Development of a Social Media Maturity Model – A Grounded Theory Approach

Sylvia Geyer
University of Applied Sciences Technikum Wien
Vienna, Austria
sylvia.geyer@technikum-wien.at

Barbara Krumay
WU Vienna University of Economics and Business
Vienna, Austria
barbara.krumay@wu.ac.at

Abstract

Social media has become part of everyday lives. Discussions about whether social media is relevant to organizations no longer exist; instead, discussions on how to successfully adopt social media prevail. With much uncertainty on what it takes to reach excellence in social media use, companies often start with an uncoordinated approach, not taking into account all potential threats. However, little research is done on the diverse components of an organization that are influenced by the use of social media. Furthermore, a common understanding on when a company is “ready” for social media application is missing. Thus, this work seeks to describe a generic approach on assessing social media maturity. Applying grounded theory, a first version for a maturity model is developed which will serve as a tool for introducing and assessing organizational social media activities, including a set of relevant demographic information, organizational prerequisites, as well as dimensions of maturity.

1. Introduction

The construct “social media” incorporates two different “worlds”. Social refers to the participation of users, communication, and their relationships. Media focuses on the underlying technical and organizational preconditions like dynamics, interaction, and decentralization [1]. Web 2.0, which is the set of functionalities provided via Internet technology, can be seen as the platform that enables the existence of social media. Therefore, one can define social media as Internet-based applications allowing for creation and exchange of user-generated content (UGC) [2]. This interaction with communities has the potential to add value to the organization, if it is well designed and aligned with the company’s business [3]. Organizational application cannot solely be found for primary activities, but also in product development, marketing, sales, product support [3], employer branding, or customer support [4]. Examples for benefits of using social media are customer-aligned product development, improved brand loyalty, increased traffic, reduced costs for product support, [3] and improved knowledge of the market and the market situation [4-7].

Threats related to the use of social media for companies are marketing channel conflicts [3], loss of communication control [7], security and privacy issues [8], loss of reputation [9], lack of internal cooperation and internal know-how resulting in uncoordinated work, as well as target groups not being addressed properly [10].

Studies suggest that topics like advertisement, marketing, public relations, customer support, sales and distribution, internal communication, market research, collaboration, social recruiting, and product development are among the top ten reasons for companies to use social media [11]. These diverse uses of organizational social media already show the complexity of the field. A model allowing for a generic yet comprehensive view on the topic is missing.

With the application of a maturity model, the whole set of relevant considerations can be covered, decreasing the risk of uncoordinated build-it-and-they-will-come social media participation attempts. Therefore, the question addressed is: What does a maturity model for the organizational social media application look like, and what dimensions does it consist of?

The rest of the paper is structured as follows: Firstly, we present the state of the field in the area of social media and maturity models. Secondly, we describe our methodological approach. Thirdly, we illustrate our resulting model. Next, we discuss the results and implications for theory and practice. Finally, we discuss results and limitations as well as possible aspects of further research.

2. State of the Field
As stated above, social media combines social interactivities of participants allowing the exchange of user-generated content [2]. This includes a huge variety of technologies, tools and instruments, such as forums, blogs, discussion boards and chat rooms [12], social network sites, content communities, and wikis [13]. These technologies – mainly covered by the term Web 2.0 – have received great attention by companies in the last years [13]. Reasons for implementing social media activities are as diverse, including brand building, advertising, promotion, customer relationship building, retrieving information about customers or competitors and so on [14]. Decisions on social media usage of companies are influenced by different internal and external factors. External factors include pressure from the market, norms and dynamics in the sector, whereas internal factors are often referring to typical business factors such as costs or competitive advantage [14]. The main advantage but also the main challenge of social media is its dynamics, which is driven by the participants and not by the company alone. On the one hand, this makes it a powerful, fast and – on first sight – low-cost tool for diffusing messages from the company [2]. But on the other hand, social media requires a deep understanding of the mechanisms and the willingness to adopt this fast and uncontrollable medium [12]. A crisis – e.g. in form of a social media firestorm, which is an online outrage, evolving quickly and often radically [15] – has to be handled specifically.

