Chapter 11
The Impact of Social Media on Internal Communications in the Tanzanian Telecom Industry

Shirumisha Kwayu, Banita Lal, and Mumin Abubakre

Abstract Social media, a new class of information technology (IT) that allows interaction and interoperability of users, is transforming organisational communication processes by offering affordances that were impossible to achieve with previous forms of IT. Social media affect knowledge transfer, socialisation and power processes within organisations. Likewise, it increases ambient awareness (knowledge of communication occurring amongst others in the organisation), metaknowledge (knowledge of who knows what and who knows whom), as well as increasing accountability. However, despite understanding potential effects of using social media within organisations, there is limited knowledge on how the internal use of social media within organisations influences structures and processes within an organisation. It is agreed that the interplay between people and technology within organisations enacts the structure of using technologies, consequently generating emergent processes and structures within organisations. Considering this, the chapter intends to explore how the internal use of social media within organisations influences the structure and process of communication within organisations. The chapter uses practice theory perspective, which considers the interplay between people and material in the process of organising. The study uses the case of the Tanzanian telecom industry to gather empirical evidence. Results of this initial study will advance our understanding of social media practices and the ways in which it affects structures and processes of communication within organisations. In particular, this will enable us to understand how people in organisations organise themselves when they engage with social media technologies and how such organisational processes produce communication structures and processes within the organisation. Furthermore, the results will assist management with insights on how to manage dynamic and fluid communication practices that are the essence of social media. Therefore, this will help organisations to moderate power dynamics, enhance knowledge management and socialisation through better management of social media practices.

S. Kwayu (✉) · B. Lal · M. Abubakre
Nottingham Trent University, Nottingham Business School, Nottingham, UK
e-mail: Shirumisha.kwayu2014@my.ntu.ac.uk; banita.lal@ntu.ac.uk; mumin.abubakre@ntu.ac.uk

11.1   Introduction

Social media applications such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, YouTube and WhatsApp are new class information technologies (IT) that allow interaction and interoperability of users. The increasing use of social media within organisations is changing the communication dynamics as it offers affordances that previous sets of information technologies could not provide. For example, in a simultaneous and consistent manner, social media affords organisational communication with visibility, editability, association and persistence (Treem & Leonardi, 2012). The impact of communication facilitated by these affordances affects various aspects of the organisation such as knowledge management, socialisation and power relations. In addition, it is acknowledged that social media communication within organisations increases the ambient awareness (knowledge of communication taking place within the organisation), metaknowledge (knowledge of who knows who and who knows what) and accountability through making communication visible (Treem, 2015). Despite the understanding of these potential impacts of social media on organisational communication, Huang, Baptista, and Galliers (2013) suggest that little is known about the effects of social media on established and emerging communication practices (i.e. how people interact and engage with others) within the organisation. Thus, the aim of this chapter is to address this paucity through exploring the impact of social media on the structure and processes of communication practices within organisations. The aim is to enhance the prevailing theoretical discussion on the role of technology in influencing organisational structure and processes, especially with a contemporary technology (social media) that is fluid and dynamic.

Understanding the impact of social media on organisational structure and processes is somewhat complex because the effects of social media technology are highly influenced by social aspects (Treem, 2015). The complexity is stirred by the fact that people's behaviours and action vary depending on their sense-making (interpretation) of the use of social media. Thus, when people interact with social media, they produce new communication practices within the organisation. Communication practices, which are the interplay between people and technology (social media), enact emergent structures and processes within the organisation (Orlikowski, 2000). Thus, the focal lens of understanding the impact of social media on internal communication is to focus on the practices that emerge from the interplay between people and social media within the organisation. Considering this, this chapter is going to use the practice perspective to analyse the impact of social media on the internal communication of an organisation with the precise focus on the structure and processes of communication within the organisation. Thus, following this objective, this chapter seeks to answer the following research question: (1) how are new communication practices that are supported by social media affecting the

structure and processes of communication within organisations? This question will be answered using an interpretivist philosophy which adopts a case study. Initial empirical evidence from a Tanzanian telecommunications organisation is gathered to provide an insight on social media communication practices and their influence on structure and processes. The chapter will contribute to information systems (IS) literature on how technology affects the structure and processes of communication within organisations as well as in practice, by offering evidence that may help managers to manage dynamic and fluid communication practices that emerge in organisation when members engage with social media. In doing so, this will help management to be in a better position in managing important organisational aspects such as power dynamics, socialisation and knowledge management.

