

**RISKS AND PARADIGM SHIFTS ASSOCIATED WITH AN
EMPLOYEE'S RIGHT TO SELF-IDENTIFY ON SOCIAL MEDIA: A
DELPHI STUDY**

A dissertation submitted

by

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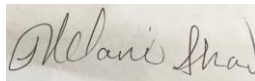
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Risks and Paradigm Shifts Associated with an Employee's Right
to Self-identify on Social Media: A Delphi study

by

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Abstract

In today's technology-driven world, organizational leaders are faced with the challenges and risks associated with an employee's use of social media concerning the workplace. On average, individuals are spending more than two hours a day on social media platforms. Social media has become an outlet for many people to discuss personal opinions, emotions, and feelings freely. Furthermore, social networking sites have changed the landscape for how organizations and individuals communicate, assimilate, and connect with people from around the world. Organizational leaders may want to plan for the use of social media not only at work, but as a personal forum in which employees use networking sites to discuss the workplace. Leaders may want to limit the disclosure of proprietary information and potential harmful public complaints by employees. The purpose of this qualitative classical Delphi research study was to develop a consensus among a panel of up to 26 United States human resources experts on identifying desirable and feasible organizational guidelines for personal social media account posts concerning company information.

Keywords: *social media, guidelines, self-concept, self-identity, self-identification, Delphi, policies and procedures, culture ownership, content, social norms, workplace, social media guidelines, social media policies, social networking*

DEDICATION

Education, training, and knowledge transfer has always been a passion of mine, so deciding to get my Ph.D. was a no-brainer. For anyone, deciding and actually starting a doctoral program is a feat in and of itself. With years of schooling ahead followed by years of research, it seemed like the end of the journey was never in sight. The daily grind of school, work, family, and the unknown proved to be a constant challenge. The drive and motivation it took to complete a task of this magnitude is something I could have never imagined. However, after completing the process, I highly commend anyone willing to put in the time, effort, and finances to finish the doctoral journey.

First and foremost, I dedicate this journey to my son, Gavin. Life will challenge you at times, but how you react and move forward will set you apart from others. No matter what happens today, the sun will set tonight and rise tomorrow, so stay focused on accomplishing your dreams. You do not have to be the smartest person in the room, I never was, but you have to have the mindset, motivation, and drive to know you can outwork others and accomplish anything if you put in the time and effort. Always remember that learning is a lifelong journey, and education is something that **NOBODY** can take away from you regardless of what happens in life. Small accomplishments lead to significant achievements, so push yourself, strive for success, and learn something new each day.

Without a doubt, I could not have accomplished this journey without the motivation and guidance of my parents. They have always supported my dreams and aspirations, no matter how farfetched they were and still are. I dream big because of the drive and motivation you have both instilled in me from a young age. You have always pushed me to do great things and go above and beyond (thank you for that!). Well, I would say this is my

greatest educational “thing” so far! Thank you for always believing in me, giving me motherly and fatherly advice, and focusing on the positives in life. I hope that Gavin is as proud of me someday as I am of both of you! Also, I offer special thanks to my sister, who has always been at my side through the good and tough times. Your desire and willingness to help others is contagious and something I appreciate beyond words.

To my wife, I would like to say thank you. Thank you for putting up with me (that is number one) and allowing me the time away from the family to focus on my studies. Since the time we met, I have been in school and what a ride it has been ever since. From getting married, to having our first child, to picking up our lives and moving to a different state, you have stuck with me through it all. I even recall an emergency room visit where I was still on my laptop because a crucial paper was due. Regardless of what happened in our lives, time does not stop, and the world around us continued to move, so thank you for sticking with me throughout the years while I completed my educational journey. Just one question, what degree can I get next?

Thank you all for being a part of my life and helping me accomplish the journey of becoming a doctor!

I love you all!

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

One of the goals of organizational development is to align the thoughts, ideas, agendas, and opinions of stakeholders and other individuals with a company's vision and strategies. Alignment has become especially critical as technology advances, and social media, in particular, impact how organizations and individuals collaborate (Andrade, 2016). Social media now reach far beyond traditional word-of-mouth communication, with nearly two-thirds of the population engaging and self-identify on some form of social media to discuss personal or work-related issues (Morales, Sosa Fey, & Farias, 2017).

Social media offers a wide array of benefits for organizations to enhance brand awareness and communication. Social networking also comes with a variety of challenges and risks associated with an organization's reputation, confidentiality, and security. Organizational leaders face challenges when seeking to govern and minimize the challenges and risks associated with social media without infringing on employees' freedom of speech or privacy (Johnston, 2015).

General Statement

With employees' daily use of social media increasing both on and off the job, organizational leaders may want to begin to understand the potential social and financial risks involved (Bizzi, 2018). Social capital represents a network of connections among individuals at home or work. These connections establish resources for conducting social affairs (Pillai, Hodgkinson, Kalyanaram, & Nair, 2017). The perspective of social capital could be said to include the exchange and creation of information on social media. Organizational leaders may become increasingly concerned about the use of social media, especially in the context of consumer interactions, ethical dissonance rarely arise if

employees abide by the best practices and online communication guidelines established by the organization. The sharing of credible information can avoid communication risks when done correctly (Gagnon & Sabus, 2015).

The use of social media, especially on smartphones, has become the norm for most individuals, who, apart from calls and texting, rarely go a moment without the urge to peek at their social media accounts. Practically speaking, employees' personal social media accounts should not represent an office, company, practice, or system, nor should the content be connected to clients or other employees, for even seemingly harmless material may have the potential compromise the privacy of another individual or an employee's organization, including inviting unwanted or warranted solicitation (Yasgur, 2018).

Background of the Study

The public-private divide in communication has become blurred in discussions of social media use concerning the workplace, and challenging questions remain unanswered regarding who has the right to access, control, and limit this type of information. The use and context of social media are increasingly a source of tension in the workplace, as evident in court cases, employment hearings, the media, and organizations' public images. The underlying causes and dimensions of social media use, even regarding well-known issues, have remained largely unexplored. Social media have disrupted traditional organizational life and communications by driving employees' and employers' efforts to reshape and reconstruct the identities and the boundaries between the private and public sectors. Employees and employers utilize much of the same technology, but their particular use and motives while doing so may cause conflict and resistance towards one another (McDonald & Thompson, 2016). Employees may feel that they own their social media accounts, including

the content, and are protected under the First Amendments of freedom of speech and their right to privacy. Organizations, on the other hand, are concerned about the risk of security breaches and damage to the company's reputations (Park & Abril, 2016).

There are typically two main types of internal communications regarding social media, organizationally-produced content, and user-generated content. The tension between the two types of communication complicates leaders' efforts to manage personal privacy and establish the ownership of content. There is an inadequate understanding of both the effectiveness of current guidelines for when and where employees can use social media within the workplace. The evidence is limited in addressing who owns social media content, which is causing organizational leaders to find minimal success in creating guidelines that reduce the company's exposure (Johnston, 2015).

Organizational leaders may want to understand the need to create guidelines that limit the company's exposure without taking away fundamental freedoms like those guaranteed under the First Amendment or interfering with employees' privacy. The interactions among and between employers and employees in today's evolving business world have become transformational and controversial due to the ever-changing business climate. Despite a disconnect between employees and employers, adaptive planning by both parties is essential for the creation of a workplace culture conducive to addressing concerns about organizations' vulnerability and the fundamental freedoms of the employees (Schlosberg, Collins, & Niemeyer, 2017).

Statement of the Problem

Leadership teams have been raising questions regarding the appropriate use of social media technology in the workplace. Organizational leaders may want to learn about the

impact and influence of social media on corporate risk and consider work-life balance and work-related communication technology when formulating guidelines for social media use in the workplace (Walden, 2016). Significant changes to business operations have been brought about by information technology and exchange. The ability to work and to communicate with others from anywhere in the world quickly has changed how business is conducted. With the innovations associated with the Internet of Things (IoT) and social media, organizations have been forced to consider and adopt new ways to share, create, and analyze knowledge transfer (Majstorovic & Rakic, 2017).

Organizational leaders, especially risk and communication managers, ought to consider monitoring social media for derogatory remarks, proprietary information, customer and employee reviews, rumors, and market trends that could disrupt current and future strategic plans and revenue growth (Higgins, 2013). The general problem that organizational leaders face concerns the risks and exposure caused by employees' emerging and rapid use of social media. Many organizations may not fully understand the exposure and risks of regulation and tarnished reputations resulting from harmful and derogatory remarks (Levy, Leusner, & Wasti, 2015). An organization may face public and social humiliation, the exposure of confidential information, and a tarnished reputation, while employees may face legal repercussions, embarrassment, and employment termination ("Derogatory Facebook post," 2017).

Employees are influenced by generational and consumerist behaviors that have caused the workplace environment to shift. Emerging technology and technology platforms are reshaping business operations and individual communication. Technologies continue to improve workplace efficiency but also create new frustrations for risk managers and

organizational leaders. Not all new technology has led to positive change; for example, mobile devices have created an always-on-call workplace and social life where gossiping and bully can be done online rather than in person (Wes, 2015). The domination of global business communications by social media has forced organizational leaders not only to understand the risks and benefits of social media but also to develop strategies for minimizing exposure in personal social media accounts (Morales et al., 2017).

Negative comments and feedback on social media can cause tensions to rise within the workplace and lead to harassment, violence, disruptive behavior, ruined reputations, and the termination of employees. Organizational leaders should inform employees of company guidelines regarding the use of an organization's name, materials, and content on social media, both inside and outside the workplace. Employees tend to be less likely to expose an organization on social media if they understand that doing so could result in termination or other legal repercussions as defined in corporate guidelines (Schultz, Koehler, Philippe, & Coronel, 2015). Organizations often lack clear guidelines for issues that arise from improper social media postings by employees, even as social media continue to be a critical component of an organization's ability to attract customers. The problem is an employees postings could be detrimental to a business if the information shared is inappropriate, confidential, or is concerning a negative experience. Notwithstanding the positive aspects of social media, organizations often lack the guidelines for what happens when social media posts negatively impact the culture, mission, acquisition of customers, and, ultimately, future success (Cho, Park, & Ordonez, 2013).

Organizational stakeholders can use social media to bring added value to their customers. Social media, however, can also pose a great deal of risk, so companies may want

to develop a risk-sensitive strategy and compliance program that is effective and ethically balanced. Social media incidents can cause brand erosion, legal exposure, regulatory penalties, and, thereby, financial losses for an organization. According to a report by Blue Hill Research, a single social media incident can cost a company of upwards of \$3.5 million (Lin, 2015).

Importance of the Study

The findings presented here contribute to social identity theory from a digital perspective. Social identity theory describes individuals' definitions of their self-concept within social groups. Advances in technology make communication more accessible than ever to connect with like-minded individuals and groups. The social groups, furthermore, aid in predicting and driving specific individual characteristics and behaviors. This study may also contribute to the dynamic theory of organizational knowledge creation by identifying guidelines for employees who post on personal social media. A further contribution is addressing the issue of employees posting during work or on personal time and feel entitled to make negative remarks about their organizations with impunity. The ability to communicate in real time helps organizations and individuals alike to create and manage their brands, provide self-social identification, and classify social media users into actual or symbolic social classes (Momoko, Harrigan, & Soutar, 2018). The key findings of this study involve the identification of strategies to guide employers and employees in the use of company information on social media to reduce a company's risks of harmful exposure.

The implications of the study may inform the creation of guidelines, policies, and strategies that define the companies limits and extent of their employees' social media use. Employees rely on social media rules to define the scope of what can or cannot post about

the company online. Guidelines and policies can validate the firing of an employee when uniformly enforced. A grey area exists, however, when companies try to ban social media posts that are critical of the organization, prohibit the exchange of certain information, or eliminate social media use altogether rather than creating nuanced policies and guidelines for employees (McCue, 2015). Additional grey areas may extend across organizational policies and state and federal laws, including the First Amendment and the National Labor Relations Act (NLRA). Individuals are spending increasing amounts of time on social media, more than on any other type of communication. As a consequence, organizational leaders should be heavily involved in creating social media guidelines that address employees' self-identification on social media while limiting the risks to the organizations posed by fabricated company news, gossip, or confidential information (Walden, 2016).

The results of the research study may serve as a basis for future discussion and the development of guidelines and strategies by the leaders and risk managers who are ultimately responsible for upholding the reputations of their companies and guaranteeing the rights of their employees. Leaders across industries, especially those involved in risk and reputation management, may look to the findings presented here to justify their guidelines relating to the use of social media in or about the workplace by its employees and affiliates.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative classical Delphi research study was to develop a consensus among a panel of up to 26 United States human resources experts on identifying desirable and feasible organizational guidelines for personal social media account posts concerning company information. Through four rounds of increasingly refined online surveys using the Zoho Survey tool, data was collected and analyzed to identify such a

consensus. This Delphi study, then, was designed to identify a consensus through a series of questionnaires focused on problems, forecasts, solutions, and opportunities. The classical Delphi method includes four key features, the anonymity of the participants, iteration, controlled feedback, and statistical aggregation of a group response.

As social media become increasingly popular, organizational leaders may want to understand the risks associated with a lack of social media guidelines. Leaders face significant communication challenges, both in practice and theory, owing to the rise in the digital and social media-driven platforms that have become the new word-of-mouth (Rokka, Karlsson, & Tienari, 2014). Organizations rush to be the first to develop and deploy new products, services, and technologies, often forgetting to create or enforce guidelines that can be used within the workplace. Even established organizations with viable products and services sometimes lack social media compliance guidelines, resulting in legal, financial, and brand liabilities that can jeopardize an organization's reputation (McGrath, 2015).

Conceptual Framework

“Social media” is an umbrella term for a vast and widespread array of technology platforms that promote the sharing of ideas, content, information, and personal messages among individuals and groups. The concept of social media can be traced as far back as 1844, when Samuel F. B. Morse patented a working telegraph and sent the first telegraph message from Washington to Baltimore (Rosenwald, 2017). In the following century and a half, the telephone, three-way calling, and group messaging were introduced. In the early 1990s, the commercial linkage of communication networks enabled the transition from telephonic and face-to-face interactions to internet-enabled communication. With the commercialization of the Internet came the social chat rooms and group emails that evolved

into such modern-day social media technology platforms as Facebook, LinkedIn, and Instagram.

Connecting individuals through an established network is the primary basis of a social media ecosystem. The micro- and macro-dimensions of social media allow individuals to interact in ways that are acceptable and simple. Social media usage, policies, and governance have raised a complex set of issues that did not arise with the earlier introduction of telephones and fax machines. Social interactions and networked communication among individuals, groups, and organizations remain in a grey area in which no clear standards exist. A culture of connectivity has taken shape in which some individuals use virtual communication to elude real-life situations, problems, and daily routines. This escape from life can be frustrating for those who believe that extensive social media connections can lead to unreal expectations for daily life. Furthermore, attention to privileges, privacy, and security has become critically important as more and more individuals use social media daily (De Silva, 2014).

In 2019, the number of social media users reached an estimated 2.77 billion worldwide, and, with the widespread use of mobile phone and smart applications, the number of social media accounts had increased to 2.46 billion since 2017. Statista (2017) projected that the number of social media users would exceed 3.1 billion by 2021. With so many individuals communicating through social media platforms, organizations may want, but often lack, consistent and fundamental principles for regulating employees' posts of negative and confidential information. As a lens through which to view findings and inform recommendations, the dynamic theory of organizational knowledge creation can help to determine guidelines for employees who post on personal social media during work and

personal time. The conceptual design for this study, based on classical Delphi research methods, involved building a consensus among a panel of 26 human resources experts regarding desirable and feasible social media guidelines that can be implemented within any organization, as shown in Figure 1.



Figure 1. The Organizational and Employee Social Media Guideline Interaction. This simple path model is an example of the path used to identify, create, and implement desirable and feasible social media guidelines.

Research Questions

Identifying desirable and feasible guidelines for employees' use of personal social media accounts to post company information online may decrease the risks associated with potentially detrimental posts. The research question (RQ1) and sub-questions (S1 and S2) for the study were accordingly formulated as follows:

RQ1: What was the consensus among a panel of 26 human resources experts as to desirable and feasible organizational guidelines and strategies for employee use of personal social media accounts concerning publishing company information online?

S1: What was the level of consensus among a panel of 26 human resources experts as to current desirable and feasible organizational guidelines and strategies for employee use of personal social media accounts concerning company information published online?

S2: What was the level of consensus among a panel of 26 human resources experts as to future desirable and feasible organizational guidelines and strategies for employee use of personal social media accounts concerning publishing company information online?