However, companies need to consider social media not as an alternative but as an additional communication channel, therefore needing to deal with multi-channel management. In contrast to other conventional channels, social media can be seen as a bundle of communication possibilities, being interactive and allowing for several different ways of communication, involvement, and participation [1]. In connection with the different organizational reasons for adopting social media, the necessity of treating it specially becomes apparent. Social media is a “hybrid element of the promotion mix” [12] by shifting control over conversations to its participants. In order to be successful nonetheless, ways of shaping and guiding interactions are required [12], imposing new tasks to the participating organization.

Companies’ competitiveness – especially when being confronted with new challenges – is highly influenced by maturity the organization has reached. Whereas the maturity of naturally growing objects (plants, animals) can be defined by reaching a state of full development [16], a company’s maturity requires a more specific characterization since the state of being ripe cannot be identified easily. Hence, maturity stages in an organizational or business context are usually not addressing the company as a whole, but are connected to different organizational units or management systems, including project management [17-19], business process management [20, 21], software development [22, 23], supply chain management [24] and many more. In this context, different definitions for maturity have become common. Maturity of organizations has been defined as a “state where the organization is in a perfect condition to achieve its objectives” [17], or when talking about processes, especially software development processes, “maturity is the extent to which a specific process is explicitly defined, managed, measured, controlled and effective” [23]. Hence, maturity means that a specific object has to have reached a certain stage at which it cannot develop any further or has to switch to another stage. The measurement of such maturity depends on different dimensions or factors, which are preconditions for or characteristics of the object.

Concerning the measurement of social media maturity, the rare academic approaches of such models so far rather focus on specific application areas like the field of open government [25]. In practice, there are some more generic approaches with most models focusing on the maturity phases a company is in, often based on the idea of the theory of diffusion of innovation, giving little or no assessment criteria [26-30]. The models by Van der Sleen [31] and Summa [32] differ by considering relevant organizational dimensions as well, although not giving further information on evaluation or assessment criteria. In practice, maturity models assist a company with assessing the current status of social media adoption as well as identifying the gap yet to overcome.

The models presented thus far provide evidence that there is no maturity model considering the complexity of organizational integration of social media in a comprehensive way. They fail to consider the complex set of influenced organizational areas for successfully going and staying social. Due to their rather rough structure, they also do not allow for a differentiated view of all relevant dimensions.

3. Methodological Approach

When developing theories, models or frameworks, researchers often face different methodological problems. Grounded theory has become popular, being a methodology to develop a theory based on data, and an increasing number of examples for its application can be found [33, 34]. It has been defined “as a qualitative research method that uses a systematic set of procedures to develop an inductively derived grounded theory about a phenomenon” [35]. Compared to other approaches to theory development it does not
separate data collection and analysis. It is rather based on the idea that while collecting data and simultaneously analyzing the data, a theory can be further developed or newly created [35]. Hence, building a theory can be seen as a creative, dynamic, and iterative process. It is important to realize that grounded theory is not about counting numbers, but assessing concepts, their meaning, and relationship [36].

As a precondition to develop a strong substantiation of concepts in a theory, framework or model, data collection requires systematic and rigorous procedures which can be applied to different sources (e.g. interviews, prior research, documents and other artifacts) [35]. These sources are analyzed by using appropriate coding procedures [37, 38]. Concepts about the investigated object are developed. At first they are provisional, but by being permanently evidenced (or absent) in the data, the concept “earns its way into the theory” [39]. In addition, artifacts serve as a basis for theoretical sampling [40], which “requires paying attention to theoretical relevance and purpose” of the data [34]. It means that the selection of new sources is based on already analyzed sources and hence contributing to the concepts’ representativeness.

Coding is based on comparing concepts found, where codes similar to codes already found contribute to the density of the concept, and codes newly found are able to account for a new concept [33]. By each and every source coded, the scientist gains knowledge about the investigated object [37, 38]. Therefore, coding requires theoretical sensitivity and is supported by creating memos, describing the evolving concepts. Codes and concepts repeatedly evolving have to be categorized [41]. However, not all concepts discovered in the coding procedure will fit into these categories [39]. A multi-step coding procedure has been proposed by different authors in different ways [42]. However, some coding procedures dominate literature, including open, selective and theoretical coding. As an initial step, open coding is done for “breaking data apart and delineating concepts” and identifying the concepts’ “properties and dimensions” [40:195, 43]. Axial coding, which has been stated to “go hand in hand” [40:198] with open coding, is used to assess relationships between concepts evolving from open coding. In a next step, selective coding identifies variables associated with the core category and thus defines the frame of the grounded model [33]. Finally, theoretical coding has been defined as “conceptualize how the substantive codes may relate to each other as hypotheses to be integrated into a theory” [44]. Although the different steps were subject to changes and vary between authors, all are focused on developing a sound and grounded theory [43]. Coding should continue until theoretical saturation has been reached [33, 35].

