

Chapter 11

The Effect of Social Media and Social Networking on Perceptions of Leadership and Leaders

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Abstract Leadership, one of today's most important public undertakings, is brimming with problems in which all the challenges of complex social life and the globalizing world are directly felt. Together with the changing world and the person, perception of leadership and interaction systems among people are also changing. This paper argues that social media and social network analysis provide a useful theoretical framework for understanding the dynamic evolution of leadership and the complex interactions among leadership actors. It is argued that leadership can be conceptualized and modeled as a complex, dynamic system, which exhibits both unpredictability and underlying order. The relevance of social media and social networking for strategy and applicability is discussed, and a number of managerial implications are suggested. To illustrate the application of social media and social network analysis, a comparative view is presented that depicts the interactions between individuals and their perception of leadership. The views presented in this paper demonstrate how managers might underestimate the effect of social media and social networking on the perceptions of leadership. The paper concludes that, by understanding leadership as a complex system, leaders can improve decision making and adopt innovative approaches to dealing with social media and social networking in the organization. The paper thus is a jewel in the crown of the elusive body of knowledge within the social media and social networking realm.

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Ş.Ş. Erçetin (ed.), *Chaos, Complexity and Leadership 2014*,

Springer Proceedings in Complexity, DOI 10.1007/978-3-319-18693-1_11

11.1 The Conceptual View of Organizations and Organizational Success

Organizations are considered to be social entities where a position can be measured by social-psychological and demographic data [1, 2, 45]. Location and connection to others provides information about members and group identification. A person's perceived position is essential in determining his or her beliefs, interests and motivation for action [8, 9, 40]. Additionally, people with close ties tend to maintain similar interpretations of the organizational environment [7] and tend to act similarly. This results in flows of social information and the tendency for people to seek out similar others.

Formal organizations are social groups that distribute tasks for a collective goal. That is why network research on organizations may focus on either intra-organizational or inter-organizational ties in terms of formal or informal relationships. Intra-organizational networks themselves often contain multiple levels of analysis, especially in larger organizations with multiple branches, franchises or semi-autonomous departments.

Research has shown that organizational success largely depends on employees who are considered as one of the most important assets of any organization because they are capable of creating value and enable organizations have a sustainable competitive advantage [17, 19, 29, 31, 45]. Indeed organizations that learn and adapt faster to social networking trends will have a clear advantage in the market place and ultimately increase their bottom lines. But this is preceded by the nature of leadership in the said organization which equally responds and reacts to the way it is perceived. Interestingly this leadership perception is shaped by social media and social networking.

Over the past 15 years, the world as we know it has been taken by storm through the onset of social media. According to Comscore [11] about 90 % of Internet users visit a social media site each month. Because we live in such a largely global-society, creating and maintaining an online presence has become most relevant in promoting your brand and expanding your social network.

By their very nature, educational institutions have a complex structure and exhibit a non-linear situation. Therefore, for an educational institution to be successful, it must define the education phenomenon as a chaotic phenomenon [23]. In Radford's opinion [37], schools are organizations under the influence of different effects of multiple implicit or explicit elements and also intending to create different effects. In these organizations there is no single and unchanging formula for success. So there are many factors affecting the success of those organizations. According to Garmston and Wellman [21], schools are also under the influence of their own feedbacks. As a child, these feedbacks increase resonantly and exponentially. Thus they create radical changes. So in order to get the desired result, it is necessary to note that the effect on the system shall be the right effect for the long term [10, 28].

Reilly refers to this as follows: [39, p. 424] "*the linear proportional relationship can not be established in the education system*" and he gives the following example:

“in order to assess whether educational investments are successful, looking the ratios of inputs and outputs is the result of a linear thought and this is a faulty assessment.” Sullivan [42] also emphasizes this chaotic order in educational institutions. He also implies that the administrators can get the opportunity to bring a new dynamic to the school using the environment of educational institution and the network of relationships in chaotic environment. In other words, it is possible for the administrator to turn the chaos into an opportunity by taking more advantage of environment.

11.2 Conceptual Description of Social Media and Social Networking

The prevalence and continued growth of social media has changed virtually every facet of how we socialize and engage for both personal and professional activities [33, 44]. Social media is not only extremely pervasive; it is an activity in which you are expected to participate. Not all social media is Facebook and Instagram. Think LinkedIn, the new virtual business profile quickly replacing the traditional printed resume. This phenomenon is a tangible version of Rogers’s concept of the ideal self. We have a general persona we construct and put out to the cyber universe based on the person we want to be, and more important, based on the person we want to be seen as.

