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**Article**

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## MANAGEMENT | RESEARCH ARTICLE

# Social media and management fashions

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**Abstract:** The management fashion literature has highlighted the role played by business media (i.e. print media outlets) in the diffusion and dissemination of new management concepts and ideas. However, in the last few years, we have witnessed the emergence of social media. Recent research has shown a widespread adoption and usage of social media both in among the general public and professionals in the business community. To date, however, management fashion researchers have not addressed the question of whether social media change the structure and workings of the management fashion market and the ways in which management concepts and ideas are diffused. This article provides a preliminary conceptual elaboration and analysis of how different social media platforms may influence the diffusion and dissemination of fashionable concepts and ideas. The analysis has several implications for research on management fashion.

**Subjects:** Business, Management and Accounting; Critical Management Studies; Organizational Studies

**Keywords:** social media; management fashions; management ideas; management concepts; dissemination; diffusion; social media in management

### ABOUT THE AUTHORS

The authors are faculty members at Buskerud and Vestfold University College in Norway. Dag Øivind Madsen defended his PhD thesis in 2011. The topic of Madsen's thesis was the diffusion of the Balanced Scorecard in the Scandinavian countries. Kåre Slåtten is currently a PhD candidate, writing a thesis on the history and evolution of Strategic Human Resource Management in Norway. The authors have published related papers on the Balanced Scorecard using theories about management fashions as well as the new alternative virus theory.

### PUBLIC INTEREST STATEMENT

There is a large supply of management concepts and ideas in the business community. These management concept and ideas offer different prescriptions on how to manage quality, improve process efficiency, or improve performance measurement practices. Some management ideas become very popular among managers and organizations (i.e. management fashions). Traditionally, managers have been exposed to fashionable ideas via print media outlets, such as management literature found in airport book stalls or glossy professional magazines. However, in recent years, the Internet and social media usage has skyrocketed both in the general public and in organizations. In this paper, we take a closer look at how new social media platforms such as LinkedIn, Twitter, and Facebook change how management concepts and ideas are spread. We discuss how social media platforms could change the dynamics of the management fashion market, by offering opportunities for user participation in idea generation/development, increased supplier-user interactivity, reduced publishing time lag, as well as increased virality.

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1. Social media and management fashions

In recent years, the spread of management concepts and ideas has received much attention in management studies (Alvarez, 1998; Engwall & Kipping, 2004; Røvik, 2011; Sahlin & Wedlin, 2008; Sahlin-Andersson & Engwall, 2002). Although different theoretical lenses have been used to study the diffusion of management concepts and ideas, the “management fashion school” has arguably been particularly influential (e.g. Abrahamson, 1996; Benders & Van Veen, 2001; Carson, Lanier, Carson, & Guidry, 2000; Clark, 2004a; Collins, 2012; Kieser, 1997; Ten Bos & Heusinkveld, 2008). Management fashion researchers point out that actors such as consulting firms, management gurus, business schools, and business media operate as a “fashion-setting community” (Abrahamson, 1996) or “management fashion arena” (Clark, 2004b; Jung & Kieser, 2012; Kieser, 1997; Klineciewicz, 2006; Madsen & Slåtten, 2013) around a management idea. These fashion-arena actors facilitate an idea’s “ability to flow” in the management community (Røvik, 2002) and perform different types of institutional activities which help raise awareness of the idea and support its long-term viability as a practice (Nielsen, Mathiassen, & Newell, 2014; Perkmann & Spicer, 2008).

It is widely recognized that business media play an important role in the diffusion and dissemination of management concepts and ideas (Alvarez, Mazza, & Pedersen, 2005; Mazza & Alvarez, 2000; Nijholt, Heusinkveld, & Benders, 2014; Rüling, 2005; Sahlin-Andersson & Engwall, 2002; Scarbrough, Robertson, & Swan, 2005). One particularly important reason for this is that business media function as communication channels where other fashion-arena actors (e.g. consultants, gurus, and business school academics) can provide discourse related to concepts and ideas. For example, other actors from the consultancy, practitioner, or academic domains may write books and articles where concepts and ideas are introduced and popularized. In addition, actors such as editors of professional magazines or books perform a gatekeeping function, influencing which ideas are given attention and space (Nijholt et al., 2014).