4. Model Development

We adopted a grounded theory approach for the development of the model. In the fresh field of social media, where academic literature so far has not addressed maturity of social media application, we used different data sources (academic literature, practical sources, e.g. guidelines and case studies) as a basis for development. Accordingly, we applied theoretical sampling which has been found to be “especially important when studying new or uncharted areas because it allows for discovery” [39]. After each analysis, we developed a provisional model (referred to as SM-MM.prov), which was further iterated. While collecting the data, coding and analysis took place concurrently supported by software (Atlas.ti). In the open coding phase, newly found as well as repeatedly found concepts were added to the model; relationships between the codes were developed to add meaning and understanding to the concepts. In the selective coding phase we excluded concepts that were not evidenced in any other source or did not fit the core category.

We started with academic literature addressing companies’ approach to social media application (3 sources, L1 – L3) [45]. However, we did not gain the impression of theoretical saturation at this stage, hence more theoretical sampling was necessary and we enlarged the sample by data from practice (6 sources, P1 – P6). This practitioners’ point of view further contributed to the development of the model’s different dimensions. It furthermore supported the density of the concepts concerning their relationships, overlaps and differences. The existing models from practice (P1 – P3) especially contributed to existing concepts of preconditions and adoption, but also generated new concepts of strategic and operational social media maturity. The cases (P4) contributed to the concepts of strategic and operational maturity, but added concepts of social listening and monitoring, social media integration as well as human resources. The guideline and policy added a concept of social responsibility and organizational culture. An overview on the analyzed sources and a short characterization can be found below (Table 1). From these sources we were able to develop a first provisional model, indicating that three main concepts can be differentiated: demographics, preconditions and adoption, and actual dimensions of social media maturity.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sources from literature</th>
<th>Paper</th>
<th>Weinberg, De Ruyter, Delarocas, Buck and Keeling [46]</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>L1</td>
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Sources from practice

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Sources from practice</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tr>
<td>P1 Model</td>
<td>Moore [27]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P2 Model</td>
<td>Pw/Smc [28]</td>
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<td>P3 Model</td>
<td>Sleem [31]</td>
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<tr>
<td>P4 Cases (8)</td>
<td>Holloman [48], pp. 147-183</td>
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<tr>
<td>P5 Guideline</td>
<td>Intel [49]</td>
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<tr>
<td>P6 Policy</td>
<td>Procter &amp; Gamble [50]</td>
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Table 1. Characteristics of Analyzed Sources

Since all the sources mentioned above did still not lead to theoretical saturation, we invited five experts from the field and were able to interview three of them (E1, E2, E3). All three experts have been in touch with one of the authors before. The experts are well-established consultants (E1 – social media strategist & coach; E2 – media, social media and mobile media communication) or have experience at the operational level (E3 – social media manager in organizations). All three experts have many years of experience in the field. All interviews were conducted in the native language of the interviewees. The interviews took place at different venues, either at the office of the interviewer, the office of the interviewee or a neutral location (meeting room). Interviews with E1 and E3 were conducted by one of the authors (A) with another author (B) present, whereas the interview with E2 was conducted by one author (B) alone. Interviews took place in spring 2014. All interviews were recorded and transcribed. Results presented here were translated from the interview language. Table 2 further describes the interviewee’s experience, interview situation, as well as the interview duration.

Table 2. Interviewee characteristics, interview situation, interview duration

Starting with an introduction, the interviewer used pre-defined, open questions to gain information in the form of narratives and stories of the interviewees. The interviewer applied techniques to maintain interactivity (rephrasing questions, asking for more explanation) until the phase of saturation was reached. The pre-defined questions were (translated from the native language of the interviewees):

- OQ1: What are the preconditions in a company in order to be able to introduce social media successfully?
- OQ2: What does a company need to implement or operate social media successfully?