While there are a number of positive aspects to social media, it is important to take a look at what effect (negative) it has presented on the perception of leadership and some alternatives to adopt a successful social media policy in various workplaces.

Social networks have also had a measurable impact on workplace activities as human resource policies are adjusted to keep pace with the new social norms. Social networks on the other hand are self-organizing, emergent, and complex, such that a pattern appears from the interaction of the elements that make up the system [34]. These patterns become more apparent as network size increases.

According to Drew Hendricks [24], a tech, social and environmental addict, “there are tremendous varieties of social networking sites, and many of them can be linked to allow cross posting. This creates an environment where users can reach the maximum number of people without sacrificing the intimacy of person-to-person communication. We can only speculate about what the future of social networking may look in next decade or even 100 years from now, but it seems clear that it will exist in some form for long as human are alive”. In the world today communication and getting timely information is vital in all aspects.

Most larger social networks display features of social complexity, which involves substantial non-trivial features of network topology, with patterns of complex connections between elements that are neither purely regular nor purely random (see, complexity science, dynamical system and chaos theory), as do biological,

and technological networks. Such complex network features include a heavy tail in the degree distribution, a high clustering coefficient, assortativity or disassortativity among vertices, community structure, and hierarchical structure. In the case of agency-directed networks these features also include reciprocity, triad significance profile and other features. In contrast, many of the mathematical models of networks that have been studied in the past, such as lattices and random graphs, do not show these features [41].

Social network theory is the study of how the social structure of relationships around a person, group, or organization affects beliefs or behaviors. Network analysis is a set of methods for detecting and measuring the patterns. The axiom of every network approach is that reality should be primarily conceived and investigated from the view of the properties of relations between and within units instead of the properties of these units themselves. It is a relational approach. In social and communication science these units are social units: individuals, groups/organizations and societies.

Social network analysis is a collection of concepts, measures, and techniques for relational analysis. It is an approach that is specifically designed to grasp the most important features of social structures and it is unrivalled in this task. It can be used to explore social relations themselves and also the cultural structures of norms and ideas that help to organize those relations in conjunction with material circumstances.

Social network analysis is focused on uncovering the patterning of people's interaction. Network analysis is based on these patterns, which is important features of the lives of the individuals. Choices of individual depend in large part on how that individual is tied into the larger social network. Social network approach is guided by formal theory organized in mathematical terms, and grounded in the systematic analysis of empirical data. It has found important applications in organizational behavior, inter-organizational relations, and the spread of contagious diseases, mental health, social support, the diffusion of information and animal social organization.

Social network analysis is a suitable method for investigating relations and interactions. Social network analysis is an approach rooted in anthropology, sociology and social psychology for assessing social structures [5]. The social network perspective illustrates social systems as networks of various relationships [6, 27]. Social network analysis is concerned with the structure and patterning of relationships and seeks to identify both their causes and consequences [5, 9]. Social networks are analyzed at the scale relevant to the researcher's theoretical question. Although levels of analysis are not necessarily mutually exclusive, there are three general levels into which networks may fall: micro-level, meso-level, and macro-level.

In general, network analysis focuses on the relationships between people, instead of on characteristics of people. Analysis of these relationships, it helps to uncover the emergent and informal communication patterns present in an organization, which may then be compared to the formal communication structures. These emergent patterns can be used to explain several organizational phenomena.

11.3 Conceptual View of People's Perceptions

Where a person lives in the world, the circumstances of life there affect the way that person views life. There are influences within the culture in which a person lives that affect his or her views on life. The world as a whole values life, yet it is the influence of a certain area's organizations and culture that influence the life system and how people see it.

Beliefs are usually conceptualized as a tacit set of often unconsciously held assumptions regarding educational issues and processes such as teaching, learning, curriculum, schooling, and knowledge [18]. Beliefs can be inferred from what people say, intend and do [36], and thus they can give insight into the reasons teachers act the way they do. In most cases the beliefs are spelled by attitude and perception held by an individual over something. Attitude permeates everything we do. It is an important component in all aspects of human endeavor. Attitude and perception influence whether we begin or continue with certain activities and whether we achieve in certain areas [32].

Perceptions have been explored by a host of researchers in varying degree [4, 13, 14, 25, 35]. A perception is a belief, theory, hypothesis, feeling, appearance, opinion, observation, insight, awareness, or sensitivity. It may or may not constitute reality, and initial perceptions often change with the passing of time, the changing of circumstances, or the receipt of additional information. The most important revelation here is that no two people experience and interpret sensations, situations, or their own feelings the same way [35]. According to Jackson [25], perception is reality. No matter how you view yourself, your profile as a leader will be constructed for you by those with which you work and interact. Based on that, knowing oneself is imperative; however, it may be that your ability to understand how others perceive you that will be a more powerful tool to help you be a better leader.