Overview of the Research Design

The purpose of this qualitative classical Delphi research study was to develop a consensus among a panel of up to 26 United States human resources experts on identifying desirable and feasible organizational guidelines for personal social media account posts concerning company information. Utilizing a classical Delphi design, the research study involved four consecutive rounds of questionnaires to gain a group consensus about desirable and feasible social media guidelines. The classical Delphi methodology is incredibly flexible; thus, many researchers refer to “Delphi techniques,” which include successive rounds of questionnaires to develop criteria for prototyping, decision-making, ranking, identifying technology issues, product development, and descriptive frameworks for future business activities (Romano, 2010).

The research design was appropriate for identifying desirable and feasible social media guidelines, as shown in Figure 2. The multiple survey rounds may have helped to identify desirable and feasible social media guidelines based on the expert panel’s consensus and so were also appropriate for the study. A consensus was formed by narrowing the outcomes of each round and obtaining the highest-rated average, based on a Likert-type scale, of each subsequent questionnaire. The panelists consisted of human resource directors from various industries. The wide range of the participants’ backgrounds helped to produce a dynamic set of guidelines. The expert panel included individuals whose breadth of expertise

and experiences was highly conducive to the emergence of a consensus once the uncertainties had been identified. The open-ended questions provided the panelists with opportunities to give feedback, identify similar themes, and refine the results over several rounds (Jones, 2018).

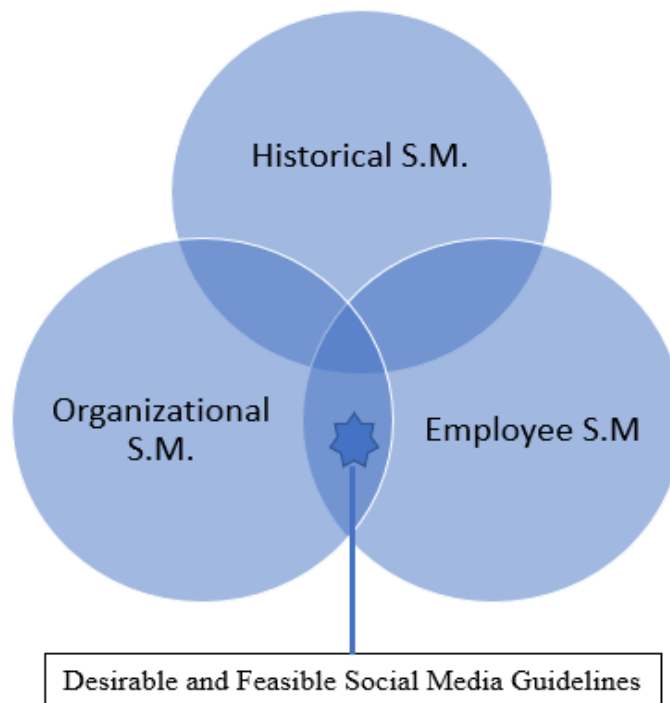


Figure 2. Desirable and Feasible Social Media Guidelines. The dark blue area represents the region lacking desirable and feasible social media guidelines.

The study consisted of four rounds of questionnaires that served to refine the consensus progressively. The first questionnaire focused on organizational tolerances and risks associated with social media use based on the experts' perceptions of the amount of time that employees spent on social media during working hours and the frequency with which colleagues interacted with and talked about one another or their organizations on social media. The second questionnaire provided the participants with the opportunity to identify and rate solutions for future desirable and feasible guidelines on a five-point Likert-type scale. The third questionnaire addressed the same issues but with a four-point Likert-

type scale. In Round 3, the experts rated the highest-ranked questions identified in each category during Round 2. The third round also summarized and rated the data using a weighted average based on a Likert-type scale. In Round 4, the experts validated and expressed their confidence in the guidelines that had been identified to that point. In the fourth round, the data was summarized, and the importance, confidence, and likelihood of implementing the chosen guidelines were rated. Before the study, the participants who had been identified were asked to complete an informed consent release form by email. The questionnaire itself was delivered utilizing the online survey tool Zoho Survey. The panelists' responses were not shared during the successive rounds of data collection and analysis phases to avoid introducing biases.

The analysis of the data that was collected identified a consensus among the expert participants. The collection and examination of the experts' experiences and observations relating to social media policies served to identify current and possible future social media guidelines. The second round focused on rating the most common themes from Round 1 using the Likert-type scale, which then provided the basis for the third and fourth rounds, during which the experts identified the most desirable and feasible guidelines. The classical Delphi framework allowed the participants to share ideas and opinions and to rate their agreement on the desirability and feasibility of future guidelines anonymously. The descriptive statistics and resulting quantitative data from each questionnaire round served to determine the consensus.

Definition of Terms

The following terms and definitions were relevant to the understanding of the research design by the participants and of the overall outcomes by the reader. According to Merriam-Webster (2019):

- A **central tendency** is the degree of clustering of values of statistical distribution and is usually measured as the mean, median, or mode.
- A **consensus** is a general agreement about something, an idea or opinion that is shared by all the people in a group.
- **Delimitations** are a set of fixed or defined limits.
- **Desirable** results are intended to produce good results or helpful effects.
- An **employee** is someone working, usually for wages, within an organization.
- An **expert/participant** is someone having, involving, or displaying specialized knowledge or skill from training or experience.
- **Feasible** refers to the possibility of being done or carried out.
- **Guidelines** are an indication or outline of a policy.
- **Mean** is the average and represents a measure of the central tendency.
- **Mode** is the most frequent value in a set of data.
- The **organization/company** is a functional and administrative structure of a business.
- **Posts/postings** are used to announce, advertise, and or publish in the context of online social platforms.
- **Self-identification** is identification with someone or something
- **Self-concept** is the mental image of oneself.

- **Social media** may be considered any form of electronic communication (i.e., websites used for social networking and microblogging) in the context of which users create online communities to share ideas, information, content, and personal messages.
- A **survey** is a series of questionnaires used to collect data from a sampled population.

Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

Every research study, regardless of its nature, has assumptions, limitations, and delimitations. Thus, for example, a study may be limited to fewer participants than planned if some individuals are unwilling to participate, fail to complete the consent form, or drop out. The expert panel consisted of 26 U.S. human resources professionals. The study's intent, detailed information about it, and expected outcomes were made known to the participants as part of the consent form before the start of Round 1.

Underlying assumptions are typically unambiguous and, in a Delphi study, can lead to the uncovering of a range of ideas, thoughts, and ideas (Winkler, Kuklinski, & Moser, 2015). The baseline assumption in the study consisted of both experts' and employees' use of social media. To compensate for the assumptions that commonly limit a research study, all alternative conceptualizations of communication for thought and action, such as social media platforms, were considered (Wortham, 2015). The anonymous online survey tool helped the participants to conceptualize and communicate. The researcher did not share the participants' responses during the data collection phase of the study. The data was collected and analyzed after each round to avoid biases. The survey tool allowed the participants to complete the questionnaire on their schedules, which alleviated any anxiety, pressure, or worry about completing the survey in a hurry or in front of someone.

There may be limitations on the transferability of the guidelines throughout various industries across the United States owing to the relatively small number of participants and industries represented. The researcher did not collect data from participants who failed to complete the consent form or to participate. The data from previous rounds generated by any expert participant were still included with the knowledge that results could alter the validations of the full consensus slightly. Limitations may arise in a wide variety of areas and at any given time throughout a study. The design process and quantifying results can be very complicated since the results may differ across participants (Uri, 2015). The researcher attempted to minimize the limitations by capturing as many responses from experts in as many industries as possible within the scope of the study. The response rate was another limitation owing to the electronic nature of the form. Before the study, the participants consented to complete the questionnaires within a predetermined amount of time. The information presented before the beginning of the research in the consent form made clear to them the time commitment required. Further issues relating to dependability, credibility, confirmability, transferability, and authenticity are discussed in the qualitative and validity sections of Chapter III.

Delimitations concern aspects of a study that are controlled for and include the research questions, conceptual framework, problem, and type of participants. Individuals met the criteria for participation in the first questionnaire by agreeing and completing the informed consent form. Round 1 of the study included an explanation of the number and type of questions, selection criteria, measurement scales, and the number of rounds. In Round 2, the same expert participants answered questions on a predetermined Likert-type scale in a themed breakdown of the answers from Round 1. The third round delimited the measurement

of questions from Round 2 to determine the themes for the fourth and final round, during which the participants rated the validity and confidence in the desirable and feasible social media guidelines identified in Round 3.

Summary

The public-private divide in communication continues to blur as more and more employees use personal social media in the workplace. As a consequence, there are concerns regarding posts about the workplace and who can access, control, and limit this type of communication. Employees may feel they have the right to own their social media and to their privacy and freedom of speech, while social media use by employees may place organizations at risk for security breaches and damage to their reputations. Regarding the two types of internal communications—involving organizationally-produced and user-generated content—organizational leaders may find difficulty controlling employees' desire to post company-related content online while at the same time maintaining employees' privacy and ownership of content and channels. One of the goals of organizational development is to align individuals' thoughts, ideas, and opinions with a company's strategies. The issues discussed here have become increasingly important as businesses have been discovering the impact of technology and social media on individual communication. The social media landscape has altered the traditional word-of-mouth communication model as employees use social platforms at work to discuss both personal and work-related issues. This classical Delphi study helped fill a gap in the literature by identifying desirable and feasible guidelines for organizations to address the risks associated with employees' use of social media while still protecting their ability to self-identify on social media.

Four more chapters follow. Chapter II provides a comprehensive review of the relevant literature on social media. The discussion in Chapter II focuses on the history of and theories about social media, their use by organizations and employees, their legality, and the gap in the literature relating to social media use that this study helps to fill. In Chapter III, the classical Delphi methodology and dynamic theory of organizational knowledge creation are introduced. Chapter III covers the research plan, including the methodology, participants, instrumentation, data collection and analysis, procedures, validity, and ethical concerns. The results are presented in Chapter IV, and the findings interpreted in Chapter V.

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this qualitative classical Delphi research study was to develop a consensus among a panel of up to 26 United States human resources experts on identifying desirable and feasible organizational guidelines for personal social media account posts concerning company information. The literature review served to ground the study historically, reveal the current state of research into the issues of interest, identify gaps in this research, distinguish pertinent concepts and theories, and suggest methods for assessing the desirability and feasibility of social media guidelines that can be implemented across industries.

The specific problem that the literature revealed was the lack of clear guidelines for managing social media postings by employees that relate to their workplaces. While social media are a crucial component of a business's capacity to attract customers, postings by employees that share confidential information or negative opinions can be detrimental to the business. Thus, notwithstanding the positive aspects of social media, organizations have often been uncertain how to respond to social media posts that have the potential to adversely impact the culture, mission, customer acquisition efforts, and, ultimately, future success (Cho et al., 2013).

The present chapter includes discussion of the history of social media, social identification, organizational and employee use, risks, and benefits, legal concerns, workplace culture, ownership, standardization, and self-efficacy. Additionally, the literature review considers current guidelines, gaps in understanding, ownership of social media accounts, social media norms, and the dynamic theory of organizational knowledge creation. Chapter II further explores the risks associated with social media use and the issue of drafting

guidelines introduced in the previous chapter. The chapter also elaborates on the classical Delphi research methodology used to gather and analyze the findings.

Search Strategy

Rather than taking an empirical approach, the researcher relied on a classical Delphi methodology to collect responses through four rounds of questionnaires from human resources experts around the country employed in a variety of industries. The literature review relied on search engines powered by Google, Google Scholar, EBSCO*host* (all EBSCO*host* Databases), Sage Journals, and ProQuest (all ProQuest Databases) to identify relevant literature. The keywords used were social media, guidelines, self-concept, self-identity, self-identification, Delphi, policies and procedures, culture ownership, content, social norms, and workplace. Owing to the limited search capabilities of the research databases EBSCO*host* and ProQuest, some searches relied on Google to identify “social norms.” Most of the research discussed was published within the past five years except when uncovering the historical background of social media, which investigation led to some sources dating back 20 years to the first exchanges of information online. This information and relevant theoretical approaches were identified utilizing Google, Google Scholar, and such industry-specific offerings as *Social Media Today* and *Digital Trends*. Research for the literature review focused on organizational employment outcomes and court cases concerning employees’ legal, ethical, or moral rights concerning social media behavior.

History of Social Media

The world is hard to imagine without technology or communication tools like social media. Since the turn of the millennium, social media use has grown exponentially, with billions of people now interacting daily through a variety of online platforms. Nearly two-

thirds of American adults use social networking sites, an increase from only 7% in 2005; the usage statistics for those aged 18 to 29 is around 90% and around 35% for those 65 and older; in terms of gender, 68% of women and 62% of men are users (Perrin, 2015). Social media began to attract public attention in 1997 with the founding of sites such as Six Degrees (Social Media Today, 2018). Table 1 provides a timeline of key events.

Table 1

Historical Timeline for Social Media

Year	Historical Event
1844	Samuel Morse sent the first telegraph from Washington D.C. to Baltimore (reading “What hath God wrought?”).
1969	The Advanced Research Project Agency Network (ARPAN) was created by the U.S. military to connect Universities using proto internet.
1997	The social media online site Six Degrees is launched and, over the next four years, becomes the most popular such site, with 1,000,000 members who can “friend” one another.
1999	The online platform Live.Journal online platform was created for individuals to keep in contact; later, the platform served as the foundation for Facebook and its status updates.
2002	Peter Chin, Davide Lee, and Jonathan Abrams launch Friendster, regarded by many as the first true social media site.
2003	LinkedIn created a professional social media platform with 500,000,000 users that allows a user to post resumes and develop their

Year	Historical Event
	professional profiles to connect to businesses and other business-minded individuals.
2004	Gmail/Google Mail was launched as a premier email service.
2004	Mark Zuckerberg launched Facebook. Initially intended for Harvard students, the platform soon gained a worldwide audience with around 2.2 billion active users.
2005	YouTube was launched for users to upload and share videos online.
2006	Myspace became the most popular social media network in the United States.
2006	Twitter became publicly traded (in July).
2010	Sixty-five million tweets were posted per day or about 750 per second.
2010	Instagram was launched as an exclusive iOS.
2011	Snapchat launched a platform that allows users to send image messages that only are available to be seen for a few seconds at a time.
2013	Vine, a short video hosting service, went public and was then acquired by Twitter for \$30 million.
2018	Virtual reality, live videos, and 360 videos came to be viewed as the future of social media.

Social Identification

Since the turn of the century, there has been a remarkable shift in how individuals share and access information in favor of user-generated content on online social media

platforms. As the use of digital technologies proliferates, especially with social networking sites, organizations have had to develop the ability and willingness to adapt their communication strategies that meet the needs and expectations of employees and consumers alike. The adaptation of new communication strategies has included not only changes in face-to-face interactions but also in digital platforms such as social media (Gagnon & Sabus, 2015). Individuals have historically needed in-person interactions with trusted individuals to feel safe when going through changes that leave them vulnerable. Users have been spending on average more than two hours a day on social media (Social Media Today, 2018) because these platforms have become a place where people feel free to share and express feelings, thoughts, and emotions freely (Clayton, 2015). In the workplace, social media have created subjective experiences that allow employees to adapt their behaviors (Rokka et al., 2014).

The Dynamic Theory of Organizational Knowledge Creation

The organizational knowledge transfer theory, also referred to as the dynamic theory of organizational knowledge creation, addresses the problems associated with transferring knowledge within an organization and maintaining its viability for future use. The theory further considers the creation of knowledge in connection with processes or procedures within an organization. Nonaka (1994) built on the organizational knowledge creation theoretical approach to describe how individuals engage in a continuous dialogue between tacit and explicit knowledge based on the principles of socialization, interaction, combination, internationality, and externalization. Tacit knowledge is deeply rooted in action and based on personalized knowledge that is hard to formalize and communicate, while explicit knowledge is co-defined knowledge transmitted in an orderly fashion. The creation of organizational knowledge is the process of making available and corroborating the

knowledge created by individuals. Connecting employees to an organization's knowledge system may help them to appreciate the benefits of a work-life balance, their colleagues, and, ultimately, the entirety of the organization (Nonaka & von Krogh, 2009).

Social Identity

In the context of social identity, affiliation means defining one's self in terms of social groups or categories such as sports teams, nationalities, or religious communities (Nason, Bacq, & Gras, 2018). Social identity theory rests on a concept that helps to explain intergroup behavior, namely that members of groups think, act, perceive, feel, and relate to each other while perceiving differences in the stability and legitimacy of members of other groups. Social identity can take the form of self-categorization that reflects processes involving the group and the self. Theories relating to self-categorization and self-identification can be used to establish a broad perspective from which organizations can be seen to alter behaviors through adjustments to employees' self-identify or concepts that resonate with the emotions and knowledge of a specific group (McKeown, Haji, & Ferguson, 2016).

