

# Skills Framework for a Social Age - SFSA

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**Abstract.** *The aim of this paper was defining required skills that a person should own or obtain to perform specific tasks with their adjacent responsibilities in jobs related to social media, web, online marketing and online public relations. Our model for this classification was SFIA Framework<sup>1</sup> (Skills Framework for the Information Age). This classification came out in need to define and differentiate what skills should have which responsibilities in order to create a standard for this field of online marketing and online PR activities.*

**Keywords.** Web, Online PR, Social Media, Social Media Marketing, Community Management, Skills

## 1 Introduction

The Skills Framework for the Information Age (SFIA), defined by the SFIA Foundation has listed 78 skills in the field of Information and Communication Technology skills (ICT skills), categorized into 6 main categories and 17 sub-categories. [1] That categorization is the tool which determines specific degrees of autonomy and responsibility an individual can have.

*“At Level 1, a skill is usually practised under close supervision. At Level 7, a skill is practised in a leadership capacity in which the software professional leads, manages, or influences others. Specific definitions are provided for each skill and its associated levels. For ease-of-use, each skill is assigned a four-letter acronym.”* [1]

While ICT has established its own skillset, media and new-media jobs lack one such framework. Based on our personal experience, there are many people claiming themselves as social media managers, social media or online strategists, while their portfolios are empty. This proposed Skills Framework for a Social Age (SFSA) paper should try to standardize the relationships between titles, skills and responsibilities in the world of social media marketing and communication through online social networks.

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.sfia.org.uk/>

We defined Skills Framework for a Social Age as a set of required skills an individual has to obtain in order to be able to bare and fulfil accompanying responsibilities while carrying the title accordingly.

## 2 Online Public Relations (OPR)

The development of the Internet has brought dramatic changes not only in how individuals communicate every day, but also in how organizations conduct their businesses. Company has to communicate with their audiences or their public (consumers, investors, employees) in order to survive and develop as entities. Technology development makes creation of content incredibly easy and virtually free, both for consumers and the media [2, 33]

Based on audience diversification communication becomes more and more complex process and the quality of communication depends on the means used for transmitting the information. The modern communication techniques permit reaching more and more public faster than before and allow increasing the freedom of action for the public. They offer new ways of transmitting the message, more efficient way to reach the public and more sophisticated ways to convince it but they also bring unexpected challenges. [3, 33] The main goal of PR is creating relationship with the audience and according to Kirat excellent communications and public relations are those that serve to facilitate the relationship between an organization and its strategic publics. [4, 167] With the popularity of the Internet public perception, opinion and the reputation of a particular company can be easily influenced. Thus, most public relations departments in private and public corporations have been using and employing a variety of Internet tools and Internet monitoring services to actively monitor opinions about their corporations. [5, 346] The World Wide Web has revolutionized relations between organizations and their public [6, 381] and it is considered to be the first public relations mass medium allowing direct communications between organizations and their public. Internet also provides a powerful medium for public relations professionals to provide information to their many publics, including the media [7, 311] Through the web practitioners of

public relations can communicate directly with their public with transparency, frankness and democracy [4, 167] “The Internet has broken the barriers of classical communication models as each recipient is a sender too.” [3, 35-36]

Public relations practitioners have recognized the as an Web opportunity for expanding communications with their public, taking a more pro-active approach to addressing more specialized segments of their target populations with specific interactive messages across national frontiers [6, 381]

Traditionally in public relations, controlled messages are sent through newsletters, annual reports, and other vehicles written by communication professionals in an organization. [8, 32] But today companies have embraced the Internet to conduct business (e-commerce) and to foster and maintain positive public relationships (public relations). And with the growth of Internet main tools public relations are companies’ own websites (online press rooms or press release), corporate blogs, forums, and social networking sites etc. Public relations practitioners must carefully consider ways to establish two-way communication with their public, they also need to consider what content to emphasize, etc. [9, 335-336] Four key differences between online public relations and traditional public relations are as follows [10, 385]