However, extant management fashion research on business media has focused almost exclusively on traditional print media outlets such as magazines, journals, or books. So far, little attention has been paid to the role of social media such as LinkedIn, Twitter, Facebook, and blogs in the diffusion and popularization of fashionable ideas. It can be argued that it is not surprising that this question has not been addressed given that most of the foundational studies in the management fashion literature were carried out and published in 1990s and early 2000s, prior to the advent of modern social media. However, in recent years, evidence has been mounting showing widespread adoption of social usage in the general public (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Wilson, Guinan, Parise, & Weinberg, 2011), as well as increased usage among professionals and the business community at large (Archambault & Grudin, 2012; Skeels & Grudin, 2009).

In our view, there is reason to believe that the growth of social media has wide-reaching implications for the configuration and workings of the management fashion market, in particular the role of business media. For example, new social media platforms may shape the ways in which management ideas are disseminated by fashion-setters, as these platforms open up new ways of broadcasting, transmitting, and marketing management ideas to their target audiences (i.e. managers). In addition, the interactivity offered by social media platforms may shape the ways in which management ideas are encountered and consumed by managers on the demand-side of the management fashion market.

### 1.2. Purpose and contribution

Based on the background outlined above, the purpose of this article is to provide a preliminary conceptual elaboration and analysis of the role of social media in the diffusion and popularization of management fashions. In doing this, our paper adds to the literature on management fashions in at least two ways.

*First*, our paper elaborates on how social media platforms change the configuration and workings of the management fashion market, in particular how management ideas are diffused and disseminated. We discuss how social media may substitute or complement traditional diffusion channels, in particular print media such as books and articles. Although extant research has provided useful insights into the role of business media, we argue it is narrowly focused on print media outlets. For example, most extant research focuses on print media professional magazines which are “often glossy, full-colour publications and typically have a monthly publication frequency” (Nijholt et al., 2014, p. 473). It is in our view important to raise the question of whether print media outlets will continue to dominate in the same way in the future. Will Røvik’s (2002, pp. 117–118) statement that “management literature is probably the single most important medium for the diffusion of organizational recipes” ring true in the future, or is it ripe for revision? Hence, our paper engages with and provides a new perspective on the ongoing debate in the management fashion literature about the role of business media in the diffusion process.

*Second*, our paper discusses the types of actors involved in social media and their interplay. We argue that social media platforms may become an “arena within an arena” (Kieser, 1997, p. 64) where different types of actors interact and develop ties and relationships. In our view, social media can function as meeting places where fashion consumers are exposed to and develop relationships with suppliers of management concepts and ideas (e.g. consultants and software firms), as well as other users.

### **1.3. Structure**

This paper is structured in the following way: In Section 2 follows a brief review of research on management fashion, with a particular emphasis on the role of business media. In Section 3 follows an analysis of the role played by social media platforms in management fashion diffusion. In Section 4, we discuss the theoretical implications of our findings for research on management fashions. Section 5 concludes the paper, and discusses limitations as well as ideas for future research.

## **2. Management fashions**

This section introduces management fashion research, and clarifies what is meant by the term management fashion. Next, the actors involved in the management fashion arena are outlined, before the focus turns to the role of business media in the management fashion arena. This sets the stage for our discussion in Section 3, where we introduce social media as a new part of the management fashion arena.

### **2.1. Management fashion research**

Over the course of the last two decades, much has been written about management fashions (e.g. Abrahamson, 1996; Clark, 2004a; Collins, 2012; Newell, Robertson, & Swan, 2001; Ten Bos & Heusinkveld, 2008) in a number of different fields such as accounting (Ax & Bjørnenak, 2005; Larsson, 2015; Malmi, 1999), strategy (Clark, 2004b), human resource management (Iles, Preece, & Chuai, 2010; Preece, Iles, & Chuai, 2011), and in information systems (Baskerville & Myers, 2009; Fridgen & Moser, 2013; Wang, 2010). Within these fields, researchers drawing on management fashion theory have studied the popularization of concepts and ideas such as Knowledge Management (Klincewicz, 2006; Scarbrough, 2002; Scarbrough & Swan, 2001), Re-engineering (Benders, van den Berg, & van Bijsterveld, 1998), Talent Management (Iles et al., 2010), Balanced Scorecard (Ax & Bjørnenak, 2005; Braam, Benders, & Heusinkveld, 2007), and Lean (Benders & van Bijsterveld, 2000; Larsson, 2012).