When the open part of the interview had reached a certain exhaustion or saturation, we showed the experts the current status of the SM-MM.prov and asked them to explain the dimensions' contents from their own point of view. Furthermore, we encouraged them to describe the dimensions in their own words. Finally, we asked them to add or exclude dimensions based on their experience.

One expert (E1) emphasized in the open part of the interview that the organizational structure of the company has an enormous influence on successful social media implementation and strategy development. The structure has to be clear, declared and well-defined. In this context, the expert mentioned resources (time, money, staff) as being influential. Furthermore, E1 referred to the existence of processes, which have to be seen in a more flexible way than in other business areas, in particular he named “overcoming inflexible processes” and “the ability to react to changes in internal and external circumstances”. This is necessary to deliver information at the right time. In addition, planning and “social media implementation in the form of projects” was emphasized. Moreover, some internal preconditions were mentioned, such as awareness for social media throughout the whole company, existence of guidelines and guiding principles, as well as the company website as the core prerequisite for social media implementation leading to “organizational readiness”. The expert explained that problems may arise from not differentiating between different social media channels. From this point of view, monitoring and controlling all activities is an additional important precondition. All preconditions are necessary to develop a social media strategy, allowing tactical and operational activities. Concerning the further development of the model, the expert largely agreed with the existing model, but not on the labeling of dimension M.6 (labeled CSR, corporate social responsibility, in the provisional model). Although it was recognized by the expert as being very important, the term CSR was not identified in this context.

Another expert (E2) focused in the open part of the interview on differences of companies concerning size, industry and support from high-level management to be able to differentiate between “social media affinities”. These differences are also influencing resources which are available or allocated to social media activities. According to this expert, successful social media implementation requires the development
of a special mindset within the company and flexibility as well as the ability to handle criticism coming from the channels. The company’s higher management needs to understand the “digital world” and managers should use social media themselves. According to this expert’s opinion, a general social media maturity model has to first address this situation before it can measure the maturity. In addition, companies have to develop a clear understanding on what social media is and what it should be used for. Besides positive attitudes, the company requires skilled or trained staff and has to calculate costs. Internal guidelines have to be developed and responsibilities within the companies have to be defined. Concerning the existing model, the expert did not address the demographic dimensions but heavily advocated for redefining project and process management and replacing it by “agile” forms thereof. Concerning M.6, the expert understood the concept, but questioned if CSR was the right term and recommended to find a dimension subsuming the companies’ responsibility for their social media activities in terms of e.g. guidelines, netiquette (code of conduct for the company and users using the company’s medium), and responsibility rules. This expert suggested to add a dimension on content but also explained the possibility to include content into strategy and operational social media management.

The last expert (E3) emphasized in the open part of the interview on skills of staff, “basic” IT resources (mobile devices, cameras etc.) and organizational structure in terms of preconditions. The existence of ways for mobile communication was quite often addressed by the interviewee. Furthermore, monitoring, measuring and controlling based on performance indicators were named as being important. Existing structures in terms of processes as well as tools were mentioned. In addition, the willingness to participate and know-how on channels are required. He also emphasized the importance of an existing company strategy being the basis for the development of a social media strategy. When shown the SM-MM.prov, the expert agreed with all dimensions but M.6. After explaining the dimension, the expert confirmed the importance of the dimension but advised renaming it to better reflect the companies’ social and moral obligation in their social media activities.

The following table (Table 3) shows if and how the experts addressed the different dimensions developed from the previous analysis. In the open part of the interview (OP), the dimensions have four different states: N = not mentioned, S = mentioned, but not seen as important, Y = mentioned; E = emphasized (in terms of meaning or frequency). In the part of the interview where the interviewees where shown the provisional maturity model (SM-MM.prov) for further development, the states were coded as follows: A = agreement or D = disagreement; R = requiring redefinition; I = could not interpret nor explain the dimension, required information from the authors.