Green [20] writes that perception is everything; especially in the world of social media. In terms of perception, we all have an ideal self. We all wish to maximize our careers, our profession, and aspire to be like those who we find most successful.

Otara [35] contends that having the right perception is not only about becoming competent, polyvalent and productive but also about nurturing diversity and being able to live with all employees. Accordingly, there are very important things to consider in understanding the vital role of perception.

1. *Objective perception is difficult if not impossible. Each individual selects, organizes and interprets information gained from their senses and internal awareness differently.*
2. *In addition to mechanics of perception, it is also important to recognize that every person has a unique frame of reference that includes all of the internal and external factors that affect behavior. Interpretation of their experiences is dependent on many factors not directly related to their immediate situation.*
3. *It is important to recognize that values, beliefs and attitudes are important factors affecting perceptual process.*

4. *The amount of energy we expend accomplishing a task is directly related to our perception of its importance. This is significant in work environments. Unless employees perceive their job assignments as interesting and worth, while their level of effort is likely to be relatively low.*

Such views trickle down to the leadership process, as leaders are influenced by many outside issues; implicit and explicit understandings, ideologies, philosophies, theories, psychology, sociology among others [3, 15, 16]. So when comparing two or more people and their thinking, there are both common and differing perceptions about the idea of the leadership process.

This perception of leadership will directly influence the person's role in the organization [14, 25]. In organizations, perceptions of leaders, managers and employees shape the climate and effectiveness of the working environment. Perception is the way interpretation of experiences is made [35]. Most of the time people believe that they are effective and efficient leaders using their perception but their supposed followers may have a very different perception. Having the right perception is significant skill for any effective leadership. It is important to understand that perception is often portrayed through communication in any organization be it big or small and therefore it is a pertinent tool in leadership.

While in the research and practice of leadership we often focus on the leader as a person or his/her behavior, the role of followers is often neglected. However, followers constitute the context in which leaders operate and there is a long-standing argument, going back to Weber's charisma theory, that leaders can only be leaders if they have followers. So, one of the obvious questions to ask is why do people follow and how are leaders 'granted' influence [13].

Recent research is looking at followers' (and others') images or stereotypes of leaders (commonly known as implicit leadership theories) and how they influence how we see leaders. For example, if someone thinks of leaders as charismatic, almost any behavior shown by a person labeled 'leader' could be interpreted as a sign of charisma [4, 13]. This notion shifts the focus from the leader to the follower, in the sense that a leader's behavior is less important for the leadership process than the perception of that leader by his/her followers. The consequences for leadership development can be quite severe in that we train leaders to behave in certain ways but if ultimately followers do not perceive this behavior as 'leader-like', the leader will find it difficult to exert influence over his/her followers.

Equally, many recent studies have also come in handy to explain the perception and beliefs of employees about leadership and their influence on practice [14, 25]. Understanding of leadership therefore, must include a grasp of interaction with the environment around a leader. No matter what we view of our personal abilities or profile authenticity is measured when others working with you are open and willing to stand behind or with you [14, 25]. The way in which we interact with others and the task is the perception (and reality) of who we are as leaders. Not only should we be aware of this social construction, but you need to be a vigilant self-evaluator of this perception so that you can adapt and adjust as needed.

While you perceive yourself to be an effective leader even under stress, do your colleagues share this perception of you? Your perception of effective leadership may be shared by others who work with you. People in leadership may see a relationship between “leaders in title” and “leaders in action” from their own experiences, but this is not guaranteed. Understanding yourself is imperative [14, 25]. Embracing your strengths and appreciating others’ perceptions of you help to be a better leader.

To ensure a strong study, however, a researcher draws on a multiplicity of paradigms to zero on one that is congruent with his or her beliefs about nature of reality [30]. Given ontological and epistemological beliefs, there are several points of departure along a spiral of methodological spectrum. Theoretically therefore, this paper builds on three major assumptions:

- People’s beliefs and perceptions come from a variety of experiences, including their upbringing, life experiences, or schooling processes, yet the exact sources are still unclear [38]. Beliefs are tentative constructions and thus subject to revision.
- A person’s view of the leadership process can present a major barrier to implementation of certain practices [22].
- Changing a paradigm is a complex matter. As Kuhn [26], indicated, paradigms control the methods, questions, and standards of a community, as well as the broader constellation of its cherished beliefs, values, and techniques. Changing educational views is therefore a gradual process and multiple conceptions co-exist in the transitional stage.