1. The audience is connected to organisations (previously, people issued press releases which were distributed over the newswires, picked up by the media, and then published in their outlets. Today communication is considered as a two-way process and public can participate in creating public relations)
2. The members of the audience are connected to each other (through publishing their news on own websites or e-newsletters information can be rapidly distributed from person to person and group to group and can be discussed and debated over the Internet)
3. The audience has access to other information (in the past the company was able to make a statement that it would be difficult for the average audience member to check, and today the Internet facilitates rapid comparison of statements)
4. And, audiences pull information (this statement is connected with previous one. In the past there were limited channels (TV and press), and today there are many sources and channels of information – this makes it more difficult for the message to be seen).

### 3 Social Media

As we already said, growth of technology has influenced the development of new forms of public relations. One of these forms is social media and as more forms of social media emerge, it is beneficial for public relations practitioners to understand how to use these tools and how they relate to their jobs. “Social media offers numerous opportunities for public relations practitioners to interact with the public while adopting new forms of technology and integrating

them into their everyday lives.” [11, 90] Companies use social media to increase interactions with their public through a steady flow of inputs and outputs toward mutually beneficial relationships. Public relations refer to creating and maintaining long term relationship between company and its customers and there are five ways how a website can facilitate those relationships: usefulness of information, feedback loops, ease of interface, and conservation of visitors and generation of return visits. [12, 330]

When we talk about social media in public relations we must mention the Social Media Release (SMR) or “social media news release”. This term was first mentioned in 2006 and it emerged as a potentially powerful public relations tool in a world of social network media, particularly when targeted at influential bloggers. The social media release aims to completely rethink the narrative, text-focused approach to news announcements. It is understood as a blend of the traditional press release, and digital social media [13, 87] that includes the additional elements a reporter or consumer would want to see before they create their own content to broadcast or transmit further. It can be defined “as a single page of web content designed to enable the content to be removed and used on blogs, wikis and other social channels” [14]

The intersection of social media and public relations is about distributing existing channels to subscribers’ surroundings. Seven classic characteristics of public relations connected with social media are: [15]

1. Media relations (as long as there have been individuals and crowds to listen, there have been reporters, journalists to write and to maintain relationships between companies and their customers and social media helps them in that)
2. Community relations (most brands “live” some community and since social media sites are communities too, reaching out is a process that helps solidify the public’s perception of a brand)
3. Customer relations (company and its’ brands have to keep loyalty of their customers and social media networks help them in achieving that by keeping them happy, listening to their needs and wishes and by providing crucial information and serving their needs)
4. Internal relations (glancing internal relations is very important for each company because employees are aware of every important information suitable for public consumption and through social media sites company can engage them as emissaries of the brand’s parent company to reap the benefits of mutual support)
5. Human interest (humans are interested in everything and they want to be aware of content in whatever topic and social media enables them to stay in touch with all what is going on around them)

6. Crisis management (bad things happen to good brands and many crises require the quick broadcast of information to serve and mitigate damage to the brand where the social media sites can help as well)
7. Investor relations (company publishes a public annual report, report schedules and other salient financial data that will matter to investors and it can be crucial company).

## 4 Social Networking Sites

Social networking sites are among major Internet developments of the twenty-first century. Its main purpose is making new friendships or maintaining those that already exist [16, 67]

Social networking sites enable users to be part of a large, international community and to share information, opinion and content with other members of the network and they “allow individuals to present themselves, articulate their social networks, and establish or maintain connections with others” [17] Companies should have in mind that the social network sites are places “... where actual and potential customers are interacting, and it shapes how they think” [18, 190]

In literature are mentioned four different approaches to understand social networks, or better said the four fundamental features of social networking sites, and they are: [19, 28]

1. Interaction approach (based on the contacts individuals have with others over a period of time)
2. Role relation approach (it focuses on the types of roles which impact on individuals, such as family members or intimate friends)
3. Affection approach (individuals’ subjective criteria to determine who is the most important for him/her)
4. Exchange approach (individual behaviour based on specific rewarding systems to determine the scope and composition of one’s social network).