11.2 Literature Review

Social media, which are explained as a group of Internet-based applications that are built on the ideological and technical foundations of web 2.0, have significantly transformed organisational communication by allowing the creation and exchange of user-generated content (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). As well as social media being Internet-based applications, they are also mobile-based which integrate technology, telecommunication and social interaction to enable the creation and dissemination of words, videos, images and audios (Dabner, 2012). Their ability to allow cheap and different forms of content creation and the exchange of information between users has enabled social media to soar within a relatively short space of time. Today most of the popular social media applications such as Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, Twitter, WhatsApp and Snapchat have more than a billion users (Piskorski, 2014). This has made the use of these platforms universal, and, within organisations, it has advanced to the mainstream level (Pillet & Carillo, 2016). Considering this rise and development of social media and their increasing influence on business organisations, a considerable interest in generating an understanding of the impact of social media and its role in organisations has emerged.

'Social media' is a very broad term that embodies various forms, which makes it difficult to apprehend. In an effort to explain it, some scholars have classified social media according to its characteristics, while others have classified it according to the functions that it supports. Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) categorised six forms of social media according to characteristics that are collaborative projects (i.e. Wikipedia), blogs, content communities (i.e. YouTube), social networking sites (i.e. Facebook), virtual game worlds (i.e. world of Warcraft) and virtual social worlds (i.e. Second Life). On the other hand, Kietzmann, Hermkens, McCarthy, and Silvestre (2011) explained social media through developing a framework of seven functional building blocks that are identity, conversation, sharing, relationships, presence, groups and reputations. Following the functional building blocks categorisation, social media activities are defined by the extent to which the social media application focuses on some or all functional blocks. Considering the categorisation of social

media, this implies that each form of social media contains a form of affordances regarding the kind of communication that it supports and, thus, each form of social media applications will have a unique set of impacts on its users. For instance, Twitter enables users to associate with other users through following their activities; it also enables sharing through tweeting and retweeting. However, Twitter does not support functions such as groups (the extent to which users are ordered or form communities). Also, it does not show the presence of the user. Thus, one can observe how twitter can support certain forms of communication but will be unable to support others such as group conversations.

The advancement of social media as a new class of information technology has influenced organisational communication in various ways. For example, Gallaugher and Ransbotham (2010) argue that social media has changed how content is contributed, structured, organised as well as the flows of interaction between users. In addition, Kietzmann et al. (2011) suggest that these changes have an effect on different aspects of organisations such as reputation, sales, as well as its survival. Moreover, Scott and Orlikowski (2012) suggest that social media has presented organisations with complex information dynamics which propels organisations in unexpected directions, redrawing boundaries and shifting relationships. Considering these arguments, there is an increasing rationale to explore the way social media is influencing established structure and processes of communication as well as instituting new structures and processes of communication within organisations.

According to Harper (2015), structure is a clearly defined pattern of activity in which, ideally, every series of action is functionally related to the purpose of the organisation, whereas processes are a systematic series of actions directed by organisational members towards a goal (Harris, Kaefer, & Salchenberger, 2013). Following the descriptions of structure and processes, they suggest that the unit of analysis is the actions/activities taking place within an organisation. The nature and manner of activities within the organisation materialise to form the reality of the organisation. Thus, to understand the impact of social media on the structure and processes of an organisation, the focus is on the pattern of social media activities (the social media practice), which endure across space and time. Thus, to understand social media practice or the recursive pattern of social media activities in the organisation, one must consider the materiality of social media. Materiality of social media is a constitution of the material aspects of social media and the social aspects of members of the organisation. Leonardi (2013) defines materiality as the arrangement of artefacts – physical and/or digital materials – into a particular form that endures across different places and time. This means that materiality are the features of technology that do not change across space and time. Important to note is that although materiality is distinct from the social aspect of organisations, they simultaneously indicate their synergetic interaction, meaning that it is difficult to separate the two. This means that social and material agencies are separate, but once they interact, it is difficult to separate them.

