

AN EXAMINATION OF SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY USAGE OF SOUTH CENTRAL UNITED STATES' UNIVERSITIES

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ABSTRACT

Since the use of social media tools by universities has expanded exponentially, a university can easily find itself in a precarious situation in a moment's notice because social media tools have been used inadvertently. This study investigated the social media policies of AACSB-International accredited schools in the SREB South Central Region of the United States as posted on university web sites. Results from this study showed that although the majority of these universities have links to social media tools on their university web sites, a minimal number of universities have social media policies posted. Given the popularity of social media tools and the results of this study, it is evident that more universities need to develop and/or publish their policies on their web sites.

INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE

As an administrator at a mid-sized regional university, imagine waking up one morning and learning that your university is in the national news because one of your students posted a racist video on Facebook. Would your university have a contingency plan for this type of unforeseen incident? Would your university have a social media policy to fall back on to help "control" such a situation?

The above scenario is exactly what happened to university administrators at the University of Louisiana at Monroe (ULM) in October 2007. ULM made national news when a current student posted on her Facebook page a video of

several white students reenacting the beating of a white male by black students known as the Jena 6 (CNN, 2007). The video was quickly reposted on The Smoking Gun (The Smoking Gun, 2007) and YouTube (YouTube, 2007). The national news coverage of this incident was extremely embarrassing not only to the student but also to the university. Because ULM in October of 2007 did not have a social media policy in place, university administrators grappled with the immediacy of handling the situation to prevent ongoing national exposure and ridicule.

With technology use expanding exponentially, from easy access of publishing information on a web site to distributing information via nu-

merous social media tools, a university can easily find itself in a similar embarrassing and precarious situation in a moment's notice. For this reason, many university sports departments are beginning to realize that social media can create problems for them and their high profile college athletes. A recent news story about University of Washington basketball player Isaiah Thomas underscores this point. Prior to a game with Washington State University (WSU), Thomas tweeted that Pullman was a ghost town (Burnett, 2011). This inconspicuous "tweet" got out, and by game time, WSU students were fired up and heckled Thomas throughout the game; many of them sent tweets to Thomas after WSU won the game so he would remember the "ghost town." Questionable postings by university athletes on Twitter and other social media web sites have caused some university athletic departments to hire Udiligence to monitor social media usage of their athletes (Udiligence, 2011). Udiligence notifies the university and the athlete if questionable material appears in a social media posting or tweet.

One may wonder, however, if monitoring is enough? What are the consequences, if any, if an athlete posts questionable material? What about social media use by students who are not athletes? What about social media use by faculty and staff? Without a social media policy in place at a university, these questions are difficult, if not impossible, to answer. Thus, the pervasive question arises as to whether or not universities are prepared to address such incidents as mentioned above. At ULM, the publicity surrounding the web site and lawsuit as well as the student video was extremely embarrassing, but university administrators learned from these situations and developed and implemented a social media policy. However, ULM is one of a few universities in Louisiana that has a published social media policy on its web page. One may ask why more universities do not have social media policies posted. This deficiency is probably because other universities have not experienced similar embarrassing incidents. However, as more and more students, faculty, and staff embrace social media, it behooves administrators at any university to develop and implement an effective social media policy and educate their constituents about the policy.

The purpose of this paper, therefore, is to consider the technology-based policies as posted on the web sites of AACSB-International accredited universities in the United States' South Central Region, which includes Louisiana, Arkansas, Mississippi, Alabama, and Tennessee; to discuss the elements that should be included in an effective social media policy; and to examine the contents of social media policies as posted on these universities' web sites.

METHODOLOGY

To investigate posted social media policies on university web sites, the researchers first conducted a literature review to examine those elements that should be included in a social media policy. From this review, a checklist of recommended items to include in policies was prepared. In February of 2011, the web sites of AACSB-International accredited schools in the SREB South Central Region of the United States, consisting of Alabama, Arkansas, Louisiana, Mississippi, and Tennessee, were reviewed to ascertain whether policies pertaining to the use of computers, internet, and social media were posted. Additionally, links to social media tools, such as Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Youtube, Flickr, that were posted on a university's main web site were documented. The social media policies posted on university web sites in South Central United States as of the first week of March 2011 were then examined, and the elements included in these policies were analyzed.

The AACSB-International accredited schools in the SREB South Central Region consists of 48 schools in Alabama, Arkansas, Louisiana, Mississippi, and Tennessee as shown in Table 1.