For past few years social networking sites have also become a new focus of many PR agencies after finding many executives participated in the medium to help build up their brands [20] to gain loyalty of their customers and to create a long-term relationships. Companies can use social media sites for smaller announcements directed to journalists, bloggers, and others in the media industry that uses online PR as one of their sources for information. [21] Public relations practitioners can use social networking sites to expand news coverage of a company or organization, to network with other public relations practitioners and keep up-to-date with the news from other companies with national, state and local news [22]

In literature are also mentioned five ways social networking sites are changing PR: [23]

1. Flattened hierarchy (communication with both internal and external communities has been democratized)
2. Time shifting (there has been a transcendence of time and distance in the communication process – geography no longer matters, the world is indeed flat)
3. Virtual connections (organizational structure is becoming more virtual with technology)
4. Digital tools (digital communications make possible the cost-effective advent of two-way symmetrical communications - many free and almost free services, such as blogs, forums, Skype)
5. Convergence (there is a convergence between the expectation for immediate communication and information and the tools to deliver on such expectations).

From mentioned above we can see that social networking sites are gaining in importance for companies that want to have positive publicity among their customers and with the help of social networking sites and public relations on them they can achieve that.

## 5 Community management process

Community management process can be described empirically from experience. Core business of a community manager is communication between customers and company.

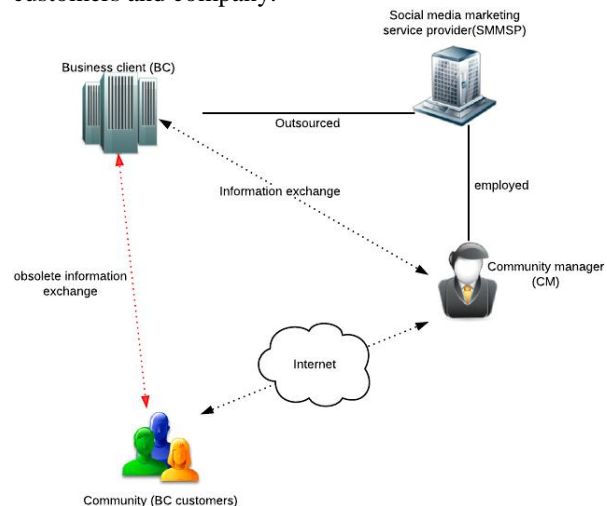


Figure 1. Community management participants  
[source: authors]

Fig.1 displays all the participants in an average community management process:

1. Business client (BC) is a brand, service or product or and other assets owner or provider that has the need to communicate with its customers or clients or community in general.

2. Social media marketing service provider (SMMSP) is a legal entity that provides service lease to BC. Service provided is community management, social media marketing, social consulting and relevant services.
3. Community manager (CM) is a person, an employee that is employed by SMMSP. This person must be qualified for its job and must comply with SFSA recommendations.
4. Community is a community of existing BC customers, potential customers and any random individual that may serve as information relay over the social networks.
5. Internet is a main medium for communication; Internet includes any form of social network, forum, virtual groups or any form of user participation in online communication and data delivery.

There may be many reasons why would BC rent any service from SMMSP one most evitable is reduction of costs. Just like many companies rent accounting services. Fig.1 shows one obsolete type of communication between BC and community. This way of communication is obsolete because SMMSP do tend to do a better job than BC alone, however exceptions do exist. Once outsourced, SMMSP must delegate project to one CM, which may be a leader of a team or single person, in any case communication between BC and CM is crucial because CM alone does not have all internal data required to make good quality communication (interaction) with community. BC and CM often work together work on mini project specially designed for online community; those projects may include sweepstakes, games, quests and many more ways of creative interaction.

## 6 SFSA

It is important to note that SFSA is not yet fully developed and it requires further field testing as well as it needs to be accepted by some significant social media agencies. Because of this, we recommend these skills, levels of responsibilities and titles to be taken as a guideline, not a rule; they have enough information to make a difference between skilful individual and a trainee.