11.4 Social Media and Social Networking and Perceptions of Leadership

Education is an important means of interaction since humans use educational institutions to teach individuals mechanisms of dealing with needs in this world. However educational institutions cannot survive in a leadership vacuum. The leadership process therefore is regarded as one of the most critical undertakings of the education system and it is largely inextricably interwoven with the competence of the leaders and its effectiveness requires the comprehensive knowledge of the management underpinnings thereto. Therefore, the leadership process requires leaders’ immense effort and followers’ effective behavior. This however largely depends on what the followers consider viable for the institution which is synonymous with the way they perceive the leadership process. If the perceptions of employees about the leadership process are not worthwhile and thus incompatible with the general thrusts of the institution and education system in general, then effectiveness of leadership outcomes will be a myth than a reality since these perceptions will be translated into the actual task execution and behavioral practices.

Nevertheless the perceptions of the employees towards leadership are shaped by a number of critical factors ranging from the natural to the man made. However, none

of the factors plays a defining role in contemporary leadership structures like social media and social networking. Indeed as the use of social media continues to evolve; the concept of presenting our ideal selves versus our real selves has become more and more prevalent on social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Google+ and even LinkedIn.

Sunstrum [43] writes that social media puts an interesting lens on the creation of the self, and how this construction affects our mental well-being. The ideal self is the self we aspire to be. According to Carl Rogers's theory of personality, every human has the basic instinct to improve herself and realize her full potential. Like Abraham Maslow, he called this achievement self-actualization. He believed this state was attained when the ideal self and the person's self-image were in line with each other. This person would be deemed a fully functioning person.

The patterns of relationships bring actors' similarities with the attitudes and behaviors of other organizational members; social network analysis may explain why members develop certain attitudes toward the organization. Distributed leadership and social network analysis have equally emerged as promising strategies for assessing the presence of and effectiveness of leadership in schools, examining the social and relational aspects of school actors, and identifying leverage within a school's networks to build capacity in leadership and instruction. This kind of analysis has the potential to provide schools with important insights about leadership and instructional capacity for improvement/reform.

Dowding [15] while exploring the aspect of perceptions of leadership contends that it is important to establish how leadership is perceived by people and why some might be thought to be 'strong' or 'weak' given their actions in the context in which those actions take place. Dowding [15] thus makes the following conclusions:

- Patterns of relationships can lead observers to perceive some leaders as weak and others strong.
- How we view individual traits in terms of leadership characteristics is, in part, dependent upon the context in which those traits emerge.
- Furthermore, once those traits are perceived by people, including the subject themselves, they further develop as traits.
- Perceptions of someone as a strong leader can make that person a strong leader or, perhaps more pertinently, once someone is labeled as a weak leader there is little that they can do to lose that reputation or not be a weak leader.
- Actions that would have appeared strong if carried out by someone with a reputation for strength will be viewed as the actions of a weak person, perhaps trying to be strong.
- Reactions of others to those actions will depend upon how they view the leader.
- Someone who is believed to be strong and shouts at a subordinate might lead that subordinate to quail and obey. The shouting leader the subordinate believes is weak might be laughed at, further weakening him.

Conery [12] meanwhile examined the relationship between social networks and leadership. He thus contends that social networks help to account for the distribution

of leadership and colleagues' access to potential resources and expertise. Accordingly, the following conclusions came up:

- Access to potential resources is related to each colleague's social ties.
- Access to the expertise of colleagues through the school's social networks is limited.
- The pattern of advice-seeking and communication is largely one-directional
- There is variance between social networks based on subject matter and proximity.

Social media and social networking influence the communication structure of an organization. The use of network analysis techniques distinguishes structural features such as the (formal and informal) communication patterns in an organization or the identification of groups within an organization (cliques or functional groups). Thus information flow between members can be determined. Characteristics that can be investigated using network analysis techniques are the following:

- Communication load as perceived by employees
- The communication styles used and
- The effectiveness of the information flows

Realistically therefore, the perceptions of leadership premised on social network and social networking are influenced by how either party views, values or partakes in the process of the media. When an individual is part of social media and social networking systems, he or she bases all subsequent views on that and the other way round. Accordingly, perceptions of leaders based on social media and social networking systems can be viewed from the following perspective:

- Leaders who value social media and social network will always allow and install social media-laden equipment within their institutions or organizations for people thereof to use at all times. This can turn them into close allies of the members in the organization as a result.
- Leaders who see less value in social media and social network will not only reject installation of the social media but may even limit freedom of utilization of the same by others. Such leaders may be perceived as archaic by those around them.
- Leaders who utilize social media and social network understand the implication of the same and would even go an extra mile to promote it amongst their followers. Such leaders may be perceived as modern in the eyes of their followers.
- Leaders who do not utilize social media and social network cannot know for sure what they mean to others. They may actually criticize those who utilize the same and end up being labeled autocratic or dictatorial by their followers.