As technologies and social media outlets have proliferated, assimilation and affiliation with social groups or categories may become more natural, thereby allowing individuals to build a self-concept. Individuals derive value and emotional significance from identifying with other members of an in-group. Likewise, group identification can be represented as a mutual relationship among meaning, belonging, and enhancing an individual's self-concept (Nason et al., 2018).

Self-Concept and Self Efficacy

Self-efficacy can be defined as individuals' "beliefs about their capabilities to exercise control over their own activities" and self-concept as the "mental image one has of oneself" (Merriam-Webster, 2019). There seems to be a fine line between self-efficacy and self-control defined by how individuals maintain emotional control and their perceived self-image. Organizational leaders may want to understand self-efficacy and self-control when monitoring social media use in order to identify individuals who are especially at risk for making negative remarks or disclosing confidential information on social media.

A belief of high self-efficacy may allow individuals to accomplish tasks using their skills and are therefore more likely to engage in activities. Individuals with low self-efficacy, by contrast, are reluctant to participate in activities unless they believe that they can do them skillfully. Recognition, close involvement, and self-efficacy may result in positive behavioral responses, and social recognition may increase individuals' motivation to volunteer and donate to those with less self-efficacy (Sojung & Nam-Hyun, 2016). While the research into these issues has shown some positive effects, the notions of self-concept and self-efficacy would also seem to have negative implications for organizations that fail to promote an inclusive and supportive environment. Further, with social media so readily available, individuals are likely to express their frustrations and negative emotions on these public forums.

Organizational Use of Social Media

Technology, especially that related to social media, has been reshaping how individuals communicate. With corporate reputations linked to thousands, if not millions, of dollars in consumer revenue, companies may want to consider managing both internal and

external communication from all sources, including their employees' social media accounts (Rokka et al., 2014). The financial, legal, and social impacts that social media posts can have on an organization informed the design of this qualitative classical Delphi study, the purpose of which was, once more, to arrive at a consensus among a panel of experts regarding desirable and feasible organizational guidelines for their employees social media use that protect personnel and proprietary information.

Usage

A report on PR Newswire (2018) deserves quotation at length in this context:

77% of U.S. small businesses use social media to facilitate key business functions, including sales, marketing and customer service, according to data aggregated by SCORE, the nation's largest network of volunteer, expert business mentors. Social media usage has grown 58% among U.S. adults in the last 12 years and is significantly impacting how entrepreneurs conduct business, as well as how current and potential customers behave. 69% of U.S. adults currently use at least one social media site, a figure that has steadily increased over the past decade. YouTube is the most popular social media channel among three generations. Facebook is the second most popular social media channel, with 68% of U.S. adults using the social media channel.

Benefits

According to a recent article by Bizzi (2018), social media has continued to be an extremely powerful organizational communication tool for sharing ideas publicly, identifying solutions, and attracting the attention of employees and customers. Bizzi found that approximately 25% of individuals used social media in their leisure time to find information

about other organizations and 36% to make new work connections, while 64% used social media at work to find out about other organizations and 69% to make new work connections. Organizations are accordingly beginning to understand the value of social media for engaging, inspiring, attracting, and communicating the mission, vision, and values of the company to a worldwide audience.

Risks

Leaders are right to be concerned about the organization's reputation and future of the when the employees create social media content that could cause a breach in security, reputational damage, or the release of confidential information. Organizations, therefore, may want to develop risk-sensitive strategies for the ethical use of social media. Adverse effects of a single social media incident cost organizations an average of \$3.5 million and may include not only financial loss but also exposure of trade secrets, regulatory penalties, brand erosion, canceled sponsorship deals, and civil litigation (Lin, 2015).

Organizations' control of social media comes with its own set of dangers, including potential breaches of state, federal, or regulatory compliance laws, infringement on individuals' freedom of speech and privacy, and violation of labor relations agreements. Corporate governance, and in particular guidelines that remain transparent and inclusive while still moving an organization toward responsible corporate stewardship, help to clarify the situation and maintain a welcoming environment for employees and leaders alike.

Workplace Culture

Understanding social media risks that could impact a company if an employee makes derogatory comments, releases confidential information, and makes threats or bullies another employee is a crucial part of creating a positive workplace environment. Negative feedback

and comments on social media can increase tensions in the workplace and foster disruptive behavior, damage to reputations, and, eventually, termination of employees. As the marketplace becomes increasingly competitive, companies may be unable to survive unless they take good care of their employees. The relationship between corporate social responsibility (CSR) and employee engagement may be essential to organizational success. CSR has two dimensions, internal and external, the former pertaining to employees. Highly involved organizations may be able to attract and retain employees who are engaged and committed to personal goals and objectives. Therefore, policies relating to employees' well-being, and engagement could associate CSR with organizational performance. Incorporation of these elements leads to financial and employee performance, as noted by Gupta and Sharma (2016) and illustrated in Figure 3.

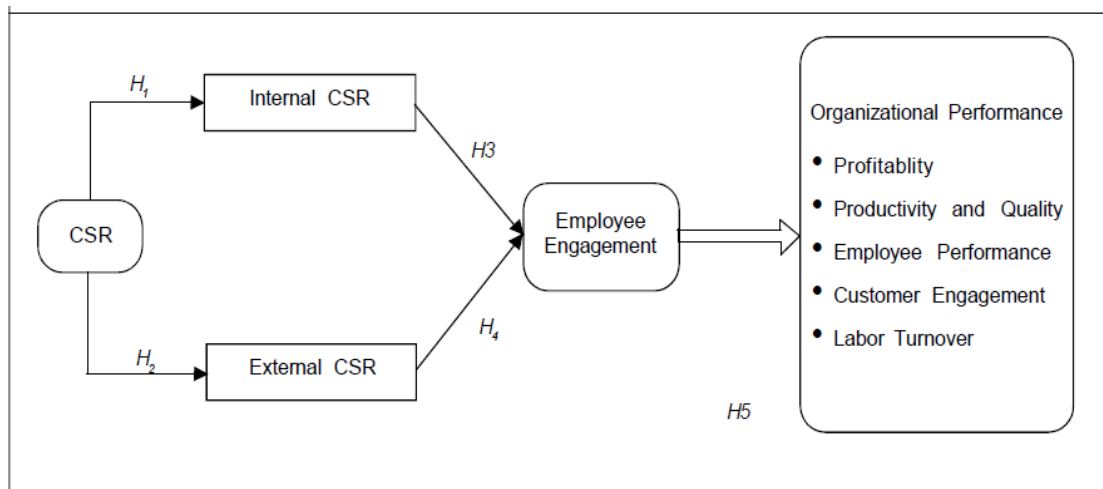


Figure 3. CSR and Employee Engagement Outcomes. The internal and external aspects of CSR can increase employees' engagement and the overall performance of an organization. Adapted from "The relationship between corporate social responsibility and employee engagement and its linkage to organizational performance: A conceptual model," by N. Gupta & V. Sharma, 2018.

Social media can give employees an active voice and thereby help employers to engage with them effectively. Engagement, from a human resources perspective, can be an indicator of job satisfaction. In conjunction with effective communication and engagement

with employees, job satisfaction should be a critical factor in devising policies for the use of social media within the workplace (Holland, Cooper, & Hecker, 2016).

Employees' Use of Social Media

Employees today are addicted to social media; on average, Americans spend a quarter of the workday on some form of social media. For employers, this means a 25% decrease in productivity or a full day every week of socializing online (Bazan, 2016). Employees' use of social media can be positive or negative for a firm depending on the nature of the content posted.

Usage

Social media platforms allow individuals to share content, collaborate, and build networks and communities across the world. These communities can foster a sense of inclusion and acceptance among like-minded individuals. Social media use by employees can promote a company's products and services, enhance workplace relationships, and facilitate engagement across divisions. Employees' beliefs and the use of social media contribute to the connections that are had with colleagues during working hours. In Bizzi's (2018) study, 60% of employees believed that social media could support their decision-making processes, while 81% believed social networking could improve working relationships.

Benefits

Social media can have a tremendous impact on an employee's engagement and job satisfaction. Positive attitudes toward new communication technologies tend to encourage self-disclosure and thereby may positively influence social conformity and socialization (Krishnan & Hunt, 2015). Social media are online tools that give individuals the ability to share content, collaborate, build networks and communities, and reach and involve large

audiences (El Ouiridi, El Ouiridi, Segers, & Henderickx, 2015). Employees who are engaged collaborate with their colleagues and find social groups with similar interests, thereby bettering their job satisfaction and lengthening their tenure. Job satisfaction and the ability to use social media as an outlet can be a crucial indicator of engagement with and involvement in the workplace, especially for Generation Y employees. In a 2014 study, 84.1% of participants used LinkedIn, Facebook, or Twitter at least once a day, and 76.3% of their companies were also active on social media, indicating that giving individuals a voice can promote job satisfaction and possibly decrease turnover, while organizations can also use this resource to observe workplace issues in real time (Holland et al., 2016).

Risks

Organizational leaders worry that social media will be a distraction and decrease productivity, and more than half of employers have reported blocking social media at work. In Bizzi's (2018) recent study, however, social media did not reduce productivity nearly as much as employee retention. Employees certainly could be at risk of disciplinary actions, termination, legal ramifications, and simply lose respect for engaging in inappropriate, false, or misguided social media postings, as illustrated in Figure 4.

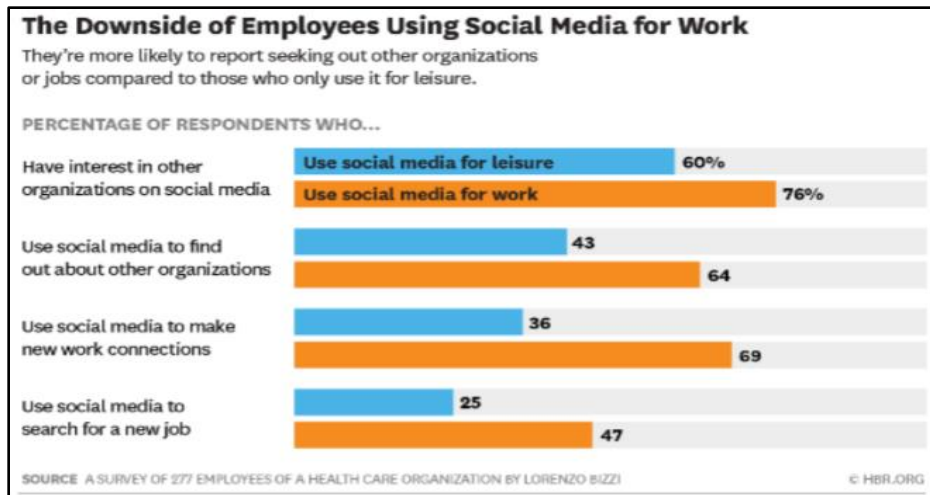


Figure 4. CSR and Employee Engagement Outcomes. The tendency who use social media at work to seek other organizations or jobs compared with those who use social media only for leisure. Adapted from “Employees who use social media for work are more engaged—but also more likely to leave their jobs,” by L. Bizzi, 2018, *Harvard Business Review Digital Articles*, 2-4.

Legality

Company executives who look to develop social media compliance guidelines may want to consider such privacy laws as the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA), the Health Information Technology Act (HITECH), the First Amendment, local regulations, and the Financial Industry Regulatory Authority (FINRA; McGrath, 2015). Organizational leaders may want to understand the rights and responsibilities of employees to remain in compliance with federal, state, and local laws and regulations. The following discussion addresses the critical aspects of the laws related to the present topic in turn.

Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA)

Congress enacted the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Action in 1996 to protect the confidentiality of individuals’ healthcare information. HIPAA-protected material includes information, images, and any other data relating to a patient. As described by Edemekong and Haydel (2019), HIPAA consists of five major titles:

1. Title I protects health insurance coverage for workers and their families when a change or loss of job prevents the new health from denying coverage owing to a preexisting condition.
2. Title II prevents health care fraud and abuse, provides for medical liability reform, and calls for administrative simplification with the establishment of national standards for electronic health care transactions and national identifiers for providers, employers, and health insurance plans.
3. Title III provides guidelines for pretax medical spending accounts, changes to health insurance laws, and deductions for medical insurance.
4. Title IV provides guidelines for group health plans regarding modifications of health coverage.
5. Title V governs company-owned life insurance policies, includes provisions for treating individuals without U.S. citizenship, and repealed the financial institution rule pertaining to interest allocation rules.

The First Amendment

The First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution protects individuals and prevents the government from inhibiting the freedom of religion, expression, speech, the press, or peaceful assembly and guarantees the right to petition the government. The First Amendment was enacted on December 15, 1791, as part of the Bill of Rights (Cornell Law School, 2019). Americans have long prided themselves on the First Amendment, especially concerning

controversial speech, which also extends to employees' use of social media for the discussion of pay, benefits, and working conditions. The legislation does regulate discriminatory and hate speech. Legislatures are now attempting to regulate and prevent harmful speech without infringing on First Amendment protections concerning social media networks that can reach billions of people (Telegen, 2018).

Financial Industry Regulatory Authority (FINRA)

In the world of finance, the Financial Industry Regulatory Authority serves as a self-regulatory organization for the securities industry, encouraging stockbrokers to be fair, accountable, and honest. FINRA provides enforcement systems and mechanisms for brokers who violate SEC regulations and for the resolution of disputes (Phillips, 2017). With social media and public forums so easily accessible, organizations may want to maintain a high level of confidentiality and sound privacy practices within such a volatile industry, in which individuals trust others to handle their life savings.

National Labor Relations Act

The National Labor Relations Act was established in 1935 to protect the rights of employers and employees by preventing unfavorable actions on either side and allowing for collective bargaining. With the number of social media users in the billions, lawmakers and regulators are now trying to limit the exposure and privacy of both individuals and organizations. Although there are no federal laws that directly regulate an organization's authority to control an individual's social media account, many local and state agencies prohibit employers from requiring or even requesting employees or applicants to disclose personal usernames and passwords.

The National Labor Relations Board (NLRB), which enforces the National Labor Relations Act, has released several reports to help guide employers in this new social arena. Even with some direction, social media guidance may not necessarily aid entities in either the private or public sectors. Reports have indicated that organizations can still circumvent some state laws and regulations by appealing to such federal laws as the Patriot Act; in one instance, a Louisiana State University student applying for a state internship was questioned about private information on his social media account. Although there have been some small steps toward increased social media privacy in the workplace, 60% of business executives who participated in a 2009 Deloitte study felt that they had a right to know how employees comported themselves online (Schroeder & Lile, 2016).

Exposure

In today's media and digital era, organizations and employees alike have an unprecedented ability to gather information, knowledge, and share thoughts. Digital technologies can be invaluable when gathering and sharing virtually any type of information. Technology can also pose significant risks for both individuals and organizations. Communication channels allow individuals to access and exchange information, primarily through social network sites, and to create connections and have an influence across the world (Wu & Li, 2017).

Risk perceptions related to media use are the product of an individual's subjective judgment about the seriousness of the potential harm that he or she may cause. These perceptions have three main dimensions, likelihood, severity, and susceptibility, that equate to the probability, vulnerability, and extent of harm that an individual could produce. Individuals' perceptions of an organization, another individual, or the world naturally vary

based on their life experiences, which can be classified as either direct or indirect. Direct experiences come from firsthand involvement, while indirect experiences generally come from interpersonal communication, which expands information on a limited basis, and mass media, which can act as an unending, systematic, and steady stream of information through which individuals learn about the world beyond the reach of their senses (Wu & Li, 2017). Media coverage, especially social media, can have a positive impact for keeping people alert to essential topics like infectious disease outbreaks, but the media can also generate negative risk perspectives for both organizations and individuals related to false information, slander, and fake news that may lead to decreased profits, terminations, and tarnished reputations.

Gap

A review of the current literature did not reveal desirable and feasible social media guidelines that could be used across industries. The focus of this study was on identifying a set of such guidelines that would support employees' ability to self-identify on social network sites, an issue about which there are currently disagreements and gaps in understanding. A search on EBSCO*host* revealed that 101 news articles, 47 academic journals, 45 non-academic journals, 18 magazines, and 5 trade publications had published material related to social media guidelines between 2015 and the time of the search, and a similar search on ProQuest yielded 44 scholarly journals, 41 magazines, 150 trade journals, and 251 newspapers. Neither ProQuest nor EBSCO*host* revealed any dissertations or theses on topics related to social media guidelines.