Understanding how human (social agents) interact with material (technology) is central for discerning how technology affects the structure and processes within an organisation. This has been an ongoing discussion within the IS field: Orlikowski

(1992) provides an account of this discussion. In brief, earlier convention viewed technology as an external force with a deterministic effect on structure; this view was opposed by those who focused on the social aspect of technology who viewed the technology effect on structure as an intervention. This resorted to a softer view of determinism that views technology as an external object with an impact on structure but moderated by human actors and organisational context. Thereafter, it emerged another view that centred on the premise that technology is not an external object but a product of ongoing human action, design and appropriation. Following this emerged a view of technology as a trigger of structural change, whereby technologies influence organisational structures in an orderly way and that order depends on the historical processes in which they are embedded. Subsequently, Orlikowski (1992) discussed a view of structuration, which is a social process that involves the reciprocal interaction of human actors and structural features of organisations. With this view, technology is created and changed by humans, and humans accomplish an action using that technology. Thus, technology contains a structure which is embedded, and then it is appropriated within the organisation. Hence, the structuration view helps to see a technology as enacted by humans, and it is institutionalised in structure. Considering this, structuration is a dynamic process which is embedded historically and contextually.

Orlikowski (2000) advanced the structuration view to a practice perspective that views how people interact with technology in their ongoing practices to enact structures that shape their emergent and situated use of technology. This view advances the notion of embeddedness with emergent structures and the appropriation with enactment. The central focus of this view is to focus on practice, which is a focus on recursive interaction between people, technology and social action. Through focusing on practice, it enables us to understand the impact of technology when people engage with it in organisations. Given that the discussion on the role of technology in organisations is an ongoing endeavour, this chapter is going to set its premises by using the practice perspective as it considers the constitutive role of humans and technology in affecting the organisational structure. By doing so, this perspective will help us to understand the emerging structures and how they are enacted when people engage with social media in organisations.

Although the practice perspective is known for considering the constitutive role of humans and technology, there are still different views on how humans and technology come together. In other words, it is conventional wisdom that humans and technology are highly intertwined; however, there is a disagreement on how they become intertwined, which brings us onto an ontological debate on this matter. The agential realist believes that the interaction between humans and technology is ontological and, thus, inseparable, whereas the critical realist believes that humans and technology are two distinct agencies that interact and affect each other (Cecez-Kecmanovic, Galliers, Henfridsson, Newell, & Vidgen, 2014). Considering this difference between the agential and critical realist, Leonardi (2011), from the critical perspective, addresses the interweaving of human and technology (material) using an imbrication metaphor, which assumes the inherent separation between human and technology agency while simultaneously indicating their synergetic interaction. Given that materiality is independent on human agency, this means that

Fig. 11.1 Imbrication
process
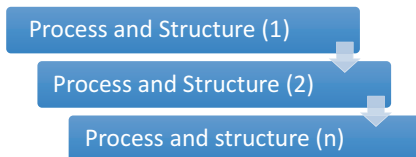
people react to the material (note: materiality is different to technology, independent of its use and the context that it is used within (Cecez-Kecmanovic et al., 2014)). Thus, from a critical perspective, people react to materiality, and this brings to 'affordances' (how people interpret or make sense on the use of technology) that people see on the technology. Therefore, although the material and social are separate from a critical perspective (Leonardi, 2011), the social and material impact and mutually shape each other through imbrication in social action. Since social agency and material agency interact in an imbrication manner, also the processes and structure occur in an imbrication manner, containing the elements of the past and the new ones in an overlapping way as seen in Fig. 11.1:

The above discussion on social media, which is fluid and dynamic in nature, presents a thought-provoking discussion on how it affects organisational structure and processes. Bearing in mind that structure and processes are concerned with the flows of activities in organisations, a practice perspective that considers the interplay between people and technology provides a suitable angle for studying the effect of social media effect within organisations. Understanding the established and emergent practices supported by social media helps to understand the influence of social media in the processes and structure of communication in organisations. A further insight on the way in which the structure and processes of organisation are affected is important for managing and predicting the emerging structure and processes within organisations.

11.3   Methodology

A case study method was selected after considering the aim of this chapter – understanding how the internal use of social media within organisations influences the structure and processes of communication within organisations. A case study method allows an in-depth exploration of what is going on in the life of an organisation, enabling us to understand the research phenomena and the context which gives insight to the context and process to which it is enacted (Yin, 2013). The guiding philosophy for this case study is interpretivist, which asserts that knowledge is socially constructed through language, shared meaning and consciousness (Orlikowski & Baroudi, 1991). The interpretivist philosophy supports studying phenomena in its natural setting, which removes researcher's predetermined views that may obscure gaining new knowledge, and, thus, it aims to remove bias.

