound changes in society and in the communication management landscape. Though social media impacts are still subject of research in a wide variety of fields, in what organizations are concerned, two main aspects are consistently revealed throughout literature. The first relates to the (each day not so) new empowered role of millions of social media users, co-creators, active voices and active influencers, which organizations fail to understand and engage with. The second aspect relates to the fact that organizations are still “reluctant or unable to develop strategies and allocate resources to engage effectively” (Kietzmann, Hermkens, McCarthy, & Silvestre, 2011, p. 242) in these environments, thus appear to be ignoring or mismanaging “the opportunities and challenges presented by creative consumers”.

DOI: 10.4018/IJWP.2015040102

In fact, organizations rush into social media environments following the trend to create a social presence in multiple channels and/or to explore their potential (Berthon et al., 2012; Fournier, Avery, Fournier, & Avery, 2011; Gensler, Völckner, Liu-Thompkins, & Wiertz, 2013; Habibi, Laroche, & Richard, 2014; Hanna et al., 2011; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Kırtış & Karahan, 2011), without previously defining a clear strategic approach, which should include, for instance, clear insights on their target audience and a content editorial plan and calendar, in order to foster the achievement of the overall business objectives.

Following the trend to join social media environments, reaching for and aiming at media-tization (Zerfass, Fink, & Linke, 2011), organizations are also lacking monitoring practices and benchmarking frameworks.

As a result, an editorial model for the development of social media strategies was constructed and its articulation should provide the basis for persistent monitoring and well suited benchmarking practices. It also provides sector positioning assessment and measurement of the return on investment (ROI) on social media. The application of this model is supported by a text-mining and categorization methodology, which is also detailed, and which allowed to reveal the sector's investments allocation in communication areas and a three-fold overall classification of social media strategies being pursued. Since this is a particularly complex challenge for atypical markets, namely organizations providing higher education services, presented research focuses mainly on social media communication management in public Higher Polytechnic Portuguese Education Institutions (HPPEI).

This paper is organized as follows: in the next two sections the concept of social media strategy in Higher Education (HE) is introduced and related work on social media content analysis in this sector is presented. The proposed editorial model for the development and evaluation of social media strategies is then explained, followed by the research design and scope, which supports the two final sections of results obtained in content analysis and on the classification of content strategies. The paper is concluded with discussion on its main contributions, methodology applicability and limitations.

## **SOCIAL MEDIA STRATEGIES IN HEI**

The Higher Education Sector (HES) has become a global competitive environment, where the decreasing number of student enrolments and the decreasing financial government support has been raising unforeseen external challenges. In fact, Higher Education Institutions (HEI) have been pushed to seek for additional financial funding and to devote a large amount of efforts to ensure brand awareness and distinctiveness. In this context, the role of social media has become a fertile field, and at least for that latter one, it has become essential.

Acknowledging a broad range and diversity of organizational publics raises distinct communication and management needs. Social media strategies aimed at organizations with such a diversity of stakeholders' expectations, service distinctiveness, societal expected intervention and corresponding external pressure are lacking research. Thus, it is important to research, reveal, systematize and bring forward modes of intervention that can provide the balance between their institutional and transactional needs, in order to ensure their survival and competitive potential.

According to this perspective, the concept of social media strategy proposed by Lardi (2013), needs to be aligned and framed in a holistic integrated organizational communication management model, such as the one proposed by Cornelissen (2014), Moss (2011), Kunsch (2003) and Robinson (2011), for instance. According to Moss and DeSanto (2011), a well-articulated communication strategy should provide a clear indication of the overall direction, purpose and intended outcome

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