With the increasing use of social media, leaders are having limited success in creating guidelines to reduce the companies' exposure on employees' personal social media accounts while not infringing on the fundamental freedoms and regulations that protect personal

privacy (Park & Abril, 2016). Social media interactions are often extensions of the individuals who engage in them and sometimes of corporate value, and this situation creates legal conflicts. Currently, the courts and laws have blurred the lines between social media control on the corporate and individual levels (Park & Abril, 2016).

Examples of Current Guidelines

In August 2016, the Federal Communicators Network (FCN) published a study declaring the immediate need for the standardization of communication across the community of federal employees. The FCN is a professional community for such employees that provides communication training, best practices, and opportunities. Although the researchers studied federal employees, their findings are transferrable to the private sector. Table 2 presents the FCN’s tips and guidelines for federal employees’ use of social media (Blumenthal, 2017).

Table 2

Ten Tips for Social Media Use by Federal Employees

Tip	Communication Recommendation
First Amendment Rights	“Personal social media profiles are that of the individual. The federal government does not intend to control online activities that are purely personal (an example of an exception is the Hatch Act, which contains certain limits on employee free speech). Also, the same principles apply whether your speech occurs over social media or in more traditional ways, e.g., publishing a letter to the editor of a newspaper.”
Special Restrictions	“Find out from your agency, whether there are any special restrictions on your social media activity beyond the general rules that

Tip	Communication Recommendation
If You Are Aware of Misconduct	<p>apply to all federal employees. For example, this might apply if you work for a law enforcement agency.”</p> <p>“Reporting fraud, waste, and abuse to the appropriate authorities is lawful, but leaking classified or otherwise confidential information over the internet is not.”</p>
Disclaimer	<p>“When people know that you work for the government, they are prone to assuming that you speak for the government, even when you are not. So, in discussing personal views, be upfront about the fact that you are not speaking in an official capacity. Example: The content of this communication is entirely my own and does not reflect the opinions of or endorsement by any federal agency or the government as a whole.”</p>
Opinions about Your Agency	<p>“You are entitled to discuss, analyze, or disagree with your agency about the publicly available information. That said, your agency may require you to tell them if you do so. Check your public affairs/public communications policy for more information, and do not hesitate to ask your Office of Public Affairs and your ethics officer for guidance.”</p>
No Impersonation	<p>“While you are free to describe your interests, experiences, and ideas on unofficial time, do not use unofficial time or personal social media accounts to act as an official representative of your agency without authorization.”</p>
Political Activity	<p>“Regarding personal political activity, read the Hatch Act. (The text is readily available online, along with an extensive set of frequently asked questions.)”</p>

Tip	Communication Recommendation
No Right to Privacy on Work Devices	“Read and follow your agency’s policies on information technology use. Some allow you to use your work computer to access personal accounts on a limited basis. If you do use your work device, whether desktop computer or mobile phone, to access personal accounts, understand that your activity may be monitored by the agency.
Keep Personal Devices Personal	“Do not use personal devices or accounts for agency activity. These accounts and devices can be subject to legal discovery (including FOIA) in the event of litigation. Also, use “smart” passwords (guidance on these is readily available online) and change them frequently.”
Targeting by Foreign Spies	“Be careful who you “friend” online. Foreign intelligence agents are known to target federal employees specifically, for a variety of reasons.”

Notes. By way of a disclaimer, the social media tips above were meant to help clarify issues of which federal employees may not have been aware of, or that may have been confusing. The list was not meant to replace a thorough review of the law, policies, and official guidance or to restrict or alter federal employees’ rights and responsibilities in any way and was not intended as a substitute for obtaining reliable direction from an official source.

Desirable and Feasible Guidelines

In response to the ongoing expansion in the use of social media, organizations may want to adopt and develop social media risk strategies. According to Lin (2015), harm and sensitivity are the two primary factors for organizations to consider when creating a social media risk strategy. A risk-sensitive social strategy should account for the risks that could result in harm to an organization, its employees, and other entities. Understanding both the

harm and sensitivity has been a crucial part of efforts to develop effective policies and responses to organizational social media risks (Lin, 2015).

Social media guidelines vary depending on the nature of a business, but most organizations may want to include them as part of the companies risk strategies. The risks associated with social media include reputational damage, disclosure of proprietary information, conflicts of interest, and fraud. Taking each of these risks, in turn, reputational damage may result from the publication of information inconsistent with a firm's corporate image; disclosure risks include the intentional or accidental release of sensitive or confidential information; conflicts of interest may arise when individuals interact inappropriately; and fraud may occur when employees use social media to gain access to privileged or sensitive information regardless of their intent (Lin, 2015). Organizational guidelines may also address access to, monitoring of, ethical considerations associated with, and education about the risks of social media. Table 3 presents the key elements of social media guidelines in light of these considerations.

Table 3

Key Elements for Implementing Social Media Guidelines

Key Element	Recommendation for implementation
Education	Educate employees on social media best practices to encourage meaningful changes in their behavior.
Risk Assessment	Conduct a social media assessment that details current and potential risks and the consequences if such events should occur.
Policies/Guidelines	Communicate to the members of an organization and regularly remind them of its social media policies, guidelines, and strategies to maintain a current and effective program.
Social Guide	Provide employees with social media guidelines that encourage ownership, communication, and taking responsibility and make clear their organization's expectations. Include real-world examples to create context and help employees manage ambiguous situations.

Standardization

The rise in the organizational use of social media has had a tremendous impact on cross-cultural communication across the world, as reflected in the popularity of social networking sites such as Facebook, with individual usage reaching 74% in 2015, up 6% from 2014. Advertising expenditures on Facebook that exceeded \$748.7 million in 2014 are evidence of the need for the standardization of international corporate social media communication. There are, in fact, two schools of thought regarding advertising on social media. Standardization advertising, on the one hand, focuses on the similarities among

consumers and deploys consistent messaging across various markets. Adaption advertising, on the other hand, focuses on specific micro- and macro-characteristics that distinguish markets. As Hatzithomas, Fotiadis, and Coudounaris (2016) have discussed, organizations brand themselves in a diverse and cross-cultural marketplace that psychologically motivate and create brand familiarity through creative solutions to fine-tune social media marketing. While the standardization of organizational communication strategies and standards can be beneficial, organizations may also take into account local policies, traditions, and regulations in order to satisfy the specific communication needs of a culture or group.

Ownership

Encouraging employees to use social media to promote the companies brands, services, and products has created the desire to understand who owns the social media content, the number of followers, and the account's worth. State laws, however, often prohibit employers from requiring or requesting that employees divulge personal social media information, including usernames and passwords, or open their personal social media accounts to them. In a discussion of account names, passwords, metrics, followers/connections, the right to access and control account content, and account relationships, DLA Piper (2018) and argued that social media content ownership and advertisements help build brands, influence consumer behaviors, and increase followers in ways that could result in monetization.

There is, in general, a lack of clarity regarding the ownership of social media content, as was evident in the 2016 court case *PhoneDog v. Kravitz*. Park and Abril (2016) summarized the case as follows:

In *PhoneDog v. Kravitz*, the plaintiff, PhoneDog.com, is a website that provides interactive news and reviews about cellular phones and mobile devices. In April 2006, PhoneDog hired Noah Kravitz as a product reviewer and video blogger. In this capacity, Kravitz was charged with submitting written and video content, which PhoneDog then disseminated to its users through a variety of online mediums, including its website and Twitter account. As part of his employment, Kravitz was given a Twitter account named “@PhoneDog_Noah” for which he created a password. In his four years with PhoneDog, Kravitz accumulated approximately 17,000 Twitter followers. When Kravitz resigned in 2010, PhoneDog demanded he hand-over the use of his Twitter account, which he had popularized during his tenure at PhoneDog. However, PhoneDog did not have a policy regarding the retention of social media accounts. Kravitz refused, and, in protest, continued to use the account to communicate with his followers but changed the handle from “@PhoneDog_Noah” to “@noahkravitz.” PhoneDog claimed that the Twitter password was a trade secret, and its continued unauthorized use was misappropriation and sued Kravitz on four claims: (1) misappropriation of trade secrets, (2) conversion, and (3) intentional and (4) negligent interference with prospective economic advantage. Employee Kravitz argued that the password to the Twitter account could not be a trade secret because the keyword was neither valuable nor secret. Passwords, he argued, could carry no

actual or economic value because they merely allow individuals to log in to an account to view information.

Moreover, Kravitz himself created the password, and his employer made no attempt to secure its secrecy. On Kravitz's motion to dismiss, the court dismissed the claims for intentional and negligent interference but allowed the claims for conversion and misappropriation of trade secrets to go forward, accepting (for purposes of ruling on the motion to dismiss) that under certain circumstances a Twitter password could be a trade secret. The parties eventually entered into a confidential settlement that allowed Kravitz to maintain sole custody of the Twitter account and its thousands of followers. The case settled amid public confusion and speculation, leaving the law unsettled.

Delphi Methodology

The Delphi methodology was initially developed for the military during the Cold War period of the 1950s by Norman Dalkey. Its fundamental tenet is that the judgments of individuals are less valid than the collective judgments of an expert group. In practice, the methodology is an interactive process for collecting and analyzing anonymous group judgments in order to identify and gaps in understanding regarding a problem or phenomenon. The methodology may be used, as within the study, to identify a consensus through a series of questionnaires focusing on problems, forecasts, solutions, and opportunities. All four key features of the classical Delphi method—the anonymity of the participants, iteration, controlled feedback, and statistical aggregation of a group response—were employed in the research described here. Taking each, in turn, the anonymity of the participants allows them to express their opinions without social pressure to conform and thus to evaluate decisions on their merit. Iteration allows participants to refine their views

based on the group's input. The controlled feedback informs participants of the other participants' perspectives and provides opportunities for them to change or clarify their views. Lastly, the statistical aggregation of group responses provides data for interpretation and quantitative analysis (Skulmoski, Hartman, & Krahn, 2007).

The Delphi methodology has evolved as a qualitative research design that helps researchers recognize relevant information used for making decisions. Among the various versions, the most common is classical, which relies on open-ended questions to build a consensus to determine results, and the modified, which begins with carefully designed questions that help validate the study (Custer, Scarcella, & Stewart, 1999).

Summary

Over less than two centuries, social media have grown from a rudimentary communication tool for transmitting simple point-to-point messages (i.e., the telegraph) to a global system through which billions of individuals communicate across the world. As social media users become more inclined to self-identify on the Internet and organizations continue to market products and services on social media platforms, the need to balance the benefits versus risks becomes crucial. In order to identify desirable and feasible social media guidelines in the study, there was a need to connect the dynamic theory of organizational knowledge creation with organizational processes. As was seen in this chapter, set guidelines for social media use have yet to be established across U.S. industries, nor have clear laws or regulations been enacted, as the case of *PhoneDog v. Kravitz* (2016) demonstrated. The present study used a classical Delphi design approach, assembling a panel of 26 U.S. human resources professionals to identify desirable and feasible organizational guidelines for

employees' posts on personal social media. The following chapter provides an overview of the methodology and the dynamic theory of organizational knowledge creation.

CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this qualitative classical Delphi research study was to develop a consensus among a panel of 26 United States human resources experts on identifying desirable and feasible organizational guidelines for personal social media account posts concerning company information. In Chapter III, the research methodology, which was chosen to provide a deep understanding of the issues of interest, of desirable and feasible social media guidelines is presented, and its applicability is discussed along with that of the classical Delphi research approach. The chapter covers the research plan, methodology, participants, instrumentation, data collection and analysis, validity, and ethical concerns of the study.

Research Questions

Identifying desirable and feasible organization guidelines for employees' use of personal social media accounts may help to effectively create organization paradigm shifts that limited exposure and risks to a company. The purpose of the research was to build a consensus among a panel of up to 26 United States human resources experts to identify desirable and feasible organizational social media guidelines. The research question, noted as RQ1, and sub-questions, noted as S1 and S2, were introduced in Chapter I and are reproduced here for the purpose of convenience and completeness:

- RQ1:** What was the consensus among a panel of 26 human resources experts as to desirable and feasible organizational guidelines and strategies for employee use of personal social media accounts concerning publishing company information online?
- S1:** What was the level of consensus among a panel of 26 human resources experts as to current desirable and feasible organizational guidelines and strategies for employee

use of personal social media accounts concerning company information published online?

S2: What was the level of consensus among a panel of 26 human resources experts as to future desirable and feasible organizational guidelines and strategies for employee use of personal social media accounts concerning publishing company information online?

The researcher relied on the level of consensus among the panel of experts to identify the organizational guidelines and strategies deemed desirable for employees' use of personal social media accounts on both personal and company time. Scholars, practitioners, and organizational leaders across various industries stand to benefit from guidelines regarding companies' exertion of ethical, moral, and legal control over content posted on social media related to the business, the employees, or affiliates. The research questions and sub-questions emerged from the review of the literature presented in the previous chapter, which identified a significant gap with respect to identifying desirable and feasible organization guidelines, that may effectively reduce organizational risks and exposure, for employee's use of personal social media. The categories of questions for the successive rounds of surveys included (1) tolerance for social media use, (2) risks associated with social media use, and (3) current and (4) potential future guidelines for social media use (Appendix D).

Selection of Methodology

The goal of a Delphi study is for a diverse group of experts to arrive at a consensus regarding a vital issue (Heitner, Kahn, & Sherman, 2013). Delphi is a qualitative research design that helps researchers to recognize and use information about a subject to assist in making decisions. The structured process of data collection consists of successive rounds of

questionnaires. Thus, a Delphi study can serve to develop a theoretical framework for drawing conclusions based on data collected from isolated experts on specific topics (Habibi, Sarafrazi, & Izadyar, 2014).

Research Design

Delphi methodologies have evolved far beyond academic settings and into a flexible research approach useful in virtually any industry for identifying the risks and likely future outcomes for organizations in both qualitative and quantitative terms (Romano, 2010). According to Yousuf (2007), “The Delphi Technique is a group process involving an interaction between the researcher and a group of identified experts on a specified topic, usually through a series of questionnaires.” The flexibility of the classical Delphi methodology is often referred to in the plural as “Delphi techniques.” These techniques include a series of questionnaire rounds to develop criteria for prototyping, decision-making, ranking, identifying technology issues, and descriptive frameworks for future business activities. The Delphi design is particularly useful for organizations looking to make changes or develop new initiatives with a cost-effective tool that can be used in forecasting organizational planning, products, and procedures, setting goals and objectives, and developing cost-benefit analyses (Green, 2014).

Utilizing a classical Delphi design, the research study involved successive rounds of questionnaires to develop a group consensus. A panel of human resources experts from various industries was selected and asked to complete web-based questionnaires. Through four consecutive rounds of web-based questionnaires, a consensus regarding desirable and feasible social media guidelines emerged. Rather than focusing on a specific industry, the

aim was to identify standardized social media guidelines that could be useful across industries of various sizes and types.

Methodology Theory

The identification of desirable and feasible social media guidelines based on numerous questionnaires established the framework for the knowledge creation process. The theoretical framework for a research methodology can facilitate the dynamic creation of appropriate organizational knowledge (Nonaka, 1994). The research methodology, based on the theoretical framework of the dynamic theory of organizational knowledge creation and the Delphi design, allows organizations to connect knowledge about social media guidelines to internal processes or procedures. The dynamic theory of organizational knowledge creation was appropriate for the present study because organizational knowledge can be created through continuous interaction between tacit and explicit knowledge to form a theoretical framework and analytical perspective.

The Researcher and Participants

The human participants in the study were the primary researcher and a panel of up to 26 expert U.S. human resources professionals.

The Researcher

The researcher developed the initial questions to begin the data collection process. The researcher at the time of the study held Bachelor of Science in Healthcare Systems Administration and Master of Business Administration with a concentration in Quality Tool and Techniques degrees and was completing a Doctor of Philosophy in Organizational Development and Leadership. The researcher also has extensive experience working in quality improvement, workplace culture, entrepreneurship, innovation, and the aspects of

organizational effectiveness relating to risk management, operational success, social media, and survey tools.

A Delphi study does not lend itself to precise analytical techniques but instead rests on the objective collection of information (Green, 2014) that researchers can use to identify themes and guidelines based on responses from participants' own academic and professional experiences. Biases were overcome by identifying themes that focused on solutions while keeping in mind that the goal was to identify desirable and feasible guidelines for various industries. The researcher took steps to avoid bias by taking into account individual probability and severity ratings, conducting multiple rounds of surveys, and identifying individuals who had had recent and relevant experiences, gathering controlled feedback, randomizing the questions, and reporting the results as medians rather than means (Hallowell, 2009). The study contributes to the literature on standards that organizations use to guide employees' use of social media.