### Table 3. Dimensions represented in the interviews per expert

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<th>E1</th>
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<tr>
<td>D.1</td>
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<td>E</td>
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<tr>
<td>D.2</td>
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<td>A</td>
<td>Y</td>
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<tr>
<td>P.1</td>
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<td>N</td>
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<tr>
<td>P.2</td>
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<tr>
<td>P.3</td>
<td>E</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>Y</td>
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<td>M.1</td>
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<td>M.3</td>
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<tr>
<td>M.4</td>
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<tr>
<td>M.5</td>
<td>E</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>E</td>
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<tr>
<td>M.6</td>
<td>N</td>
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5. The Social Media Maturity Model (SM-MM)

The further development based on the source analysis leads to the following version of the maturity model:

![Figure 1. Social Media Maturity Model (SM-MM), current stage](image)

Three different parts of the model were identified: demographics, organizational readiness and maturity as such. The relationship among these three parts is as follows: as the goal of the maturity model is to assess companies, the area of demographics is relevant for conducting a company analysis. It helps to identify the current market position which will serve as an input to further social media related activities (e.g. strategy planning). Prerequisites incorporate the organizational aspects that influence the success of social media adoption in an organization, and can therefore also be reviewed previous to social media use. The different dimensions of the maturity model (M1-M6) are then
used for assessing actual social media use in the organization.

The dimensions M1 to M6 each contain different aspects of social media maturity. Therefore, a company will have to work on all maturity dimensions for achieving social media excellence.

5.1. Demographics

Demographical information describes the company at its current stage and is further grouped into general demographical information (D.1) and social media status (D.2), both assessing the current situation of the organization. General demographical information aims at describing the company including size, location, industry, company statistics, products, services, and organizational structure. This assessment allows for the classification of the company, which will be required for market, customer, and competitor analysis. The social media status is about assessing the current use of social media. The following categories of social media are reviewed [2]: (1) collaborative projects, (2) blogs, (3) content communities, (4) social networking sites, (5) virtual game worlds, and (6) virtual social worlds.

5.2. Preconditions

The section of preconditions covers the broad field of organizational readiness. Recent evidence allows for the suggestion that there is a set of preconditions heavily influencing the successful introduction and use of social media in an organization. These preconditions are further grouped into three types: project management (P.1), process management (P.2) and organizational culture (P.3).

The introduction of a social media strategy will require solid project management support including the management of the change [51]. After the actual introduction of the new strategy, follow-up projects on guideline creation, development of social (mobile) applications, or the introduction of social data mining will require professional project management skills as well. Therefore, the precondition type project management refers to the experience, know-how, and relevant organizational structure for conducting social media-related projects successfully. Moreover, aspects of change and knowledge management are touched on.

The field of process management is included for several reasons: overview and description of the company’s processes, experience in describing and defining processes, and an established continuous improvement. In order to know what the company’s core competencies are, an enterprise process model is required. On this basis, the relations between processes can be assessed and studied [52]. As for social media use, a major success criterion is authenticity; knowing what your company is about, and being able to deliver a single face to the customer is therefore crucial. Moreover, organizational responsibilities and the underlying organizational structure become clear. Furthermore, the use of process management saves the company from being stuck with functional silos [46]. The experience in describing processes will be necessary because social media activities will require predefined processes as well. An already existing continuous improvement process in the organization does not only ensure improvements of the social media-related processes, but also gives evidence of an open culture that embraces improvements, empowers its employees, and values the ideas of every employee the same way.

The third type of precondition is the organizational culture. Already influenced by the cultural aspects imposed by the use of project and process management, this type of precondition is concerned with whether the whole organization is ready for going social. As a starting point, a company must have a defined company mission and vision as well as employees being aware of how to reach the vision. Employee commitment as well as the awareness of the use of social media is essential. Furthermore, management commitment for social media initiatives must be present [1, 13]. Customer orientation, also indicated by the use of process management, needs to be a central value of the company. Both process and project management, rely on the existence of a learning organization. Employee empowerment is required due to the necessity of employees working on their own on different platforms, just by following existing guidelines and rules, in turn requiring adequate leadership styles [53]. From the organizational structure, mixed teams in combination with a matrix structure are considered as favorable [54]. Change management is necessary for social media introduction and, due to the nature of the field, for the constant changes required to stay successful.