It's not SFSA purpose to list every single skill or ability an individual should have in order to be a part of a particular responsibility level, especially if we consider social media as a new and still developing market with rapidly evolving rate. [24]

Some basic layout of a SFSA matrix would be consisted of a skill name, overall description of a skill, description of a skill on a specific level and generic definition of level involved. The skills context is identical to the one defined with SFIA and is consisted of professional and behavioural skills, knowledge and overall experience and qualifications. [25]

Skills Framework for a Social Age defines generic skills with several levels of responsibilities. These levels are being based on our own empirical data; the levels of responsibilities are:

- Follow and track - the first level for beginners and people who are just getting into social media communication, the responsibilities in this level include setting up the profiles on various social networks based on instruction made by higher authorities. Users in this level have no permission to publish content nor comment on it;
- Assist - users within this level have the authority to schedule their own content for review and/or publishing previously accepted content. It isn't allowed for the users with this level to engage in comments with the readers(community);
- Publish - users are allowed to create and publish content without previous approval as well as engaging in comments on published content;
- Advise - advisor can approve content for publishing and advise authors on how to create quality content. They are also responsible for creating weekly or monthly publishing plans as well as to keep up with the communication strategy. Advisors may have contact directly with the clients, brand manager or marketing department;
- Influence - users with this level of responsibility are bound to define and execute the online and communications strategy and related activities as well as coming up with new ways to get a better reach for the content in question;
- Set strategy - defining the complete online strategy and coordination of activities, duties and personnel (delegation) across social networks and other online media.

## 7 SFSA matrix

The first edition of SFSA matrix is made of six responsibility levels and two main groups; online media strategy and social media strategy, with total of 18 different activities distributed over responsibility levels and titles of specific titles of profession.

Table 1. SFSA matrix

		1	2	3	4	5	6
		Follow	Assist	Publish	Advise	Influence	Set strategy
<b>Online media strategy</b>	<b>Web presence</b>				Online web planning Content planning		
	<b>Social media presence</b>				Social activities Budgeting Defining relevant social networks		
<b>Social media strategy</b>	<b>Social media strategy development</b>				Social media planning Coordination		
	<b>Social media strategy execution</b>			Content strategy Content optimization			
					Delegation		
	<b>Social media management</b>			Mentoring			
					Content evaluation Content creation		
	<b>Community management</b>				Publishing own content Commenting		
		Publishing preapproved content					
<b>Social media support</b>	Social media setup Proposing content						

## 8 Benefits of accepting and using SFSA

SFSA is meant to be a tool for measuring and evaluate individuals and their skills within social media activities. This information can be used in order to reassign the individual within a social media team to a more accommodating position where it would give much better performance. Our skillset framework can also be useful in outsourcing social media agencies to determine are they capable and responsible enough to handle the campaign a client has in plan. On the other side, SFSA can be used to give out public listings of compatible agencies, giving them additional authority among the competition.

Since social media is open to public, the online strategy should include a crisis communication plan in case of an undesired PR from a client or unsatisfied customers. The social media team should be able to handle those kinds of situations; where SFSA and agencies previous references could be a proof of such capability.

## 9 Conclusion

SFSA's main goal is to prevent constant overflow of people which get self-titled with titles like community manager, social media strategist etc. without real experience or without knowing their responsibilities as a social media marketing expert. We believe that this skills framework would be beneficial to everyone involved in social media in any way, be it operative community manager or on a more strategic level of duty. As being completely new job position, Community manager is currently being under development and there are no rules or guidelines on how to perform this new position. However, the foundation for SFSA Matrix is based on our own experience we got over the last three years in working with clients on both commercial and government sponsored projects in which we did the duties of community management.

SFSA is the first step to start a standardisation of Community Management profession. Since this paper suggests the first version of SFSA Matrix, in the future research we will focus more on the empirical study of the matrix as well as the feedback from other notable community management service providers in the SEE region.

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