The Participants

The expert panelists were selected for their knowledge and expertise through industry-specific human resource groups and professional social media networking sites such as LinkedIn. Only U.S. citizens were considered for participation. The researcher obtained permission to solicit industry experts from specific human resource groups before posting any study or recruiting information online (Appendix A). The potential participants were then contacted through social networking sites and by email (Appendix B), and their data was collected through Zoho Survey. All such messages included the researcher's point-of-contact email so that individuals could express their interest in participating in the study (Appendix E).

The appropriate sample size for the Delphi study was 26 human resources experts.

The minimum qualifications for being identified as a human resource expert included:

1. holding a bachelor's degree (or advanced certificate) in the field of human resources;
2. possessing three or more years of experience working in some human resource capacity;
3. current employment (at least part-time) in some human resource capacity;
4. currently living in the United States; and
5. currently employed by a business registered in the United States.

Purposive sampling based on such specific criteria as reputation, leadership, education, and experience is an accepted method to develop a diversified group of participants for a Delphi study (Heitner et al., 2013). The participants comprised a purposive sample and nonprobability group that did not represent the entire population; rather, a sampling of selected experts used their knowledge and expertise to answer research questions that represented the population (Skulmoski et al., 2007) and the demographically predicted outcomes. Participants were solicited on LinkedIn's built-in social media messenger. Before starting the survey, participants reviewed, accepted, and electronically signed an informed consent waiver (Appendix C) delivered through Zoho Signature.

Instrumentation and Collection and Analysis of the Data

This section reviews the instrumentation, data collection, and data analysis for the research study.

Instrumentation

The survey questions were designed to answer the research question and sub-questions. The Zoho Survey instrument served as the primary tool for collecting and

analyzing the data. Before the full study, the researcher conducted a field test of the design involving one human resource expert who reviewed Round 1 questions for face validity, clarity, and relevance. Data were not collected during the field test. The field test assessed the internal consistency and reliability of the scaled questionnaires using the primary study data and calculations of Cronbach's alpha. During the main study, the participants received a series of four questionnaires, each consisting of three to four questions in three categories (Appendix D). The first round consisted of open-ended questions built within Zoho Survey, while the questions in the remaining rounds were answered using a Likert-type scale. After Round 1 and also included a rounded analysis of the prior results.

The purpose of the open-ended questions for Round 1 was to assess possible guidelines to be adopted by employers for their employees' use of social media, on both personal and company time, with respect to importance, tolerance, and risks. The purpose of Rounds 2-4 was to refine the information progressively. Thus, the third round helped identify a consensus among the panel of experts. The questionnaire in Rounds 1 and 2 used a five-point rather than a four-point Likert-type scale to avoid coercing the participants into making a choice. The five-point scale also minimized potential problems associated with the qualitative validity of the data (Sapsford, 2007). The fourth and final round helped validate the participants' confidence in and assessment of the salience of the proposed guidelines. The participants received a summary of the statistical analysis after each round. The data from previous rounds were used to generate the questionnaires for succeeding rounds.

Consistency and dependability were crucial in assessing the reliability of the study. The researcher avoided interpreting the results as much as possible so that estimates were based on observations. Many factors were taken into consideration in assessing the reliability

of the study, including the collection methodology, handling of the data, qualifications of the participants, response rates, participants' interstation, and the industries represented by the participants. Participants may have perceived the research topic and questions in distinct ways, so the questionnaires employed a Likert-type scale, and, after the first round, the mean value was used for the central tendency calculation. For the first round, the analysis used mode as the first central tendency while subsequent rounds used mean. Standard errors of measurement and reliability coefficients were categorized into the number of measurement errors. Composite scores helped to validate the reliability of various factors to provide a single index of achievement. Although composite scores can be subject to measurement errors, the scores can be estimated for conditional reliability (Kolen, 2012).

The Round 1 questionnaire contained open-ended questions based on a review of the literature, current guidelines, and the research questions. The questions were intended to solicit three specific responses regarding organizational tolerance of social media, the importance of social media guidelines, and desirable and feasible guidelines for social media use. Each round of questions refined the panel's consensus.

Data Collection

The data collection strategies of a round of open-ended questions and several rounds of Likert-type rating scale questions are consistent with the Delphi methodology (Heitner et al., 2013). The data collection method and questions associated with the approach were appropriate for strengthening the consensus and relevance of the study. Utilizing email and the web survey tool Zoho Survey, the researcher collected the participants' responses during each survey round in order to arrive at a consensus regarding the social media guidelines.

In a Delphi research study, participant responses should be collected, analyzed, and then resubmitted to them in a subsequent questionnaire until an underlying consensus is achieved (Skulmoski et al., 2007). The process of retrieving data from the questionnaires involved collecting and analyzing ordinal categorical data based on the Likert-type items. Treating them as ordinal categorical data, researchers can collect Likert-type items into a central tendency summarized by a mode and illustrate the mode through bar charts (Statistics Café, 2011). The preselected questions for the study focused on specific social media topics without influence from the response outcomes. The analysis focused on identifying the mean for each question within a category in order to eliminate subjective data. The data collection method was justified, and unbiased results ensured by restricting the observations to the highest-rated average of each round, based on a Likert-type scale.

Data Analysis

The data analysis was intended to provide clarity, accuracy, and consistency and to identify content in each round of the Delphi. Analyzing the data was especially crucial in Round 1, in which the information gathered may have been more subjective than in the later rounds. The first round of questions was designed to shed light on the importance of tolerance for the use of risks associated with and current and potential future social media guidelines for social media use by employees, on both company and personal time, concerning company information published online. The second, third, and fourth rounds of questionnaires utilized a simple rating scale to determine supportive outcomes and an analysis to establish a consensus (Heitner et al., 2013).

The data analysis in Round 1 focused on organizational tolerance for and risks associated with social media use and identifying any current or potential future social media

guidelines. The researcher themed the experts' responses (Appendix D) by mode. Round 1 provided experts had the opportunity to rate the importance of tolerance for, and risks associated with social media and to discuss current and potential future guidelines related to social media use.

Before Round 2, the participants received a summary of the rating statistics for and themes identified in the Round 1 questionnaire. Round 2 allowed the experts rated future guidelines for desirability and feasibility on a five-point Likert-type scale with a range of responses from one extreme to another, for example, from strongly agree to disagree strongly. For Round 1 questions, the Likert-type scale ranged from (1) Very Undesirable and Unfeasible, (2) Undesirable and Unfeasible, (3) Neutral, (4) Desirable and Feasible to (5) Very Desirable and Feasible. The responses on this scale and the mean value for the central tendency calculation helped to determine the highest-rated average for each question.

At the beginning of Round 3, the participants received a summary of the statistical analysis of Round 2 that showed the resulting frequency and mean for each guideline. After reviewing the material, participants completed Round 3 with the same central tendency as Round 2 but this time answering the questions on a four-point Likert-type scale. In Round 3, participants rated the question with the most significant mean from each category identified in Round 2. A single rating for each category based on the four-point Likert-type scale provided supported the credibility of the panel's consensus.

Following Round 3, the participants received a summary of the overall rating, frequency, and desirability scale that the researcher used as the primary driver to validate a consensus much as in the previous rounds. In the fourth and final round, the participants rated the importance and confidence level of the recommended guidelines using a four-point

Likert-type scale. The data analysis considered the mean value for the central tendency in order to validate the desirability and feasibility of the organizational guidelines and strategies that had been identified regarding employees' use of social media in ways that have implications for their employers.

Procedures

The researcher identified and messaged dedicated LinkedIn groups to contact U.S. human resources experts. While Facebook, with some 2.2 billion active users, was at the time of this study the most widely used social networking site day-to-day, LinkedIn allows its users to share professional business interests within dedicated groups as well as with the general public. The researcher obtained permission from the group administrators for industry-specific sites before posting any study or recruiting information.

As shown in Figure 5 and documented by Osman (2019), LinkedIn as of the time of this study had 575 million users with more than 260 million monthly active users who averaged 17 minutes on the platform monthly and of whom 40% accessed social media sites daily. The United States had the most registered LinkedIn members, with 150 million users whose average household income exceeded \$75,000 per year.

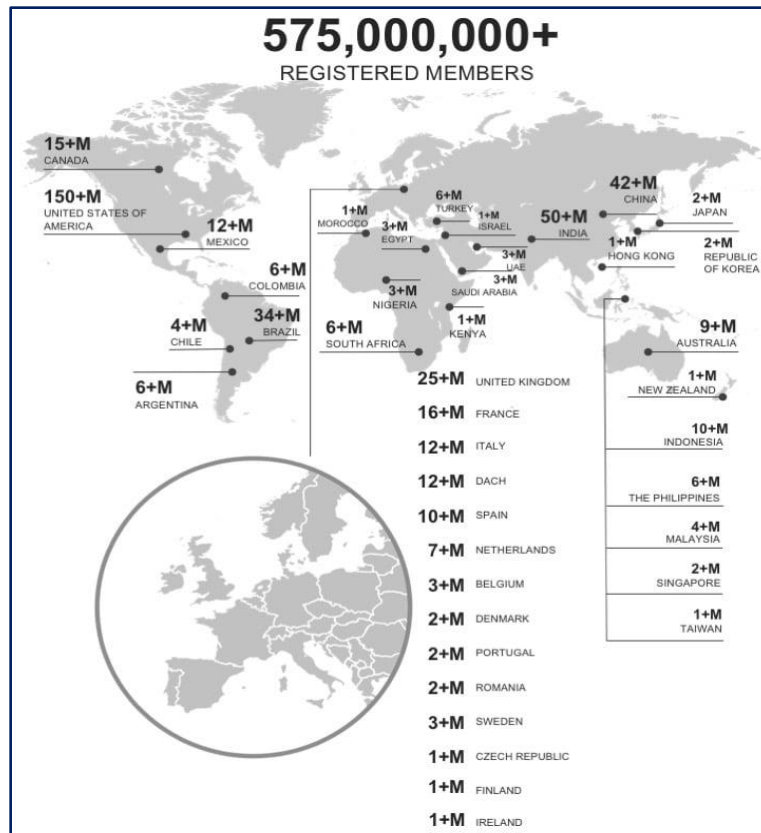


Figure 5. LinkedIn User Demographics Registered members of social networking sites worldwide. Adapted from “Mind-blowing LinkedIn statistics and facts,” by M. Osman, 2019.

Qualitative Validity

A study’s trustworthiness and validity are a function of its dependability, credibility, and transferability. Credibility concerns whether a researcher interprets and presents the data—in studies like this one, the participants’ responses—truthfully. Dependability refers to the extent to which comparable results are obtained under similar conditions; in this case, the researcher presented the data from participants’ responses without revealing any personal views or biases. Transferability refers to the applicability of the findings to other groups or settings. Lastly, authenticity refers to the frankness with which researchers express personal feelings, opinions, and emotions (Cope, 2014).

The design of the study helped to ensure its authenticity by calling for the use of only the raw scores for each round rather than of the subjective data. Transferability may be limited by the extent of modification necessary to apply the results to specific types of organizations or industries. In the present study, the participants' responses were not shared during the data collection and analysis phases to avoid biases, and biases on the part of the researcher—in particular, any personal subjective favoritism—were minimized or eliminated by restricting the analysis to the results of the Likert-type responses.

To further validate and confirm the truth and trustworthiness of a study, the data can be retested. Researchers must be able to offer evidence in five major categories, including variation in the evidence, disconfirming evidence, interpretative status, and any discrepant analysis (Freeman, DeMarrais, Preissle, Roulston, & St. Pierre, 2007). The numerous rounds of questionnaires and incorporation of a Likert-type scale made it possible to retest the data from one survey round to the next. Without accounting for the errors made while observing the central tendency, composite score, or individual scores, the assessment results would have diminished credibility for those who may have been affected. The risk of errors can affect the reliability of a score in that variable predictors may no longer measure actual outcomes, in which case the validity of the assessment at the individual level will be compromised (Harris, Lowenkamp, & Hilton, 2015).

While reliability is vital for decision-making purposes, trustworthiness and validity are essential aspects of a study's worth. The main focus in terms of validating this study's trustworthiness was on ensuring a consistent response rate from all 26 participants. Having credible and quality data was essential, particularly since a complex social phenomenon—social media—was the subject of the study. Investigating and discovering the credibility of

the participants' skills, knowledge, and expertise can impact the outcomes of a study (O'Connor, 2011).

Ethical Concerns

Many factors contribute to or detract from the ethical and moral nature of a study. For instance, the participants' thoughts, opinions, and beliefs may be controversial. In order to maintain the ethical and moral rectitude of the present study, the researcher considered the participants' qualifications and was sensitive to their confidentiality, privacy, and personal rights. The standards for confidentiality and privacy are reflected in the consequences for researchers who do not protect the participants in their research in these respects and the extent of efforts to do so. Privacy and confidentiality concerns in the modern era are primarily associated with digital technologies. The American Educational Research Association (AERA, 1999) suggested that everything from clients' records to communications should be encrypted if possible. The participants in this study were able to view and respond to each survey round within the context of a Secure Socket Layer (SSL), an encrypted communication stream established between the relevant web server and each participant's browser.

Prior to the study, the participants were informed about and accepted the purpose of the study, their responsibilities as participants, and the collection, use, and presentation of the data (Appendix C). Individual responses were not shared among participants during the data collection phase of the study. The data were collected and analyzed after each round to avoid any biases. Furthermore, the researcher explained the rights and roles to the participants, disclosed any potential risks and any public exposure to further publication of the study, described the use of the results, and obtained their full acknowledgment and consent. Taking

these steps in advance of the research served to protect the researcher and participants should any legal, moral, ethical, or validity concerns be raised.

Summary

The goal of this chapter was to outline the methodology used to answer the research questions, including the selection of the methodology, the research design, the roles of the researcher and participants, the instrumentation, the procedures for data collection and analysis, and concerns relating to qualitative validity and ethical research. The qualitative classical Delphi approach resulted in a consensus among the panel of 26 United States human resources experts on identifying desirable and feasible organizational guidelines for personal social media account posts concerning company information. The researcher identified the participants using the professional social networking site LinkedIn and made available to them information about the study using email and Zoho Survey. The four sequential rounds of questionnaires used Likert-type scales and central tendency measures to guide the development of a consensus among the participants. The results from each round determined the questions and set-up for the next. The researcher took the necessary precautions to ensure validity and trustworthiness and to uphold the relevant ethical and moral standards as much as possible throughout the study. The following chapter presents the results obtained using the methodological approach described in Chapter III.

CHAPTER IV: RESULTS

The purpose of this qualitative classical Delphi research study was to develop a consensus among a panel of up to 26 United States human resources experts on identifying desirable and feasible organizational guidelines for personal social media account posts concerning company information. The present chapter is devoted to the analysis of the classical Delphi methodology relating to the research questions. The chapter also includes a presentation of the data analysis from the four rounds of questionnaires based on responses from participating experts of the research questions developed using the dynamic theory of organizational knowledge creation.

RQ1: What was the consensus among a panel of 26 human resources experts as to desirable and feasible organizational guidelines and strategies for employee use of personal social media accounts concerning publishing company information online?

S1: What was the level of consensus among a panel of 26 human resources experts as to current desirable and feasible organizational guidelines and strategies for employee use of personal social media accounts concerning company information published online?

S2: What was the level of consensus among a panel of 26 human resources experts as to future desirable and feasible organizational guidelines and strategies for employee use of personal social media accounts concerning publishing company information online?

The researcher manually coded the emerging themes based on the recurring results from the first questionnaire. At each level of the analysis, the researcher conducted a comparison to distill the data until the responses yielded a consensus on desirable and

feasible social media guidelines, thereby answering the research questions, which were most recently reproduced at the beginning of the previous chapter.

Demographic Analysis

As detailed in Appendices A, B, and C and already specified above, the participants met the following minimum requirements:

- holding a bachelor's degree (or advanced certificate) in the field of human resources;
- possessing three or more years of experience working in some human resource capacity;
- current employment (at least part-time) in some human resource capacity;
- currently living in the United States; and
- currently employed by a business registered in the United States.

The participants varied significantly in terms of gender, age, years of human resources experience, education level, and industry in which the individual was employed, which can be seen in Table 4. Specifically, six (23%) worked in healthcare, five (19%) in professional services, four (15%) in manufacturing, three (11%) in finance, two each (8%) in technology and transportation, and one each (4%) in supply-chain management, forestry, construction, and food production. Their diverse backgrounds contributed to the validity of the study. The panel did skew heavily female (81%). The participants ranged in age from 20 to more than 60 years, with six (23%) being 20-29, eleven (43%) being 30-39, four each (15%) being 40-49, and 50-59, and one (4%) being over the age of 60.