This however does not only reflect the leaders and their attachment to social media and social networking systems. Sometimes the perceptions are a making of the employees or followers' attachment to social media and social networking systems. In this case the way followers or employees value or perceive their leaders at all times.

- Followers who value social media and social network would wish to have a leader who approves of the same and actually hold them in high esteem
- Followers who do not value social media and social network always criticize those who love social media and social network. If it is leaders then they would always undermine them as weak or useless. They may doubt their ability to steer the organization to greater heights
- Followers who utilize social media and social network would want freedom and acceptance from their bosses and would feel enthralled by leaders who also utilize social media and social networking sites. They find them more of family indeed.
- Followers who do not utilize social media and social network may never understand why certain people behave in a certain way and act in a certain way. They may thus command unrealistic perceptions of such people. If it is leaders then the trust and respect they accord them may also be less or inappropriate.

Important to recall and note too is the fact that the nature and mode of utilization of the social media and social networking will also have an influence on the way a person perceives a leader. In such cases, issues of being too lousy, modern, responsible etc. may crop up based on which social media and for what reason, a leader utilizes social media and social networking systems.

- The type of social media and social network sites utilized by the leader would also affect or influence the way people perceive the leader and therefore, leadership itself. Some of the social media and social network sites are very demanding and would not be ideal for leaders but if the leader adopts them, then he or she may be perceived differently by the people around
- The frequency of utilization of social media and social network by the leader also influences the way people around the leader may perceive him or her. If it is extreme then such a leader may be perceived as flamboyant
- The forms of utilization of social media and social network i.e. for what is social media utilized? If a leader utilizes the social media and social network sites in professional or formal forms, then such a leader would be perceived as responsible. However if it is informal, then perceptions might take a weird direction indeed.
- The leader's involvement of followers in the utilization of social media and social networking. Sometimes a leader may utilize social media and social network sites by him or herself but other times could involve the people he or she leads. Any decision would influence how the leader is perceived by the followers.

The leadership styles as we know them ranging from the customary ones (Democratic, dictatorial and laissez-faire) to the more contemporary ones (Transactional, transformational and charismatic) as well as certain specificities in leadership (people leadership, service leadership, action leadership, goal oriented leadership etc.) cannot stand on their own and indeed may not be existent *per se*. What exists, therefore, is how people perceive the leader. It is therefore not surprising that a

Table 11.1 Effect of attachment to social media on the classification of leadership traits by followers in an organization

Attachment to social media and social networking systems	Plausible perception of leadership style
Attaches value to social media and social networking systems	Modern, democratic, transformational
Does not value social media and social networking systems	Archaic, dictatorial
Utilizes social media and social networking systems	Modern, transformational, transactional (Interactive)
Does not utilize social media and social networking systems	Archaic, dictatorial

leader who seems to be democratic in his dealings may end up being perceived as dictatorial based on how the followers view his or her activities in the realm of leadership.

The table below shows how attachment to social media can influence the classification of leadership traits by followers in an organization (Table 11.1).

Important to note is the fact that these perceptions may not necessarily reflect the real leadership trait of an individual leader but they may persist and remain the basis of understanding and conceptualizing the leader within the organization at all times.

11.5 Conclusion

Perceptions of the employees towards leadership are shaped by a number of critical factors ranging from the natural to the man made. However, none of the factors plays a defining role in contemporary leadership structures like social media and social networking. Indeed as the use of social media continues to evolve; the concept of presenting our ideal selves versus our real selves has become more and more prevalent on social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Google+ and even LinkedIn.

Social media puts an interesting lens on the creation of the self, and how this construction affects our mental well-being. The ideal self is the self we aspire to be. Leaders should thus be steadfast when it comes to how they conduct themselves and relate with others in the organization since how those around them view leaders is critical to the effectiveness of the leadership setting in the system. Crucially though, the way the leaders undertake to exploit the social media and social network systems is very profound given that these shape the way people perceive their leaders at all times. There is no gain saying therefore, that leaders and leadership may turn out to be victims of social media and social network, yet they may ride on the back of the same once properly and appropriately understood, conceptualized and utilized.

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