TECHNOLOGY-BASED POLICY POSTINGS

Prior to examining the depth and breadth of university social media policies, the technology-based policies, including policies on the use of computers, internet, and/or social media, as posted on the web site of AACSB-International accredited universities in the United States' South Central Region were reviewed. Of the 48 university web sites examined in this study, nine universities (18.8%) had no policies posted on their

TABLE 1
SREB SOUTH CENTRAL REGION
AACSB
INTERNATIONAL ACCREDITED UNIVERSITIES

State	N	Percentage
Alabama	11	22.9
Arkansas	8	16.7
Louisiana	14	29.2
Mississippi	5	10.4
Tennessee	10	20.8
Total	48	100.0

web sites. The remaining 39 schools had policies posted addressing the use of computers, internet, and/or social media, with more schools (68.8%) posting policies on computer use (see Table 2). However, only 7 of the 48 schools investigated in this study (14.6%) had social media policies posted. Although only seven universities posted social media policies, 42 of the 48 universities (87.5%) posted a link to a social media tool, such as Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, YouTube, Flickr, MySpace, iTunes, or some other social media tool, on the main university web site.

The seven universities with posted social media policies include two universities from Alabama, two universities from Arkansas, and three universities from Louisiana (see Table 3).

TABLE 3
SREB SOUTH CENTRAL REGION
AACSB
INTERNATIONAL ACCREDITED UNIVERSITIES
WITH POSTED SOCIAL MEDIA POLICIES

State	School	URL
Alabama	Auburn University Montgomery	www.aum.edu
Arkansas	Arkansas Tech University	www.atu.edu
Louisiana	Loyola University New Orleans	www.loyno.edu
Louisiana	Tulane University	tulane.edu
Alabama	University of Alabama	www.ua.edu
Arkansas	University of Central Arkansas	www.uca.edu
Louisiana	University of Louisiana Monroe	www.ulm.edu

SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY ELEMENTS

To determine elements to include in an effective social media policy, one can readily find numerous articles presenting various “do’s” and “don’ts” as to what should or should not be

TABLE 2
TECHNOLOGY-BASED POLICIES POSTED ON
SREB SOUTH CENTRAL REGION AACSB – INTERNATIONAL ACCREDITED UNIVERSITIES

School	No Posted Usage Policies		Computer Usage Policy		Internet Usage Policy		Social Media Usage Policy	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Alabama	4	44.4	6	18.2	5	17.9	2	28.6
Arkansas	1	11.1	6	18.2	3	10.7	2	28.6
Louisiana	2	22.2	12	36.4	8	28.6	3	42.9
Mississippi	0	0.0	2	6.1	4	14.3	0	0.0
Tennessee	2	22.2	7	21.2	8	28.6	0	0.0
Total	9	100.0	33	100.0	28	100.0	7	100.0
Total Based on 48 Schools Examined	9	18.8	33	68.8	28	58.3	7	14.6

included in a social media policy. A good starting point for anyone wanting to learn more about social media policies is the web site <http://socialmediagovernance.com/>, created by Chris Boudreaux (Boudreaux, *Analysis of Social Media Policies: Lessons and Best Practices*, 2009). This site provides a database of almost 200 social media policies, a database of almost 200 research reports related to social media, and a policy report resulting from Mr. Boudreaux's analysis of 49 social media policies. According to his "Analysis of Social Media Policies: Lessons and Best Practices," organizations should create two policies: one for those who work in social media as part of their job and one for all employees that addresses both business and personal use of social media. His blog often addresses issues related to social media policy.

In the article "10 Things You Should Cover in Your Social Networking Policy," Shinder indicates an organization's social media policy should include the following: (1) a clear philosophy about social media; (2) a definition of social media; (3) whether employees can identify the organization for which they work; (4) whether employees can write recommendation or referrals for friends; (5) whether employees can refer to clients, customers, or partners; (6) the kinds of information that should be kept confidential; (7) compliance with the terms of service of the social media sites that employees use; (8) compliance with laws about copyrights, plagiarism, [and FTC rules about endorsements], (9) interference with primary job responsibilities, and (10) the consequences of violations (Shinder, 2009).

Like Shinder, Mah argues in "How to Build a Social Networking Policy" that the policy should include a definition of social media and user guidelines. In addition, he emphasizes the need for (1) coordinating with existing policies, (2) educating users on the policy, and (3) monitoring and follow-up (Mah, 2010).