5.3. Dimensions of the Social Media Maturity Model SM-MM

The maturity model itself consists of six dimensions: Operational social media management (M.1), human resource management (M.2), social listening and monitoring (M.3), social media integration (M.4), social media strategy (M.5) and guidelines for responsible behavior (M.6).
5.3.1. Operational social media management. The dimension of operational social media management focuses on the actual implementation of the strategies. Business processes on the operational management and use of social media activities, as well as processes for campaign development and implementation are part of this dimension. A definition of responsibilities as well as the rough flow of actions will have a positive impact on the quality of social media activities alone and allow for better integration in the existing communication structures. This includes processes like daily posting, community management, and crisis management. In order to become successful, business processes for aligning social media-related tasks need to be implemented [46]. Example criteria for measuring this dimension could be: process descriptions, content plans, communication plans.

5.3.2. Human resource management. The human resource management dimension reflects staff-related issues. This starts with the introduction of social media-related roles [1] and role descriptions containing social media-related tasks. Commonly used roles are social media manager/expert [55], social media consultant, and community manager. Another approach is setting up a social media expert pool [46]. Additionally, training programs [47], career paths, and incentive systems for those roles need to be established. For further employments of social media-related personnel, the development of selection criteria based on the role descriptions is required. Example criteria for this dimension could be: role descriptions, career paths, coaching and mentoring programs.

5.3.3. Social listening and monitoring. Social listening and monitoring includes the assessment and understanding of the relevant stakeholders and their sentiments [56, 57]. It is about knowing what they are doing, what they are talking about, and what their tonality is in order to derive or adapt one’s own activities. Based on social listening, learning, responding, and measuring can take place [57]. As understanding is seen to be a key to successful social media management, this is considered the basis for further development of metrics and social media dashboards [58]. In order to instantly use and profit from the current customers’ opinions, the introduction of tools is recommended [59]. Example criteria for this dimension could be: metrics and KPI descriptions, competitor analyses, customer analyses.

5.3.4. Social media integration. Spaulding [3] describes in his work the approach of considering the core and support business processes of a company as a basis for discussing the participation in social media activities. With business processes being a means of overcoming functional silos and introducing cross-functional cooperation, this can be seen as one step towards social media integration across a company’s different departments (product development, marketing, sales, etc.). In their work, Weinberg and Pehlivan [60] cover the aspect of aligning the different social media channels, reflecting another aspect of social media integration. Furthermore, the integration of the social media mix into existing cross-channel activities is to be considered [12]. Equally important is the ICT support of the tasks outlined [1]. This includes workflow management systems, previously mentioned social media monitoring software, reporting software, content management software, mobile applications, and the like. In addition, the use of data warehouses and data mining can be used for text analysis [61]. Example criteria for this dimension could be: process descriptions, goal definitions.

5.3.5. Social media strategy. The social media strategy dimension encompasses all strategic aspects of organizational social media use. In contrast to organizational prerequisites like top-level management support for the topic, this dimension is about the actual social media-related strategic decisions. In order to successfully introduce and run social media in an organization, a social media strategy is required [47, 48]. Social media strategies are tools for defining the target audience, the respective goals, and the required resources for the whole social media endeavor as well as on a platform-specific level. The existence of strategic social media business processes like strategy, reviews illustrates the successful anchoring of social media topics in an organization’s management processes [46]. Furthermore, and based on the developed strategy, guidelines and policies for the use of social media are required. Social media guidelines contain the information on which, how, and by whom social media is done in the organization [62] and clarifying the scope of action for every employee. Due to the democratization of communication [63] in an enterprise using social media, the existence and quality of such guidelines are seen as a critical success factor and as a leadership tool. Moreover, existing documents on content planning as well as communication and crisis management will be required. These documents ensure the aligned and systematic approach towards social media channel usage. Example criteria for this dimension could be: social media strategy paper, process descriptions.

5.3.6. Guidelines for responsible behavior. The use of social media will be based on – and in turn will
influence – corporate-society relations [64]. Organizational social media use imposes several threats to the organization triggered by the increased transparency on the market [65]. Therefore, companies should engage in CSR activities covering topics of self-regulation like: transparency [49], privacy, security, legal issues, ethics, and general organizational responsibility. Guidelines, policies, and processes for these topics can therefore serve as risk mitigation techniques [65]. Example artifacts of this dimension could be: privacy and security guidelines, code of conduct, wording manuals.