### **2.2. Management ideas and management fashions**

Management concepts or ideas are “prescriptive, more or less coherent views on management” (Braam et al., 2007, p. 868). Well-known examples include Knowledge Management, Lean, and The Balanced Scorecard. A central question for management fashion researchers is how management ideas become fashionable, i.e. management fashions. Management fashion researchers point out that the distinction between management ideas and management fashions is important since not all management ideas succeed in becoming popular and fashionable (Nijholt & Benders, 2007, p. 630).

Jung and Kieser (2012, p. 329) define management fashion as those “management concepts that relatively speedily gain large shares in the public management discourse.” From this definition, it follows that management fashion constitutes a subset of all available management ideas (Braam, Heusinkveld, Benders, & Aubel, 2002, p. 4). Some ideas never become fashionable as they fail to attract any attention and die off quickly (Benders et al., 1998). Management fashion researchers emphasize that supply-side actors play an important role in the “fashionization” of management ideas, by creating a wave of interest leading to a critical mass of adopters, which triggers further bandwagon effects on the supply- and demand-sides of the management fashion market (Benders, 1999). In the management fashion market, intermediary actors and groups (Scarbrough, 2002) such as consulting firms, business schools, and business media operate as “carriers” of fashionable ideas (Sahlin-Andersson & Engwall, 2002), facilitating the “flow” of ideas in the management community (Røvik, 2002).

### **2.3. The management fashion arena**

Researchers focusing how management ideas become popularize and become fashionable, highlight that intermediary actors together form a so-called “management fashion arena” around a management idea (Clark, 2004b; Jung & Kieser, 2012; Kieser, 1997; Klineciewicz, 2006; Madsen & Slåtten, 2013). There is a broad constellation of actors involved in the management fashion arena, e.g. consultants (Heusinkveld, 2013; Kipping & Clark, 2012), management gurus (Clark & Salaman, 1996; Huczynski, 1993), conference/seminar organizers (Kieser, 1997), financial analysts (Nicolai, Schulz, & Thomas, 2010), software firms (Klineciewicz, 2006), professional organizations (Greenwood, Hinings, & Suddaby, 2002; Newell, Robertson, & Swan, 1998), business media (Alvarez et al., 2005), as well as actors which operate more in the shadows such as book editors and ghost writers (Clark, 2004b; Clark & Greatbatch, 2002).

### **2.4. The role of business media in the management fashion arena**

It is widely recognized that business media play an important role in the diffusion and popularization of management concepts and ideas (Abrahamson, 1996; Alvarez et al., 2005; Mazza & Alvarez, 2000; Nijholt et al., 2014; Rüling, 2005; Sahlin-Andersson & Engwall, 2002; Scarbrough et al., 2005; Spell, 2001). The actors and groups involved in the management fashion arena actively use business media as an important communication channel to raise awareness of new concepts and ideas, and by authoring such media pieces position themselves as experts and providers of solutions and services in relation to concepts or ideas. Therefore, consulting firms and software firms often contribute heavily to the business media discourse. For example, consultants tend to be very active in the early stages of the management fashion life cycle with enthusiastic and upbeat articles touting the merits of the new concepts.

Academics, on the other hand, tend to write more sober and critical articles, and often perform a critical due diligence function in relation to fashionable management ideas. However, the publishing and review processes in academic journals are generally slow-moving. Therefore, academic discourse on fashions tends not to surface until much later in the life cycle of fashions (see e.g. Heusinkveld, 2004, p. 27).