While a little older and focused mainly on blogging, the list of best practices developed by the Society for New Communications Research is worthy of consideration and provides additional insight on elements to include (*Best Practices for Developing a Social Media Policy*, 2007). Factors noted as influencing the successful development and implementation of a social media policy in-

clude fostering a culture of openness, trusting employees to use good judgment, and training employees about the policy and legal issues related to it.

Another useful web site is <http://www.socialmedia.biz/>, which includes a large number of social media policies and a variety of other resources (Social Media Policies, n.d.). The resources include a social media policy template (as does Mr. Boudreaux's web site) for any organization wishing to develop a social media policy.

While focused on franchising, Bauer's article emphasizes the need for organizations to ensure that their social media policies protect confidential information and protect against improper endorsements by their employees (Bauer, 2010). The author emphasizes the importance of including wording about avoiding controversial topics and requiring disclaimers for content and opinions.

Although numerous articles are readily available to help one develop an effective social media policy, Jonathan Hyman, a partner in the law firm Kohrman Jackson & Krantz, best sums up these articles when he stated, "Employees need to know the ground rules on what's appropriate and what's not" (Aguilar, 2009). Hyman further states, "a social media policy boils down to two words: Be professional."

From the various articles mentioned above in addition to other sources listed in the Bibliography, the researchers developed a checklist of desired elements to include in a social media policy. The elements on the checklist used in examining university social media policies can be organized into four main categories as follows: (1) Policy Introduction/ Background/ Overview, (2) Policy Expectation/Usage Clarity, (3) Policy Education, and (4) Enforcement Clarity.

SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY POSTINGS

The social media policies of the seven universities in the South Central United States with posted policies were examined to determine what elements were included. As presented above, the following main categories of elements were examined: (1) Policy Introduction/ Background/ Overview, (2) Policy Expectation/Usage Clarity,

(3) Policy Education, and (4) Enforcement Clarity.

Policy Overview

In reviewing the introductory section of posted social media policies, the researchers first examined what elements were provided wherein an overview of the policy was addressed. All seven of the social media policies from the above-mentioned universities with posted policies included a definition of social media. In the general overview, all of the policies, with the exception of

Loyola, included a discussion of Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube in their definitions (see Table 4). Four universities, including Loyola, specifically discussed blogs.

As shown in Table 5, all of the policies are administered by units responsible for communicating with the public and maintaining goodwill. Additionally, all of the policies discussed the usage and terms of agreement of social media tools at the university, and all of the policies mentioned to some extent the coordination of this policy with other existing policies. Two policies

TABLE 4
SOCIAL MEDIA TOOLS INCLUDED AND DEFINED IN UNIVERSITY SOCIAL MEDIA POLICIES

School	Facebook	Twitter	YouTube	Other
Auburn	yes	yes	yes	Mentions similar sites
Arkansas Tech	yes	yes	yes	Mentions a variety of social media apps
Loyola	no	no	no	Blogs
Tulane	yes	yes	no	Blogs
U. Alabama	yes	yes	yes	no
U. C. Arkansas	yes	yes	yes	Blogs, Wiki's, LinkedIn, and Flickr
U. L. Monroe	yes	yes	yes	Blogs, MySpace, and other social media apps

TABLE 5
GENERAL OVERVIEW POLICY ELEMENTS INCLUDED IN UNIVERSITY SOCIAL MEDIA POLICIES

School	Responsible for Oversight	School Policy Usage/Terms of Agreement	Coordination with Existing Policies	Building and Maintaining Goodwill	Date of Last Update
Auburn	Univ. Relations	yes	yes	yes	3/1/2011
Arkansas Tech	Univ. Relations	yes	yes	yes	11/2010
Loyola	Office of Web Communications	yes	yes	yes	n.d.
Tulane	Univ. Communications & Marketing	yes	yes	yes	n.d.
U. Alabama	Univ. Relations	yes	yes	yes	2010
U. C. Arkansas	Director of Web Development	yes	yes	yes	3/1/2011
U. L. Monroe	Univ. Relations	yes	yes	yes	8/4/2009

did not give the date of the last update, and two have been updated recently.