Sixty-two percent of participants had 6-19 years of experience working in the human resources industry, four (15%) had 3-5 years, eight (31%) had 6-9 years, another eight (31%) had 10-19 years, five (19%) had 20-29 years (19%), and one (4%) had 30 or more years. The

majority had 6-19 years of experience. Sixteen (62%) of the participants had a master's degree in some aspect of human resources, and the rest (38%) only a bachelor's degree in human resources management.

Table 4

Demographics of Expert Panel (N = 26)

Demographics	N	%
Gender		
Male	5	19%
Female	21	81%
Age (Years)		
20 – 29	6	23%
30 – 39	11	43%
40 – 49	4	15%
50 – 59	4	15%
60 or older	1	4%
Human Resource (Years)		
3 – 5	4	15%
6 – 9	8	31%
10 – 19	8	31%
20 – 29	5	19%
30 or more	1	4%
Education		
Bachelor's degree	10	38%
Master's degree	16	62%
Industry		
Healthcare	6	23%
Professional Services (Consulting/Development/Research)	5	19%
Manufacturing	4	15%
Financial	3	11%
Technology	2	8%
Transportation	2	8%
Supply-Chain	1	4%
Forestry	1	4%
Construction	1	4%

Demographics	<i>N</i>	%
Food Production	1	4%

Data Collection

Researchers tend to use purposive sampling—which involves taking into account such specific criteria as reputation, leadership, education, and experience in the development of a sufficiently diverse sample of participants—for Delphi studies (Heitner et al., 2013). For the present study, the researcher, having received approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) on August 2, 2019, at once began soliciting participants on LinkedIn as described above using the built-in social media messenger and through email using Zoho Email services. The collection process continued through the end of October and resulted in the selection of the 26 expert participants. Before starting the survey, potential participants reviewed, accepted, and electronically signed an informed consent waiver (Appendix C) provided through Zoho Signature.

The participants served as the primary source of data. The qualitative portion of the study, Round 1, was intended to solicit responses on organizational tolerance of social media use, the importance of social media guidelines, and desirable and feasible guidelines for social media use (Table 5).

Table 5

Tolerance and Importance of Social Media

Results	Average Rating
Importance of SM Guidelines	4.16
Tolerance	3.68

The researcher analyzed the proposed guidelines to identify themes. The themes from the first questionnaire guided the overall questions in the following questionnaires. No unusual circumstances were encountered during the data collection process. The quantitative questions in subsequent rounds identified an overall consensus on desirable and feasible social media guidelines. The questionnaire in Round 2 used a 5-point Likert-type scale, while those in Rounds 3 and 4 used 4-point Likert-type scales to ensure that the Delphi method was applied consistently throughout the data collection. The original survey protocol and the subsequent questionnaires are included in Appendix D.

Data and Analysis

In accordance with the classical Delphi research methodology, shown in Figure 6, the participants completed a series of questionnaires. The open-ended questions in Round 1 identified themes, while subsequent rounds used a Likert-type scale to collect the data and validate the results. The analysis in Round 1, then, was of the participants' written responses to open-ended questions. The researcher coded and categorized these responses thematically and conducted a secondary analysis and batching during this round to identify the two most salient guidelines for each theme, current or future. The results from the remaining rounds were coded automatically and electronically and reviewed to identify a consensus using the Zoho Survey tool. The results of the themes were based on mode, while the quantifiable results were expressed as the mean. Once more, apart from Round 1, the results were automatically calculated based on a Likert-type scale and the highest-rated average.

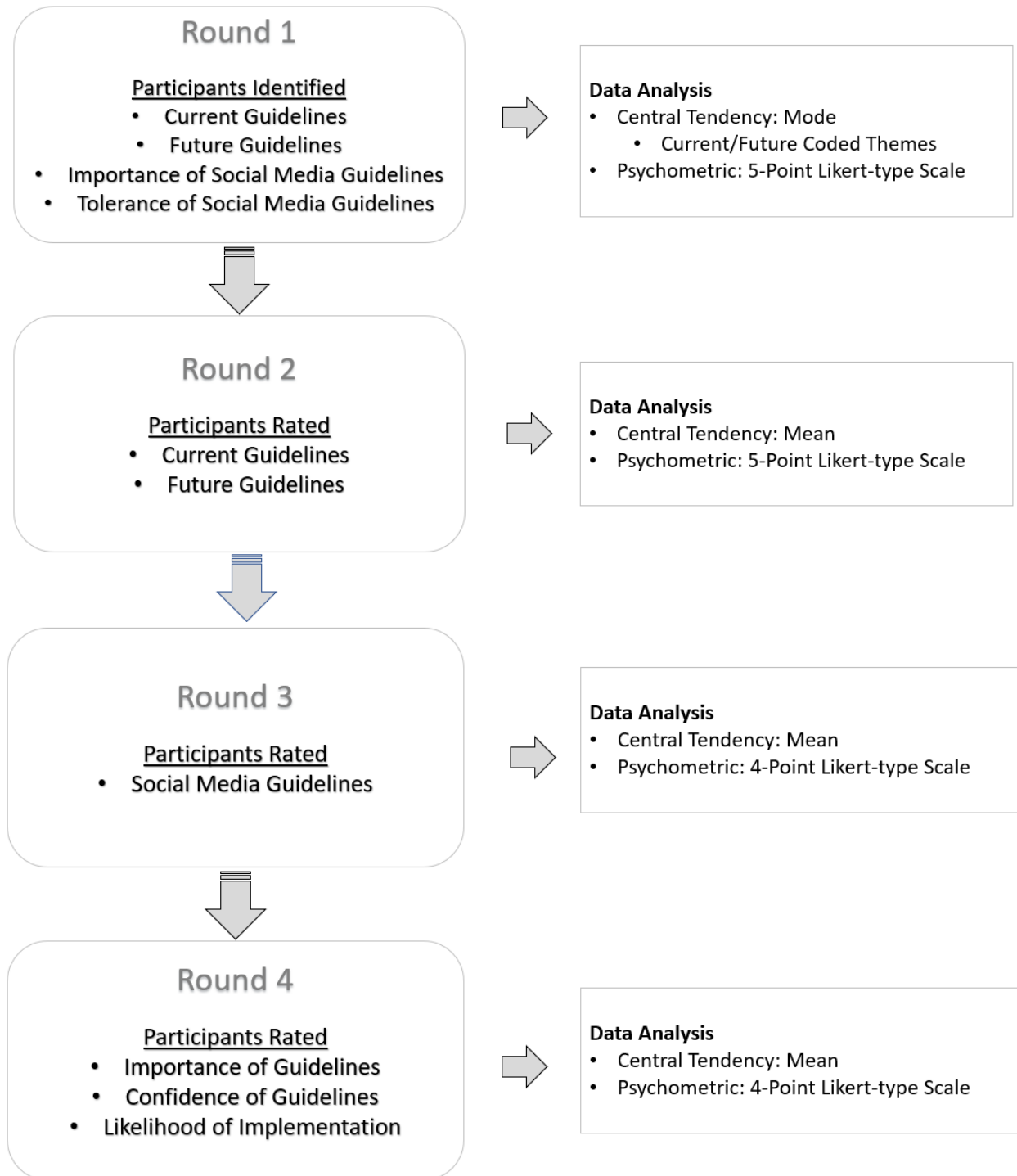


Figure 6. Data Analysis Process

Research Questions S1 & S2

Rounds 1 and 2 served to answer research questions S1 and S2. Round 1 focused on identifying themes and eliciting a variety of current and potential future social media

guidelines for employees' posting of material relating to their workplaces on their personal social media accounts. Round 2 focused on the desirability and feasibility of these guidelines.

Round 1. The researcher manually analyzed and coded the results of the open-ended questions and identified the five most common themes—confidentiality, employee relations, communication, productivity, and reputation—which were then used for subsequent survey rounds.

Round 2. Based on the themes identified in Round 1, the participants were asked to rate the most desirable and feasible current and future guidelines using the 5-point Likert-type scale described in the previous chapter. The Zoho Survey tool automatically calculated the ratings for the desirability and feasibility of each guideline; the guidelines with the highest weighted average ratings were then used for Round 3.

RQ1

Round 3 provided the final list of consensus guidelines, and in Round 4, participants rated and validated the importance of and their confidence in these guidelines.

Round 3. Using the highest-rated averages of the results from Round 2, the participants in Round 3 rated one of two possible desirable and feasible social media guidelines associated with each theme using the 4-point Likert-type scale described in the previous chapter to validate each guideline further. The highest-rated if these guidelines then informed the design of the questionnaire for Round 4.

Round 4. In the fourth and final round, the participants rated the importance of, their confidence in, and the likelihood of the implementation of the guidelines that emerged from the previous rounds using the 4-point Likert-type scale described in the previous chapter. Specifically, participants rated the confidence in the guidelines on a scale of (1) Unreliable,

(2) Risky, (3) Dependable, or (4) Reliable. Lastly, the researcher asked participants about the likelihood of implementing the identified guideline using the scale of (1) Very Unlikely, (2) Unlikely, (3) Likely, or (4) Very Likely.

Findings

The findings presented in Tables 6-10 answered the research question and sub-questions. Specifically, in Table 6 are presented the coded themes identified in the participants' feedback during Round 1; in Table 9 is presented the answer to RQ1; in Table 7 are presented the answers to S1 and S2; in Table 8 are presented the results of Round 3, and in Table 10 the overall results are presented.

Individual-centric Codes

Round 1. In the first questionnaire, each participant identified the ten current and ten future social media guidelines that he or she considered most salient. The results from the Round 1 questionnaire were then analyzed, batched, and coded into themes. The guidelines identified in this round are presented in Table 7, and the five manually identified themes are presented in Table 6. The subsequent analysis identified the two current and future guidelines that the participants preferred on average. Participants rated an average of 4.16 on a 5-point Likert-type scale with regard to the importance of social media guidelines and an average rating of 3.68 for employers' tolerance of social media.

Table 6

Round 1 Results

Theme	Percent
Confidentiality (Security/Safety/Legal)	36.2%
Employee Relations (Professional Conduct)	11.3%
Poor Communication	19.1%
Productivity	13.5%
Reputation	19.9%

Round 2. Based on the results of Round 1, the questions for the second round addressed two categories, current and future. The participants indicated, for each theme, which of the two social media guidelines was considered most desirable and feasible, as shown in Table 7.

Table 7

Round 2 Results

Guidelines (Current)	Code	Average Rating	Batch
<u>Guideline 1:</u> Non-work-related use of social networking activities conducted during scheduled working hours may interfere with work duties and/or responsibilities and can be cause for disciplinary action. Posting during breaks or lunchtime is permissible; however, employees should be mindful to avoid the perception that they are engaged in your work commitments while posting.	Productivity	3.80	Current
<u>Guideline 2:</u> Whether an employee is exempt, non-exempt, temporary, or voluntary status, social media activity should not interfere with work commitments. Non-exempt, temporary, and volunteer employees must be on the clock to represent the company.	Productivity	4.27	Current

Guidelines (Current)	Code	Average Rating	Batch
<u>Guideline 1:</u> Divulging confidential company information including, but not limited to, business plans, strategies, financial information, and proprietary or sensitive information is strictly prohibited on social media or otherwise.	Confidentiality	4.87	Current
<u>Guideline 2:</u> Clients, or prospective clients, names, projects, photos, or likeness, are considered confidential and private and should not be referenced on social media without prior written consent. Only those authorized employees can then share specific information as deemed appropriate and necessary.	Confidentiality	4.47	Current
<u>Guideline 1:</u> The posting of comments or materials (i.e., photographs, videos, audio, etc.) is prohibited if such comments or materials are obscene, maliciously false, unlawfully defamatory, threatening, and/or abusive to another person or entity.	Reputation	4.47	Current
<u>Guideline 2:</u> The reputation and success of the company are affected by the actions of all employees. It is expected that any statements, especially those on social media, will be respectful and not reflect negatively on the organization. Employees should use common sense when posting to social media regardless if on personal or company accounts.	Reputation	4.40	Current
<u>Guideline 1:</u> The creation of a company's social media presence is subject to the rules and policies of the organization. Only authorized employees can post on company social media platforms. If the employee is authorized to communicate about the business or business-related matters, the employee must disclose their connection with the business.	Communication	4.07	Current
<u>Guideline 2:</u> Although employee's use of social media for non-work purposes such as self-publishing and self-expression is permitted, individuals are personally responsible for their commentary and should be aware of the potential liability in conjunction with laws, regulations,	Communication	3.67	Current

Guidelines (Current)	Code	Average Rating	Batch
and/or company policies. Employees must use a disclaimer when posting personal opinions, thoughts, or any communication about the organization.			
<u>Guideline 1:</u> Be professional, use good judgment, and be accurate and honest in communication; errors, omissions, or unprofessional language or behavior reflect poorly on the business and may result in liability for the individual and/or business. Be respectful, be accountable, and be professional to fellow employees, business partners, competitors, and all those you encounter (both internally and externally).	Employee Relations	4.13	Current
<u>Guideline 2:</u> For personal social media accounts where an employee connection to the business is apparent, employees should be careful to avoid implying any endorsements of a product, person, or entity on behalf of the organization.	Employee Relations	4.2	Current

Guideline (Future)	Code	Average Rating	Batch
<u>Future Guideline 1:</u> Participation in personal social networking activities should only be conducted during non-working hours.	Productivity	4.00	Future
<u>Future Guideline 2:</u> Generally speaking, employees' personal time and activities outside of work are considered personal and private. However, if an employee's activities, relating to social networking, affects personal performance or that of others, as well as negatively interrupts business operations, disciplinary action may be taken.	Productivity	3.73	Future
<u>Future Guideline 1:</u> Potential candidates whose social media accounts are open to public view may be reviewed to assist in determining hiring potential based on possible violations of current company policies. Likewise, current employees whose social media accounts are set to public are open to review and subject to disciplinary action if deemed necessary.	Confidentiality	3.00	Future

Guideline (Future)	Code	Average Rating	Batch
<u>Future Guideline 2:</u> Private company information should never be posted online unless by an authorized individual.	Confidentiality	4.40	Future
<u>Future Guideline 1:</u> Employee’s direct and indirect actions have an impact on the organization’s reputation. Employees are to report any observation of misconduct, misrepresentation, or inappropriate content on social media that could be considered harmful to the company, individuals, and cause conflict to the organization and its affiliates.	Reputation	3.73	Future
<u>Future Guideline 2:</u> Employees represent the organization at all times. Employees communicating on any social networking site must make it clear they are not representing the company or its opinion on any matter.	Reputation	3.53	Future
<u>Future Guideline 1:</u> Employees are encouraged to effectively use social media to improve the companies brand reputation, awareness, and sustainability. The use of social media to share positive company news and attract new candidates is acceptable on personal and professional social networking sites.	Communication	4.00	Future
<u>Future Guideline 2:</u> Social media is defined as any website or application that allows users to share content and information. Employees who engage in such activities are encouraged to share and promote company posts to their social media. Employees, however, should not edit, alter, or create new posts regarding company information without approval.	Communication	4.33	Future
<u>Future Guideline 1:</u> Any social media posts that violate the company code of conduct may result in discipline up to and including termination. Social media communication that can be viewed as bullying, creating a hostile work environment, or combative behavior will not be tolerated and subject to disciplinary action, including legal action.	Employee Relations	4.07	Future

Guideline (Future)	Code	Average Rating	Batch
<u>Future Guideline 2:</u> All employees will participate in social media training to discuss the effectiveness, responsibly, and security of being active on social networking sites.	Employee Relations	4.13	Future

Round 3. Round 3 involved the use of a combined list of both current and future guidelines based on the results of Round 2 from which participants were asked to choose the two most desirable and feasible without respect to the batch with which the guidelines were associated. The 4-point Likert-type scale used in this round helped to validate the results.