However, as pointed out by Nijholt et al. (2014), business media such as professional magazine do not function as a “mouthpiece” for the fashion-setters. Instead, media-internal processes shape which ideas are given attention and space. In particular, editors play important roles as gatekeepers. For example, editors perceive the newsworthiness of different ideas and decide which ideas are given attention (Nijholt et al., 2014).

Although extant research has provided useful insights into the role of business media in the management fashion market, we argue that extant research been narrowly focused on print media outlets. For example, much of extant research focuses on print media professional magazines which are “often glossy, full-color publications and typically have a monthly publication frequency” (Nijholt et al., 2014, p. 473). To date, however, management fashion researchers have not paid much

attention to how and to what extent social media and the Internet more generally might be game changers. Partly this has a natural explanation; after all, the rise of social media is a new phenomenon and these developments have happened very quickly and not yet materialized in the research literature. In keeping with the aim of the paper, in the next section, we will discuss how different social media platforms influence management fashion diffusion.

### **3. Social media platforms and management fashion diffusion**

#### **3.1. Emergence and growth of social media**

Although the World Wide Web (sometimes referred to as Web 1.0) has been around since the early 1990s, the Web was in its early days largely a vast collection of websites containing large amounts of information. In recent years, the Internet has become a place where users can interact, collaborate, and share information via social networks and virtual communities. This evolution of Internet is often referred to as Web 2.0 (Arora, 2014; Cormode & Krishnamurthy, 2008). Since the mid-2000s, we have seen the advent and rapid growth of various types of social media such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and LinkedIn.

In recent years, social media usage has skyrocketed. In the general public adoption has been fueled by the increased prevalence and sophistication of smart phones and tablets. Hence, social media have gone mainstream, not only in everyday use, but also increasingly in professional life and in organizations. Recent research has shown that the use of social media in the workplace is increasing (Archambault & Grudin, 2012; Skeels & Grudin, 2009). Social media platforms are being used in the workplace to interact, collaborate, and share knowledge (Leftheriotis & Giannakos, 2014; Razmerita, Kirchner, & Nabeth, 2014). The popularity of social media in organizations and among managers has led some researchers to ask the question of whether social media themselves have become a “management fashion” (Bergquist, Ljungberg, Zaffar, & Stenmark, 2013).

#### **3.2. Social media platforms**

In the following sub-sections, we briefly describe the main social media platforms which we deem to be of particular relevance in relation to management fashions. Our focus is on the large social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and YouTube, and exclude from our discussion some types of social media platforms which are geared mostly toward teenagers or young adults (e.g. SnapChat, Instagram) and other niche audiences (e.g. Pinterest, ResearchGate). Although we recognize that this may change, as of today these platforms have limited relevance to our discussion of management fashions.

To illustrate how management fashions are diffused via social media platforms, we utilize well-known examples of management concepts and ideas. The chosen concepts and ideas have all been previously studied from a management fashion perspective, e.g. Balanced Scorecard (Ax & Bjørnenak, 2005; Madsen, 2014), Beyond Budgeting (Ax & Larsson, 2012), Lean (Benders & van Bijsterveld, 2000; Larsson, 2012), and Quality Management (David & Strang, 2006; Thawesaengskulthai & Tannock, 2008).

#### **3.3. LinkedIn**

LinkedIn is a social media platform which is geared toward the interests of professionals. Since it was introduced in the mid 2000s, LinkedIn has achieved a strong position with the business community (Archambault & Grudin, 2012; Bonsón & Bednárová, 2013; Skeels & Grudin, 2009) and widely used for job hunting, as well as networking with former colleagues and alumni.

LinkedIn is highly relevant in the context of management fashions for a number of reasons. First of all, there is a high concentration of supply-side actors present on LinkedIn, e.g. consulting firms, software firms, spokesmen, and thought leaders. The demand-side of fashions also has a heavy presence on LinkedIn. For example, many of LinkedIn’s users are managers, often at the senior level. However, LinkedIn is also used by aspiring professionals (e.g. MBA students) looking to network and market themselves to potential employers. LinkedIn users can also choose to follow thought leaders



such as famous business leaders, politicians, and management gurus. LinkedIn offers a high degree of interactivity as users can join groups focusing on different management concepts and ideas, participate in discussions, and send messages to other users.