6. Discussion

This paper illustrates the aspects relevant to successful social media implementation and operation in organizations. We developed a maturity model based on a grounded theory approach indicating the relevance of diverse organizational aspects. The maturity model at this stage is destined to be generally applicable, therefore serving different company sizes, business models or industries. It is independent from the current state-of-the-art social network service or tool provider, but rather focuses on the conceptual questions. The model takes into consideration the necessity for company-wide coordination and integration with existing structures, including social media use with external as well as internal stakeholders.

Literature screening suggested that there is no adequate approach in assessing the social media maturity of organizations. Whereas the necessity for elaborating on organizational aspects for excellent social media use is undisputed [6, 46], very little research is done on the development of a comprehensive and generic approach. Models addressing this topic considered at the time of research either focus on giving a rough outline on the topic, consider a specific aspect of social media use only (e.g. posting frequencies), are tailor-made for a very specific area (e.g. politics) [25-32], and/or lack the academic approach. As Weinberg et al. discuss, more research needs to be done regarding organizational social media use on: how can companies evolve, what common best practices are there (e.g. successful applications or contexts), how do organizational structures have to adapt, as well as what relevant measures for preparing success are there [46]. By building this unique maturity model structure, we contribute to the academic world. Based on this, research regarding the measurement of dimensions and relevant performance indicators, optimized maturity dimension design, dependencies between dimensions, or procedure models on social media introduction can be done.

The relevance of the model lies in the novelty of a comprehensive approach on social media use. The model allows for further development of scales measuring actual social media maturity levels, in turn being used as benchmarks. Future use of the model therefore will include measuring social media maturity, becoming a relevant benchmark for social media activities, and serve as an input when planning social media projects as well as when developing social media documentation.

Our practical implications lie in the actual use of the model for assessing and benchmarking a company’s social media activities on their way to excellent social media usage. At the current stage, the model may serve as a template for companies wishing to implement social media activities. It clearly shows the important dimensions required for being successful. The model at hand allows a rough assessment of existing social media initiatives and provides guidance on relevant issues for upcoming projects. Due to the above-mentioned lack of scales, it does not allow for actually measuring the degree of maturity yet. Moreover, a discussion on cross-influence between dimensions is required in further research.

7. Conclusion, limitations and further research

We have developed our maturity model based on different sources, coming to a stable version, therefore being able to answer the research question on the design of a social media maturity model (Figure 1). Three parts (demographics, organizational readiness and social media maturity) have been identified. In these parts, different dimensions have been developed from the sources, leading to two areas in the demographic part and three regarding organizational readiness. Concerning maturity, in dimensions M.1 – M.5 agreement has been found. The most problematic dimension was M.6 (formerly named CSR), where no consensus has been found, but mainly regarding the naming and not concerning its importance or content. Although some data suggested the label CSR for dimension M.6 (based on definitions of CSR), it was found that the label was not understood by the interviewees in the way intended. To enhance comprehensibility and therefore ease its use, a more intuitive label was chosen (since all sources agreed on the contents of the dimension). This led to a re-labeling of the dimension, already being introduced in the current version of the SM-MM.

The generalizability of these results is subject to certain limitations. Firstly, the experts all come from the same country and have a more or less similar
educational background and experience. Introducing the model in an international context may produce further insights. Secondly, the current model lacks an underlying measurement model; hence it is not applicable for companies yet. Thirdly, since social media as such is a rather young and still changing field of study, it might require re-modeling in the next stage of developing the underlying measurement model. Notwithstanding these limitations, the results allowed us to develop a stable and applicable version of the maturity model.

Further research can include the development of scales for the different areas of the maturity model as well as the application of the maturity model in certain cases. From these cases we expect insights on the relevance as well as the validity of the scales and the model itself. This can be conducted on a national as well as international level, in turn generating findings on regional differences and the applicability of the model. Furthermore, procedure models on social media maturity measurement should be developed.

8. References

[16] Merriam-Webster, "Maturity", in (Editor, 'ed.' Book Maturity