Table 8

Round 3 Results

Guideline	Code	Average Rating	Batch
<u>Guideline 1:</u> Whether an employee is exempt, non-exempt, temporary, or voluntary status, social media activity should not interfere with work commitments. Non-exempt, temporary, and volunteer employees must be on the clock to represent the company.	Productivity	3.14	Current
<u>Guideline 2:</u> Participation in personal social networking activities should only be conducted during non-working hours.	Productivity	3.07	Future
<u>Guideline 1:</u> Divulging confidential company information including, but not limited to, business plans, strategies, financial information, and proprietary or sensitive information is strictly prohibited on social media or otherwise.	Confidentiality	4.00	Current
<u>Guideline 2:</u> Private company information should never be posted online unless by an authorized individual.	Confidentiality	3.86	Future
<u>Guideline 1:</u> The posting of comments or materials (i.e., photographs, videos, audio, etc.) is prohibited if such comments or materials are obscene, maliciously false, unlawfully defamatory,	Reputation	3.64	Current

Guideline	Code	Average Rating	Batch
threatening, and/or abusive to another person or entity.			
<u>Guideline 2:</u> Employee’s direct and indirect actions have an impact on the organization’s reputation. Employees are to report any observation of misconduct, misrepresentation, or inappropriate content on social media that could be considered harmful to the company, individuals, and cause conflict to the organization and its affiliates.	Reputation	3.07	Future
<u>Guideline 1:</u> The creation of a company’s social media presence is subject to the rules and policies of the organization. Only authorized employees can post on company social media platforms. If the employee is authorized to communicate about the business or business-related matters, the employee must disclose their connection with the business.	Communication	3.43	Current
<u>Guideline 2:</u> Social media is defined as any website or application that allows users to share content and information. Employees who engage in such activities are encouraged to share and promote company posts to their social media. Employees, however, should not edit, alter, or create new posts regarding company information without approval.	Communication	3.14	Future
<u>Guideline 1:</u> For personal social media accounts where an employee connection to the business is apparent, employees should be careful to avoid implying any endorsements of a product, person, or entity on behalf of the organization.	Employee Relations	3.57	Current
<u>Guideline 2:</u> All employees will participate in social media training to discuss the effectiveness, responsibly, and security of being active on social networking sites.	Employee Relations	3.43	Future

Work-centric Codes

Round 4. The fourth and final round of questionnaires identified a set of five desirable and feasible social media guidelines that could be used by companies in various industries around which the participants formed a consensus. Participants were asked to rate, based on the 4-point Likert-type scale described above, the desirability, feasibility, and significance of each guideline, as well as the likelihood that the identified guidelines would be implemented.

Table 9

Round 4 Results

Guideline	Code	Importance	Confidence	Likelihood	Batch
<p><u>Guideline 1:</u> Whether an employee is exempt, non-exempt, temporary, or voluntary status, social media activity should not interfere with work commitments.</p> <p>Non-exempt, temporary, and volunteer employees must be on the clock to represent the company.</p>	Productivity	3.64	3.14	2.93	Current
<p><u>Guideline 2:</u> Divulging confidential company information including, but not limited to, business plans, strategies, financial information, and proprietary or sensitive information is strictly prohibited on social media or otherwise.</p>	Confidentiality	3.93	3.50	3.64	Current

Guideline	Code	Importance	Confidence	Likelihood	Batch
<u>Guideline 3:</u> The posting of comments or materials (i.e., photographs, videos, audio, etc.) is prohibited if such comments or materials are obscene, maliciously false, unlawfully defamatory, threatening, and/or abusive to another person or entity.	Reputation	3.71	3.29	3.43	Current
<u>Guideline 4:</u> The creation of a company's social media presence is subject to the rules and policies of the organization. Only authorized employees can post on company social media platforms. If the employee is authorized to communicate about the business or business-related matters, the employee must disclose their connection with the business.	Communication	3.57	3.29	3.43	Current
<u>Guideline 5:</u> For personal social media accounts where an employee connection to the business is apparent, employees should be careful to avoid implying any endorsements of a product, person, or entity on behalf of the organization.	Employee Relations	3.50	3.00	3.21	Current

Analysis of the Overall Results

The participants had the opportunity during Round 4 to rate the overall significance of the social media guidelines, their confidence in them, and the likelihood of their implementation; these results are presented in Table 10. At each level of the analysis, the researcher conducted a comparison to distill the data until the participants reached a consensus.

Table 10

Participants' Overall Assessment of the Guidelines

Overall Results	Average Rating
Importance of the guidelines identified	3.57
Confidence in the guidelines identified	3.36
Likelihood of implementing the guidelines	3.50

Conclusions

The goal of this classical Delphi research study was to provide businesses with guidelines for implementing desirable and feasible social media guidelines; the results were presented in this chapter. The expert panel developed a consensus that answered the research question regarding the formation of a consensus on guidelines for employees' social media use. The analysis served to answer the research questions in a manner consistent with the dynamic theory of organizational knowledge creation by identifying organizational guidelines for companies. The 26 participants responded to a series of four questionnaires that yielded a consensus on five desirable and feasible social media guidelines, as shown in Table 9. The participants—who were female and male human resources professionals in a variety of U.S. industries and ranged in age from 20 to over 60 years of age—identified as

most salient among the individual-centric and the work-centric results the themes of confidentiality, employee relations, communication, productivity, and reputation. This chapter, then, summarized the critical analysis and discussion of the themes and guidelines that the panel identified. In Chapter V, the limitations of the study are discussed, along with recommendations for future research and literature relevant to the implementation of the guidelines.

CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION

The purpose of this qualitative classical Delphi research study was to develop a consensus among a panel of up to 26 United States human resources experts on identifying desirable and feasible organizational guidelines for personal social media account posts concerning company information. The present chapter includes a discussion of the major findings of the literature on the dynamic theory of organizational knowledge creation, and of problems encountered in transferring knowledge. This discussion expands on the research questions, which are presented here one more time for convenience and completeness. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the limitations of the study, implications for practice, and recommendations for future research.

RQ1: What was the consensus among a panel of 26 human resources experts as to desirable and feasible organizational guidelines and strategies for employee use of personal social media accounts concerning publishing company information online?

S1: What was the level of consensus among a panel of 26 human resources experts as to current desirable and feasible organizational guidelines and strategies for employee use of personal social media accounts concerning company information published online?

S2: What was the level of consensus among a panel of 26 human resources experts as to future desirable and feasible organizational guidelines and strategies for employee use of personal social media accounts concerning publishing company information online?

The research revealed that social media guidelines should be built around five themes: (1) confidentiality, (2) employee relations, (3) avoiding poor communication, (4)

productivity, and (5) reputation. Some guidelines are individual-centric, some are work-centric, and others combine both aspects. All of the results contribute to the effort to guarantee individuals' right to self-identify on social media while protecting the organizations that employ them.

Interpretation of the Findings

As the use of social media has become increasingly widespread, leaders have had limited success creating guidelines that protect their companies from loss of control over proprietary information and from reputational damage without infringing on their employees' fundamental freedoms and regulations that protect personal privacy (Park & Abril, 2016). Expectations, needs, and common sense are among the perspectives from which employers may view personnel sharing of information about the workplace on social media. Employers and employees often find themselves in conflict regarding who holds the rights to the content that employees post on personal or company-sponsored social media platforms. Emboldened by the U.S. Constitution's guarantee of freedom of speech and the National Labor Relations Act, employees may believe they have a right to say whatever, whenever, and to whomever they wish, a belief that may conflict with the principles of the employer. As noted in the literature review in Chapter II, grey areas may exist within organizational policies and state and federal laws. At the same time, individuals have been spending more time on social media than any other type of communication. Employers have been seeking to understand the risks associated with an employees' desire to self-identify on social media, which is why organizational leaders are involved in creating guidelines that limit the exposure and risks associated with their employees' disclosure or fabrication of company news, gossip, or proprietary information (Walden, 2016).

RQ1

Social networking sites facilitate individuals' efforts to collaborate, share, and build social networks, which may grow to reach large audiences (El Ouiridi, El Ouiridi, Segers, & Henderickx, 2015). The present study contributes to the current literature as a model for identifying desirable and feasible guidelines regarding the use of social media by employees in ways that may impact their employers. The lines between control of social media at the corporate level and their employees' personal use of social media have often become blurred (Park & Abril, 2016). This study has built on previous literature by identifying a set of social media guidelines that are applicable across industries. These guidelines constituted an answer to the RQ1.

- (a) Guideline 1: Whether an employee is exempt, non-exempt, temporary, or voluntary status, social media activity should not interfere with work commitments. Non-exempt, temporary, and volunteer employees must be on the clock to represent the company.
- (b) Guideline 2: Divulging confidential company information including, but not limited to, business plans, strategies, financial information, and proprietary or sensitive information is strictly prohibited on social media or otherwise.
- (c) Guideline 3: The posting of comments or materials (i.e., photographs, videos, audio, etc.) is prohibited if such comments or materials are obscene, maliciously false, unlawfully defamatory, threatening, and/or abusive to another person or entity.
- (d) Guideline 4: The creation of a company's social media presence is subject to the rules and policies of the organization. Only authorized employees can post on

company social media platforms. If the employee is authorized to communicate about the business or business-related matters, the employee must disclose their connection with the business.

- (e) Guideline 5: For personal social media accounts where an employee connection to the business is apparent, employees should be careful to avoid implying any endorsements of a product, person, or entity on behalf of the organization.

S1 and S2

While organizations may benefit from social media, they often lacked clear guidelines for dealing with the potential adverse effects of this form of communication (Cho et al., 2013). The subsequent questions distinguishing current and future guidelines had to be addressed in order to answer the primary research question. The results were based on the five themes identified through the four consecutive questionnaires; thus, the findings from Round 1 informed the questionnaires for Rounds 3 and 4, which, in turn, served to answer the research question.

While the participants' human resources experience, education, and backgrounds varied, the themes of confidentiality, employee relations, avoiding poor communication, productivity, and reputation were prominent across their assessments of desirable and feasible social media guidelines in Round 1. The themes were relevant, valid, and dynamic to represent various individuals, organizations, and industries. The results of Round 1 yielded ten guidelines—2 from each batch, current and future, for the five themes—which the participants then rated in Round 2. The participants also considered the implementation of social media guidelines extremely important, as indicated by their average rating of 4.16 on a 5-point Likert-type scale for the relevant question. Unsurprisingly, their tolerance for social

media use by employees was not high, as indicated by their average rating of 3.68 on the scale for the relevant question.

Round 2 answered the research sub-questions S1 and S2, as shown in Table 7. S1 concerned the level of consensus within the panel regarding current desirable and feasible guidelines and S2 the level regarding future guidelines. The results of Round 2 yielded a more concise list of 10 guidelines—again, one from each batch, current, and future, for the five themes—which the participants rated in Round 3.

In Round 3, then, the participants rated these ten on a 4-point Likert-type scale. As shown in Table 8, the participants significantly favored the current over the future guidelines. The results of this round yielded a final list of the five most desirable and feasible social media guidelines, as shown in Table 9, thereby answering RQ1.

The results of the fourth and last questionnaire, identified in Table 9, validated the importance of the guidelines and the participants' confidence in the study. Participants rated each of the five consensus guidelines within each category to produce an overall average rating of 3.67 for the importance of implementing guidelines, 3.24 for their confidence in the study, and of 3.33 for their assessment of the likelihood that the guidelines would be implemented. The average rating for the importance, confidence, and likelihood of all the identified social media guidelines was 3.41. As part of the fourth and final round, the participants rated, on a 4-point Likert-type scale, the overall importance, confidence, and likelihood of implementing all five of the guidelines. The results showed that the majority of participants overwhelmingly supported the guidelines, with an average rating of 3.57 for importance, 3.36 for confidence, 3.50 for the likelihood of implementation, and a cumulative rating of 3.48, as shown in Tables 9 and 10.

Social media, as noted in Chapter II, have an enormous impact on many employees' engagement and job satisfaction as a channel for positive self-expression (Krishnan & Hunt, 2015). The ongoing increase in social networking has been causing organizational leaders to consider developing guidelines that address the potential risks to organizations associated with social media. The present study sheds light on these issues and contributes to the current conversation about the general guidelines that some organizational leaders have implemented. The answer to the research question provides organizations across various industries with social media guidelines that may help to reduce the risks associated with personal and company social media accounts without infringing on the fundamental freedoms of employees.

Implications for Theory and Future Research

Social Media provides open communication for users and a sense of freedom in expressing their thoughts, beliefs, feelings, and opinions. As technology advances, so does the evolution of social networking. In today's dynamic working environment, there is a need to bridge the gap between theory and practice regarding the acceptable use of social media by employees in relation to the workplace. As was seen in Chapter II, individuals have been spending more than two hours a day on social media (Social Media Today, 2018) due to the ease and ability to freely express individual thoughts and opinions (Clayton, 2015). Chapter II presented a description of the social identification model, which includes the dynamic theory of organizational knowledge creation, where the transfer knowledge from one part of an organization to another may ensure the organization's future viability.

Review of Literature on the Dynamic Theory of Organizational Knowledge Creation

The dynamic theory of organizational knowledge creation, sometimes referred to as the organizational knowledge transfer theory, is based on the notion that the transfer of knowledge from one part of an organization to another is inherently problematic. The theory considers the formation of knowledge and the connections that are fostered. In the present study, a set of guidelines for social media use was considered from the perspective of the creation of organizational knowledge. Social media generates a continuous conversation, one that may involve millions of individuals across the world, so the need to create practical and feasible social media guidelines that allow for the transfer of knowledge is imperative. The research for the study revealed that industries differ regarding the importance and tolerance of workers' social media use. The participants nevertheless reached a consensus, thereby indicating that a standard set of guidelines could be agreed upon and for implementation across industries.

The need for a standardized set of guidelines may help organizations to align themselves with employees, irrespective of industry or sector. With so much communication taking place on social media platforms and the growing popularity of the global marketplace, employers and employees have been resorting to networking sites to transfer tacit knowledge. As younger generations enter the workforce, organizational leaders may want to consider the benefits and the risks associated with social media. The establishment of widely applicable guidelines has the potential to facilitate the transfer of knowledge in a manner consistent with the dynamic theory of organizational knowledge creation in various scenarios. Connecting employees to their organization through social media could help to

bridge gaps among locations and departments, which may further generate a healthier work-life balance.

Implications for Practice

With the number of individuals using social media expected to increase from some 2.77 billion to around 3.1 billion by 2021 (Perrin, 2015; Statista, 2017), there is a pressing need for guidelines regarding the use of these platforms. As successive generations enter the workforce, social media networking will become an ever more widely used and accepted form of communication and knowledge transfer. With 90% of adults aged 18 to 29 likely to use social media according to a study from the mid-2010s (Perrin, 2015), organizational leaders may want to try and bridge the gap of professional communication within the workplace.

The findings presented in the study indicate the importance of and the need for social media guidelines. With an average rating of 4.16 on a 5-point Likert-type scale, the participants rated the need for social media guidance as “very important.” While some organizations have general social media policies, many lack clear guidance when limiting liabilities while not infringing on an individual’s right to self-identify. Other organizations lack guidelines altogether, a situation that exposes them to the negative consequences discussed throughout this study. While every organization has a right to develop and regulate its own social media guidelines, all could benefit if an agreement could be reached on standards applicable across industries that would provide employees with a uniform understanding of acceptable behavior. Such guidelines would both help to protect organizations and to clarify for their employees their rights and responsibilities.

Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research

While the qualitative classical Delphi method was appropriate for this study, quantitative research could add further validity and credibility to the results. A quantitative research design, for example, might include a subsequent statistical analysis that provides further evidence of the need for and importance of social media guidelines within various industries. Similarly, a quantitative research study of the risks and paradigm shifts associated with an employee's right to self-identify on social media might investigate the specific needs of a particular industry or organization of a certain size.

Limitations

The research study was limited in the first place by the number of individuals who were eligible and willing to participate. Some eligible individuals did not wish to participate, while others were ineligible because they did not hold a degree in human resources—one of whom pointed out that such degrees did not become common among human resources professionals, even those with extensive experience in the field, until around the turn of the century. Further, the lack of transferability of the guidelines, which is attributable to the diversity of the industries represented by the participants, may also have impacted the validity and trustworthiness of the results. Table 4 lists the industries in which the participants were employed; the greatest number of them, six (23%), was employed in the healthcare sector. The validity of the study might, in addition, have been limited due to the small number of participants from each business sector and their personal biases associated with any industry affiliation. One more limitation or source of potential bias concerns the coding of the data, in that the researcher manually coded the results of Round 1. The

remainder of the study, however, was coded automatically based on participants' ratings on Likert-type scales without any outside influence.

Recommendations Relating to Demography

Future research could target a more diverse demographic audience. Although the current study had considerable demographic diversity, the addition of more individuals representing each industry and of further industries could help to corroborate the findings. A larger participant pool would provide for a more significant sample that would, in turn, yield more robust, and therefore more persuasive, findings regarding the importance of implementing the guidelines identified here. Taking into account foreign and international companies would increase the generalizability of the results.