The case organisation is a telecommunications company in Tanzania (Kijiko – a pseudonym used). Kijiko is a private company. It is one of the biggest telecom

organisations in the country. It is a vibrant user of social media and a proponent of a digital lifestyle, making it a suitable case for this research. Moreover, given that the case company is in Tanzania, which is an emerging market, it makes the context of this research more interesting as the digital infrastructure is different to that of the western developed world, which has many studies done on social media in organisations in comparison. This study selected a telecom organisation, as telecom organisations are faster in adopting new technology (Belasen & Rufer, 2013). The selection of Kijiko also considered the size of the company as well as the use of social media. A large company was preferable as it provides a wider base for exploring the processes and structures of communication within organisation across its different departments and functions.

Data was collected through semi-structured interviews which allows the researcher to hear what the informant says about the topic as well providing the opportunity of probing more in areas which the researcher identifies (Parveen, Jaafar, & Ainin, 2015). The interviews were conducted with staff and management at Kijiko with the rationale that communication is carried out by all members of the organisation. Ten interviews were conducted with members from different functions within the organisation. The interviews were conducted in multilingual (mix of Swahili and English) languages.

The analysis was done through narrative structuring, which follows an inductive approach that concentrates on issues and themes extracted from the data collected (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Narrative structuring provides a description of an experience that is told in a systematic way, indicating a flow of related events which, when compiled together, is significant to the narrators and conveys meaning to the researcher (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996). The narrative structuring is a powerful means of analysing data as it brings the context and social situation into the analysis of the events that occurred (Saunders et al., 2009). In addition, analysis using narrative structuring provides the ability to highlight points that were made and what they symbolise and how they explain specific issues within the organisation such as culture, politics and change. Thus, the analysis was done by creating a coherent story from the data collected through the interviews. By doing this, it enables researchers to take into account the social and organisational context of how the events occurred (Saunders et al., 2009). The analysis was done after transcription and translation of the recorded interviews.

11.4   Findings

Interviews with managers and other members of staff at Kijiko revealed that social media in the form of WhatsApp communication is widely used within the company. WhatsApp is a web and mobile application that allows calls, voice notes, text messages, video calls, groups and location service, and it allows attachment of files both audio and video. This section is going to present the key issues associated with WhatsApp use at Kijiko.

11.5 Uses of WhatsApp

There are various reasons why people prefer to use WhatsApp communication in Kijiko. The four main reasons that are associated with the use of WhatsApp are urgency, solving problems, sending reports and presenting evidence.

Urgent issues:

Urgent issues are normally done through WhatsApp. – Customer Service staff member

Solving problems:

I am a leader and I use WhatsApp, our group we are twelve with three leaders. If there is any challenge, we send it to the group. When they get a problem in the market, they send it to the group and we solve it – Marketing Team Leader

Sending reports:

With WhatsApp a boss can order me to send him a report, I take a photo within a minute I send him and it becomes easy – Sales Person

Evidence:

WhatsApp helps a lot on our communication. Our communication need evidence, if you move from here and you go marketing. I must take a photo that am on the market a certain area and send it to the group. Anything happens here in office I will need to send a photo. Therefore, it helps a lot in work but also shows evidence. – Manager Branch Y

11.6 Dynamics Around WhatsApp Use

Although people prefer to use WhatsApp, email and conference calls are the main means of communication in Kijiko. The zonal manager explains this as follows:

We use email and WhatsApp groups. Email is key, but we also have official WhatsApp groups. If there are matters that cannot be sent in email, they done through WhatsApp. Agent issues also are sent via *WhatsApp or through conference calls. These are the main communication technologies that we use* – Zonal Manager

Similarly, a branch manager from Branch X explains how they use WhatsApp at their branch as follows:

Our office uses WhatsApp. Our office has eight staff members and we have a [Whatsapp] group which we update each other. This is because not everything is shared on email. Not all the people are using email. We are customer service; we are eight and there are only two computers. That means other people are not connected to email but people are using WhatsApp because it is modern, attractive and easy to communicate anything concerning the office. – Manager Branch X

As observed from the explanation above, the use of WhatsApp is manifested in groups. The manager from Branch Y explains the WhatsApp groups as follows:

Every group has its process and structure depending on the objective of the group. For instance, in our northern zone, we have two groups, one for official and the other it's social. On social group, you will find everything concerning social, that group is social oriented.