Policy Expectation/Usage Clarity

In reviewing information on the expectations for and clarity about the use of social media tools, all of the policies at the seven universities focused on the institutional use of social media and made a point of differentiating between institutional use and personal use. Only two policies mentioned the impact of social media tools on productivity, and only two policies mentioned compliance with the social media site's user agreement (see Table 6).

In reviewing various legal and ethical elements that could be included in social media policies, all of the policies addressed legal issues (see Table 7). Furthermore, all of the schools except the University of Louisiana Monroe discussed the need for honesty and accuracy, to avoid controversy, and to protect confidential information in their policies. The majority of the university policies emphasized the need to publish a disclaimer that the views expressed did not represent the school as a whole and to avoid the appearance of making endorsements on behalf of the institution. The majority of the policies also discussed the need to use school logos and colors with care and to follow appropriate naming guidelines. Approximately one-half of the policies mentioned the need to obey copyright laws.

School	Institutional	Personal	Productivity	Social Media Terms of Agreement
Auburn	yes	no	no	yes
Arkansas Tech	yes	yes	yes	no
Loyola	yes	yes	no	no
Tulane	yes	yes	no	yes
U. Alabama	yes	no	no	no
U. C. Arkansas	yes	yes	yes	no
U. L. Monroe	yes	yes	no	no

School	Honesty/ Accuracy	Controversy	Confidentiality/ Privacy	Disclaimers	Logos	Naming	Copyright
Auburn	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	no	yes
Arkansas Tech	yes	yes	yes	no	yes	yes	no
Loyola	yes	yes	yes	no	yes	no	yes
Tulane	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
U. Alabama	yes	yes	yes	yes	no	no	no
U. C. Arkansas	yes	yes	yes	yes	no	no	yes
U. L. Monroe	no	no	no	yes	yes	yes	no

Policy Education and Enforcement Clarity

In reviewing both the education of constituencies relative to the social media policies and the clarification of enforcement, none of the schools provide any training relative to their social media policies (see Table 8). And although not explicitly discussed, three of the reviewed university policies hinted at possible disciplinary actions if the policy is violated. However, violations would be detected only if complaints were made because only three schools mentioned any type of employee monitoring. Furthermore, two of these universities indicate that monitoring would not be performed routinely. As mentioned in their

cial media rather than personal use of it; however, only two addressed the issue of social media tools' impact on productivity and the need to comply with the social media site's user agreement. All of the seven posted policies reviewed in this study addressed various legal and ethical issues, with the majority of the policies addressing honesty/accuracy, confidentiality/privacy, controversy avoidance, disclaimers, logo usage, and naming guidelines. Although the majority of the policies went into great detail about content that was allowed and not allowed, little time was spent on the issue of noncompliance, a plan to monitor policy compliance routinely, and penalties for violating the policy. However, none of the policies discussed the provision for training.

School	Training	Security /Risk Mgmt	Approval	Monitoring	Removal of Content	Disciplinary Actions
Auburn	no	yes	yes	yes	no	yes
Arkansas Tech	no	no	no	no	yes	no
Loyola	no	no	no	yes	no	yes
Tulane	no	no	no	no	no	no
U. Alabama	no	no	no	yes	yes	yes
U. C. Arkansas	no	yes	yes	no	no	no
U. L. Monroe	no	no	yes	no	no	no

policies, only three schools require approval of social media sites, and only two indicated the school reserves the right to remove content.

SUMMARY

In examining the social media policies of the 48 AACSB-accredited schools in the SREB South Central United States, the researchers found that only seven universities (14.6%) had social media policies posted on their web sites. Although 86.4% of the universities did not have a social media policy posted, 42 of the 48 universities (87.5%) had links to social media tools on their main university web sites.

In general, the posted social media policies addressed Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and Blogs. The policies focused on institutional use of so-

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In conclusion, although the majority of AACSB-International accredited universities in the SREB South Central Region of the United States have links to social media tools on their university web site, a minimal number of universities have social media policies posted on their web sites. Given the popularity of social media tools and the results of this study, it is evident that more universities need to develop and/or publish their policies on their web sites. This study also indicates the need for schools when revising or developing their policies to address the issues of training, monitoring, and penalties for noncompliance.

To ensure university administrators, faculty, and staff are aware of expectations relating to the use

of social media tools, it is recommended that universities post their policies on their web sites and educate all university employees on policy implementation. Being proactive is much better than waiting to react to an unforeseen social media situation wherein a university is unexpectedly positioned negatively in the national news.

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