Recommendations for Bridging the Gap

As organizations expand and establish a global presence and make increasing use of remote working environments, there may be a desire to bridge the gap between the seasoned workforce and more recent hires through social media. The younger generations entering the workforce have come to expect a healthy work-life balance based in part on the use of social media for communication in all aspects of their lives. The following recommendations are intended to help companies to enjoy the benefits of social media and to extend those benefits to their more seasoned employees.

Recommendations for Leaders

Organizational leaders should embrace social media and provide guidance and support to their employees. In order to expand the consensus regarding the social media guidelines identified here, future studies could consider best practices for training the members of organizations to develop and implement the guidelines in specific contexts. Such

training could be administered to new hires and annually to all employees in order to provide continual feedback and assistance in embracing social media and other emerging technologies. Training employees in the use of social networking sites based on the guidelines and providing ongoing support could help ensure that those at all levels of an organization both follow the guidelines and understand the value of social media.

Conclusions

The purpose of this qualitative classical Delphi research study was to develop a consensus among a panel of 26 United States human resources experts regarding desirable and feasible organizational guidelines for employees' social media posts relating to the workplace. The popular image of the modern work environment where employees can say what they want, when they want, and to whomever they wish is somewhat inaccurate. Readily available digital technologies allow individuals to communicate around the world within seconds and have caused many organizational leaders to second-guess their social media strategies. Organizations typically focus on marketing their brands, products, and services but fail to appreciate the fact that employees may reach audiences that are just as large or larger. In such an environment, a standardized set of social media guidelines can be a crucial tool for limiting an organization's risks and exposure relating to social media without infringing on their employees' right to self-identify on these platforms.

Organizations may want to consider creating a consistently positive environment, regardless of the market segment or industry, in which employees are engaged, motivated, and able to express their passions. If their employees are unable to self-identify and self-express, organizations may end up losing talented professionals and future leaders. One of the most significant hurdles in business today is the gap just described between younger and

older generations of workers regarding the use of technology. While the research questions did not address the generation gap, it is a topic that merits future investigation.

The findings presented here, then, revealed five themes regarding organizations' tolerance for social media use by their employees and the importance of guidelines for that use, namely (a) confidentiality, (b) employee relations, (c) avoiding poor communication, (d) productivity, and (e) reputation. The participants in the study drew on their personal, professional, and educational experiences to identify the following five desirable and feasible social media guidelines for use across industries corresponding to the five themes listed most recently at the beginning of this chapter.

- Whether an employee is exempt, non-exempt, temporary, or voluntary status, social media activity should not interfere with work commitments. Non-exempt, temporary, and volunteer employees must be on the clock to represent the company;
- Divulging confidential company information including, but not limited to, business plans, strategies, financial information, and proprietary or sensitive information is strictly prohibited on social media or otherwise;
- The posting of comments or materials (i.e., photographs, videos, audio, etc.) is prohibited if such comments or materials are obscene, maliciously false, unlawfully defamatory, threatening, and/or abusive to another person or entity;
- The creation of a company's social media presence is subject to the rules and policies of the organization. Only authorized employees can post on company social media platforms. If the employee is authorized to communicate about the business or business-related matters, the employee must disclose their connection with the business;

- For personal social media accounts where an employee connection to the business is apparent, employees should be careful to avoid implying any endorsements of a product, person, or entity on behalf of the organization.

Social media has been embraced by billions of individuals and millions of companies as a way to express their thoughts, ideas, and beliefs and to communicate information. In order to be successful, organizations must be able to coordinate their strategies while maintaining an employee-centric environment. Even as the debate regarding ownership of the content posted on personal social media accounts continues, organizations can maximize the benefits and minimize the risks associated with social media without infringing on their employees' right to self-identify through the establishment of clear and concise social media guidelines.

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Appendix A: Social Media Request to Solicit

The following statement was used when asking, via LinkedIn social media messaging, individuals or group leaders for permission to discuss and solicit themselves or group members to participate in the study.

Hello {Individual or LinkedIn Group Leader},

My name is Brant Pearson, and I am reaching out to you as a graduate student at Ashford University, working on my dissertation for a Doctorate in Philosophy degree specializing in Organizational Leadership and Development with a concentration in Risk Management.

My research study is titled, Risks and Paradigm Shifts Associated with an Employee's Right to Self-Identify on Social Media. With your permission, I would like to reach out to you and other members of your organizational group, {Group Name}, and invite them to participate in the study. The classical Delphi study needs human resources experts, who are working within the United States, and able and willing to participate in a series of online surveys that may build a consensus for identifying desirable and feasible organizational social media guidelines.

The intent of this message is to request your permission to solicit, discuss, and invite you and members of your group or organization to participate in the research. The minimum qualification for any participant within the study will hold a bachelor's degree in human resources, worked three or more years in human resources, are currently working at least part-time in some human resource capacity, live within the United States, and work for a registered United States business.

If you are interested in participating in the study, please reply to this message with "I ACCEPT" and provide your full name, phone number, and email address. If you accept, you will be sent an email detailing further participation information. Should you know other human resources experts within the United States that may be interested in participating in the study, please feel free to provide me their contact information as well.

Thank you for all your time and consideration.

Brant D. Pearson,
Ph.D. Candidate Researcher
Ashford University



Appendix B: LinkedIn Invitation to Participate

The message below was used as the initial communication when asking individuals to participate in the study.

Hello,

My name is Brant Pearson, and I am reaching out to you as a graduate student at Ashford University, working on my dissertation for a Doctorate in Philosophy degree specializing in Organizational Leadership and Development with a concentration in Risk Management.

My research study is titled, Risks and Paradigm Shifts Associated with an Employee's Right to Self-Identify on Social Media. The purpose of this qualitative classical Delphi research study was to develop a consensus among a panel of up to 26 United States human resources experts on identifying desirable and feasible organizational guidelines for personal social media account posts concerning company information.

I want to invite you to participate in the study, which will consist of four consecutive rounds of questionnaires that are relatively short. Each questionnaire round can be completed online and will dive deeper into identifying a consensus among all participants.

The minimum qualification for any participant within the study will hold a bachelor's degree (or higher) in human resources, have worked three or more years in human resources, are currently working at least part-time in some human resource capacity, live within the United States, and work for a registered United States business. Please ensure you meet all the qualifications prior to accepting to participate.

If you are interested in participating in the study, please reply to this message with "I ACCEPT" and provide your full name, phone number, and email address. If you accept, you will be sent an email detailing further participation information and informed consent. Should you know other human resources experts within the United States that may be interested in participating in the study, and please feel free to provide me their contact information as well.

Thank you for all your time and consideration. If you should have any questions, comments, or concerns, please do not hesitate to let me know. Also, if you know anyone that meets the qualifications, please let me know.

Thank you,
Brant D. Pearson,
Ph.D. Candidate Researcher
Ashford University



Appendix C: Informed Consent Statement

Prior to the study, experts were informed and provided consent, via Zoho Signature, to the purpose and importance of the study, his or her responsibilities as a participant, how the data would be collected and used, and how the data would be presented.

Informed Consent for a Study on the Risks and Paradigm Shifts Associated with an Employee's Right to Self-Identify on Social Media: A Delphi Study

You are being invited to participate in a research project conducted by Brant Pearson, who is a doctoral candidate at Ashford University.

You are invited to participate as a Human Resources Expert in a research study about the Risk and Paradigm Shifts Associated with an Employee's Right to Self-Identify on Social Media. The purpose of this qualitative classical Delphi research study was to develop a consensus among a panel of up to 26 United States human resources experts on identifying desirable and feasible organizational guidelines for personal social media account posts concerning company information. The research may be beneficial in adding to the current literature and providing direction to organizations for creating desirable and feasible social media guidelines, which may help to reduce a company's exposure and protect an employee's ability to self-identify on social media.

The qualitative Delphi Study will utilize a data collection and analysis approach, which you will be asked to complete four rounds of sequential questionnaires, as noted below.

Questionnaire rounds will:

- a. *Round 1:* Focus on organizational tolerance and the risks of social media use on personal and company time and the identification of current and future guidelines.
- b. *Round 2:* Allow expert participants to identify and rate solutions for future desirable and feasible guidelines on a five-point Likert-type scale.
- c. *Round 3:* Allow expert participants to rate, using a four-point Likert-type scale, the top current and future guidelines discovered in Round 2.
- d. *Round 4:* Provide expert participants the opportunity to validate and determine confidence in the identified social media guidelines.

Your participation is entirely voluntary, and you have the right to withdraw your consent or discontinue participation at any time. You have the right to refuse to answer any

question(s) for any reason during the questionnaires. The survey questions are not intended to be intrusive or cause distress; if you feel distressed at any time, you have the right to withdraw. If you choose not to answer all the questions or want to withdraw from the study, email the researcher immediately. In the unlikely event that I, the researcher, sense distress, or a lack of participation, I will recommend your removal from the study.

Although participation is entirely voluntary, and you have the right to withdrawal at any time. It is requested that if you wish to participate in the study, you are able, willing, and make every effort to complete all questions in each round. Your participation is critical to validating and contributing to a growing body of research in identifying desirable and feasible social media guidelines. Organizations in various industries and employees from across the country, and possibly the world, may benefit from your experiences, knowledge, and expertise as part of the study.

The study is designed to maintain ethical, moral, and confidentiality throughout, as noted in the previous email(s) and/or other communication. Furthermore, a description of your experiences will be part of the published study, but your name will be replaced with a pseudonym to protect your anonymity and ensure that your privacy will be maintained in all publications or presentations.

If you use any company names or names of colleagues/managers during the study, those names will not be used in any publications or presentations associated with this study unless given consent. Instead, the company will be referred to as “the company” or “organization,” and any additional colleagues/managers will be referred to as “third party contributors” or “dialogist,” or similar language will be used.

The potential risks associated with this study could include full participation, timely completion of each questionnaire, and any public use or presentations of the findings. We expect the project to benefit you, your organization, and other businesses by being able to better understand desirable and feasible social media guidelines. There is no compensation for your participation. However, your participation could help your organization and others become more informed and aligned with the modern-day use of social media.

Data will be collected and analyzed digitally in real-time using Zoho Survey. Following each round of the survey, you will be provided a summary of the previous round. Following the final round of the study, along with subsequent approval of the researcher, research committee, and/or Ashford University, all recorded materials and data will be analyzed, summarized, and presented in a formal and public manner as part of the research findings and used at the discretion of the researcher.

If you have any questions regarding this study, you may contact the researcher, Brant Pearson, at [REDACTED] or [REDACTED]. If you have questions regarding your rights as a research participant or any concerns regarding the study, you may report them – confidentially, if you wish – to the Ashford University chairperson of the Institutional Review Board at [REDACTED].

Brant D. Pearson,
Ph.D. Candidate Researcher
Ashford University



Melanie Shaw,
Dissertation Chair
Ashford University



Please Indicate if You Have:	Yes	No
1.) A Bachelor's Degree (or higher) in human resources		
2.) Worked 3 or more years within some human resource capacity		
3.) Currently working at least part-time in some human resource capacity		
4.) Live within the United States		
5.) Work for a United States registered business		

Participant Name:
Participant Current Job Title:
Participant Contact Number:
Participant Contact Email:
Consenting Participant Signature:
Consent Date:

Researcher Name: Brant Pearson
Consenting Researcher Signature:
Date:

Appendix D: Questionnaires

1. **Round 1:** The Risks, Tolerance, and Guidelines of Social Media Use

a. Importance and Risks

- i. What are five potential challenges and/or risks associated with an employee's use of personal social media accounts, **on COMPANY time**, concerning company information published online? (Central

Tendency: Theme/Mode)

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

- ii. What are five potential challenges and/or risks associated with an employee's use of personal social media accounts, **on PERSONAL time**, concerning company information published online? (Central

Tendency: Theme/Mode)

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

iii. What is the importance of social media guidelines? (Central Tendency: Mean)

1. (1) Very Unimportant
2. (2) Unimportant
3. (3) Neutral
4. (4) Important
5. (5) Very Important

iv. What is your level of social media tolerance? (Central Tendency: Mean)

1. (1) Very Unimportant
2. (2) Unimportant
3. (3) Neutral
4. (4) Important
5. (5) Very Important

b. Current Guidelines

i. What are ten of the most important and **CURRENT** social media guidelines your organization uses? (Central Tendency: Theme/Mode)

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.

- 7.
- 8.
- 9.
- 10.

c. Future Guidelines

- i. What are ten social media guidelines you deem desirable and feasible for any organization in the **FUTURE**? (Central Tendency:

Theme/Mode)

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.
- 7.
- 8.
- 9.
- 10.

2. **Round 2:** Summarize the identify themes from Round 1

a. Importance and Risks

- i. What is the importance of social media guidelines?

1. Average rating: 4.16

- ii. What is your level of social media tolerance?

1. Average rating: 3.68
- iii. What are the top five reoccurring potential challenges and risks associated with an employee's use of social media?
- iv. The top five reoccurring themes, out of 141 responses, regarding the potential challenges and risks associated with an employee's use of social media were:
 1. Productivity-13.5%
 2. Confidentiality/Security/Safety/Legal-36.2%
 3. Reputation—19.9%
 4. Poor Communication-19.1%
 5. Employee Relations/Professional Conduct-11.3%

b. Current Guidelines

- i. Based on Round 1 and the reoccurring themes discovered in the question, “what are ten of the most important and **CURRENT** social media guidelines your organization uses,” rate the desirability and feasibility of each of the following potential guidelines.
 1. Each theme was rated based on the Five-Point Likert-type Scale
 - a. (1) Very Undesirable and Unfeasible
 - b. (2) Undesirable and Unfeasible
 - c. (3) Neutral
 - d. (4) Desirable and Feasible
 - e. (5) Very Desirable and Feasible

c. Future Guidelines

- i. Based on Round 1 and the reoccurring themes discovered in the question, “what are ten of the most important and **FUTURE** social media guidelines your organization uses,” rate the desirability and feasibility of each of the following potential guidelines.

1. Each theme was rated based on the Five-Point Likert-type Scale

- a. (1) Very Undesirable and Unfeasible
- b. (2) Undesirable and Unfeasible
- c. (3) Neutral
- d. (4) Desirable and Feasible
- e. (5) Very Desirable and Feasible

3. **Round 3:** Based on the five-point Likert-type scale from Round 2, the highest-rated responses were used to identify a collective (current and future) set of guidelines, which you will note in Round 3.

a. Desirable and Feasible Guidelines

- i. Based on the collective guidelines, **rate the most Desirable and Feasible Social Media Guideline from each theme that could be used as a set standard for any organization.** A four-point Likert-type scale is used in Round 3 to help further identify the validity of each guideline.

1. Each theme was rated based on the Four-Point Likert-type Scale
 - a. (1) Very Undesirable and Unfeasible
 - b. (2) Undesirable and Unfeasible
 - c. (3) Desirable and Feasible
 - d. (4) Very Desirable and Feasible

4. **Round 4:** Based on the four-point Likert-type scale from Round 3, the highest-rated responses were used to identify a final set of 5 guidelines from each category/theme, which you will note in Round 4.
 - a. *Validation and Confidence*
 - i. For each identified guideline, **rate the importance, confidence, and validity for the Desirability and Feasibility** of each Social Media Guideline that could be used as a standard for any organization. A four-point Likert-type scale is used in Round 4 to further validate the confidence of each guideline. (Central Tendency: Mean)
 - ii. What is the importance of the identified social media guideline?
(Central Tendency: Mean)
 1. (1) Very Unimportant
 2. (2) Unimportant
 3. (3) Important
 4. (4) Very Important

iii. What is your confidence level of the identified desirable and feasible guidelines? (Central Tendency: Mean)

1. (1) Unreliable
2. (2) Risky
3. (3) Dependable
4. (4) Reliable

iv. What is the likelihood of implementing the identified guideline? (Central Tendency: Mean)

1. (1) Very Unlikely
2. (2) Unlikely
3. (3) Likely
4. (4) Very Likely

b. Based on the desirability and feasibility of the five identified guidelines that may be used as a set standard for any organization, what is the overall importance, confidence, and implementation of all five?

i. What is the importance of the identified social media guidelines?

1. (1) Very Unimportant
2. (2) Unimportant
3. (3) Important
4. (4) Very Important

ii. What is your confidence level of the identified guidelines?

1. (1) Unreliable
2. (2) Risky

3. (3) Dependable

4. (4) Reliable

iii. What is the likelihood of implementing the identified guidelines?

1. (1) Very Unlikely

2. (2) Unlikely

3. (3) Likely

4. (4) Very Likely

Appendix E: Researcher's Contact Information

Brant D. Pearson,

Ph.D. Candidate Researcher

Ashford University

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]