People will talk jokes, football etc. *Through that group, you can know what someone likes and dislikes. Nevertheless, the official group is only about work, it is business oriented. Therefore, on social group is where you can be free as you like but on business is serious matters.* – Manager Branch Y

Although WhatsApp is widely used within Kijiko, it is still unknown whether it is an official or unofficial communication practice. The manager of Branch X explains this ambiguity as follows:

I cannot term WhatsApp as official communication because we are not official told. However, our leaders and we use it so we see it as official. Because when someone request you an information will either want you to reply through WhatsApp or through email. This is something that is official because the office depends on it because there are two kinds of groups ones that are business oriented and ones that are social. Therefore, when I say they are official I think am correct. Even when we ask each other, we look at the group and share. Therefore, it is something that we use officially. – Manager Branch X

11.7   Challenges of Using WhatsApp

Apart from the above-mentioned reasons, the use of WhatsApp at Kijiko is coupled by several challenges. The challenges associated with WhatsApp use include work-life balance, Internet access and disinterest of WhatsApp communication.

Work-life balance:

It brings destruction but it depends on yourself. I may decide not to respond until am back in the office. Then I weigh on how I spoke with the customer. For instance, if the service level agreement is 72 Hours and when I look the 72 hours have or are about to pass. I will feel guilty. Therefore, I will let him know I have receive the email. Therefore, I see its better I tell him to avoid complain. – Manager Branch Y

Internet access:

Sometimes, a group member does not have internet access and is supposed to solve the issue. Also, at times, someone may say he was in a location with no internet. Therefore, I can say the problem is internet access. – Marketing staff member

Disinterest:

Official groups have challenges; sometimes people do not give information on time. Then when you ask he takes it as not an official media of communication. Someone can find an excuse and say why you did not send me an email or call me. – Manager Branch X

11.8   Discussion

From the findings, we learn some details regarding the use of WhatsApp in internal communications at Kijiko. The use of WhatsApp is spread across the organisation from the management to the staff: they all use WhatsApp to communicate. WhatsApp is used alongside other communication channels like email and conference calls.

The use of WhatsApp substitutes and supplements other channels in fundamental ways. It is important to note that the use of WhatsApp has not diminished the use of other channels, but it has reinforced and introduced the purpose, interpretative meanings, norms and abilities for each communication channel (technology) in use within the organisation. For example, when the zonal manager asserts that '*If there are matters that cannot be sent in email, they done through WhatsApp. Agent issues also are sent* via *WhatsApp or through conference calls'*, this suggests that each channel of communication is assigned with an interpretive meaning on their use. Furthermore, the distinction between the social group and the WhatsApp group emphasises the purpose and norms in the use of WhatsApp within the organisation.

In terms of structure and processes, the findings reveal ambiguity between interpretive and procedural aspects of communication. For example, when the branch manager at X states, '*I cannot term WhatsApp as official communication because we are not official told. However, our leaders and we use it so we see it as official.'*, it shows that the use of WhatsApp communication is interpreted as an official means of communication, but the procedures have not set it as official. This ambiguity raises a challenge on the use of WhatsApp communication. For example, disinterest of communication sent via WhatsApp as some people claim it is not an official means of communication.

In a positive way, the use of WhatsApp at Kijiko influences processes and structure in various aspects such as urgent issues, problem-solving, evidence and reporting process. These are important aspects in any process; for example, reporting on the processes helps to know the status of an activity and helps to achieve better performance. Also, during crisis, WhatsApp communication becomes a handy tool to help the processes. The ability of WhatsApp to influence processes in this way is because of its influence on structure, for instance, the grouping which has structure and purpose. For example, separating the groups between social and work groups, this is arguably to enable urgency as work group communication is not diluted with information that does not need a quick response. Likewise, the groups help to fuse the synergy between different levels of management and within a sect.

One of the negative impacts of WhatsApp communication within Kijiko is work-life balance. WhatsApp communication challenges staff on drawing a boundary between their work and personal lives. WhatsApp has enabled the staff to work remotely as they can get the information on what is going on and through that some are obligated to engage. Although it can be argued that social WhatsApp groups help socialisation within Kijiko, it appears to intensify the conflation between work and home and, similarly, to the work groups.

Associating the findings with the literature, the staff at Kijiko have established the affordances of WhatsApp through group communication. Members of Kijiko have found affordances of WhatsApp, for example, the staff's use of camera and location services to provide evidence of their activities or to support their communication. Also, the ability to form social and work groups is afforded by the material aspects of WhatsApp. Thus, when the staff engage with WhatsApp, they form the groups, whereby through these groups, they can solve some problem. Extenuating

this, one must differentiate between a normal work group and WhatsApp work group in their ability to function. The physical work group, even when formed by the same people, can only work and collaborate when they are physically present at a single location, whereas with the WhatsApp work group, they can work at a distance; for instance, if one is at the office and other members are in the field, i.e. marketing can get the support at a distance which is aided not just by text but also with videos, photos and audios.

Considering the example above which provides an analogy between the physical work group and WhatsApp work group, the fundamental question is how the interaction between the people and WhatsApp affects the structure and processes within the organisation. The findings indicate that people's social action (i.e. groups/teams) and WhatsApp's material features exist as separate, but once they interact, it becomes a WhatsApp group which the social media cannot be taken away from. Both agencies come together in an imbricate manner. The teams for executing processes within the organisation existed before WhatsApp, but with the emergence of WhatsApp groups, they contain elements of the former while introducing new elements. For example, the separation of the WhatsApp social group and WhatsApp work groups, where each WhatsApp group has its norms and purpose. Thus, it is through this imbrication process that new elements of structure and process are enacted and emerge.

11.9   Conclusion

Contemporary organisations such as Kijiko are embracing new social media technologies such as WhatsApp which are fluid and dynamic in nature. These technologies are influencing organisational communication to become significant communication channels. Social media technologies such as WhatsApp are spreading within organisations before procedural authorisation, leaving them to the interpretation of the users within organisation to establish new communication practices as with the case of Kijiko. For example, the ambiguity on whether WhatsApp is an official or unofficial means of communication is evidence that procedures are lagging behind the use of social media within the organisation. Putting procedures in place can assist in guiding the use of social media within organisation. Lack of procedures creates differences in interpretation on the use of social media, consequently leading to challenges such as disinterest of communication through the WhatsApp channel. Thus, it is essential for management to understand the dynamics of social media and manage them by allowing interpretive use of the technology which is balanced with procedures in order to harness the potential powers of social media into their structure and processes within organisation.

This research has shown how communication structure and processes within organisation are affected when members of organisation interact with WhatsApp. The interaction occurs in an imbrication manner, creating structures and processes which develop from previous ones to create a new emergent structure which con-

tains elements of the former. Also this initial finding highlights how social media affects socialisation (i.e. the use of WhatsApp social group within the organisation), power dynamics (i.e. increase control power of managers through sourcing evidence via WhatsApp) and knowledge management (i.e. as members of the organisation, they can solve issue/challenges through WhatsApp) through emerging practices supported by WhatsApp communication. Finally, though this has shown how practices emerge from the interaction with WhatsApp at Kijiko and their impact, future research will benefit more on learning how to manage fluid and dynamic communication practices as it is certain that these types of communication practice have an effect on flows of activity within organisation.

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Shirumisha Kwayu   is a PhD student at Nottingham Trent University. His research topic explores the impact of social media on the alignment of strategies within organisations.

Banita Lal   is a Senior Lecturer in Information Studies at the Nottingham University Business School, Nottingham Trent University. She gained her PhD in Information Systems from Brunel University. Her research interests revolve around the adoption and diffusion of technology, including broadband, mobile and e-Government technology. Banita has published in leading peer-reviewed conferences and journals in the field of Information Systems, including Information Systems Frontiers, Government Information Quarterly and Information Technology & People.

Mumin Abubakre   is a Senior Lecturer in Management. He holds a PhD in Management Information Systems from Loughborough University. Mumin's research interests span culture and its interface with the implementation of e-business/IS strategies, global management of IT and digital entrepreneurship. Mumin has published articles in peer-reviewed scholarly journals such as Information & Management Journal, Information Technology & People and Journal Global of Information Management. He is currently on the editorial board of Journal Global of Information Technology Management.