Our exploratory research reveals that there is considerable activity in relation to management concepts and ideas on LinkedIn (Table 2 in Appendix 1). For example, there are several groups set up in relation to management concepts and ideas such as Beyond Budgeting, Lean, Balanced Scorecard, and Quality-related concepts. Some of these groups have thousands of members, many of which, according to the group statistics, are consultants and senior managers.

### 3.4. Facebook

Facebook is currently the largest social media platform (Wilson, Gosling, & Graham, 2012). On Facebook, businesses can set up so-called “fan pages” (Zanette, Rosenthal, Abdalla, Ferreira, & Brito, 2015) around their products and services. Research has shown that businesses can create “brand page communities” (Shao, Ross, & Zahay, 2015) and that such brand fan pages can be used as business communication tools which can lead to brand love, which has positive outcomes such as increased word of mouth (Kudeshia, Sikdar, & Mittal, 2016).

In the context of management ideas, fashion-setting actors such as consultants, gurus, and software providers can use Facebook to set up pages focusing on management concepts and ideas. On these pages, supply-side actors may present the services they offer related to certain management concepts and ideas. There are currently numerous examples of such brand page communities on Facebook (Table 3 in Appendix 1). For example, the US-based *Balanced Scorecard Institute* has more than 3,200 likes, while *Beyond Budgeting Iceland* has about 250 likes (not an insignificant number given the small population of Iceland).

### 3.5. YouTube

YouTube is the largest website for videos (Welbourne & Grant, 2015). It contains both professional and user-generated contents. Research has shown that YouTube is frequently used in for instance science communication (Welbourne & Grant, 2015) and medical videos (Desai et al., 2013). YouTube is also frequently used in the classroom (Berk, 2009), and there is reason to believe it is also increasingly used in business schools. Research has shown that YouTube videos go through a popularity life cycle (Yu, Xie, & Sanner, 2015), which can resemble that of a management fashion. For instance, in recent years, we have seen some YouTube videos go viral, but after some time they too go out of fashion and fade into the background. Compared to other social media platforms, YouTube is less interactive. Although it is possible for users to post comments and their own videos, in many ways YouTube resembles traditional media since it is dominated by one-way communication.

In the context of management fashions, there are also a number of videos about management concepts and ideas on YouTube, e.g. Balanced Scorecard, Beyond Budgeting, and Lean (Table 4 in Appendix 1). Supply-side actors can set up YouTube channels and post videos, e.g. educational videos where they introduce new concepts and ideas, or videos from conferences, seminars, and meetings. For example, *Accenture Academy* provides a wide range of videos on business topics, e.g. on Total Quality Management. There are also interviews with management gurus on YouTube, e.g. interviews with Robert Kaplan, one of the founders of the Balanced Scorecard movement, and several presentations by Beyond Budgeting spokesman and book author Bjarte Bogsnes. Another example is the Norway-based Lean Forum Norge which regularly posts videos from its yearly conference and other events.

### 3.6. Twitter

Twitter is a social media platform which is used for short messages and conversations (Smith, Himmelboim, Rainie, & Shneiderman, 2015). It has been noted that close to 70% of journalists are present on Twitter (Rosengren, Meisel, Gardner, & Bowman-Zatzkin, 2015). The very high volume of tweets means that there is much noise on Twitter (Rosengren et al., 2015) which can make it hard to

gain attention and traction. Research on social media in politics has shown a relationship between Twitter attention and political behavior (DiGrazia, McKelvey, Bollen, & Rojas, 2013), which suggest that social media such as Twitter have relevance for understanding offline behavior as well. In the business world, firms can use Twitter to engage with customers in different ways (Okazaki, Díaz-Martín, Rozano, & Menéndez-Benito, 2015).

Twitter is frequently used in the context of management concepts and ideas (Table 5 in Appendix 1). Many supply-side actors have Twitter accounts where they tweet about management concepts and ideas, and post pictures and videos. Several consulting firms and spokesmen have Twitter accounts, e.g. in relation to Balanced Scorecard, Lean, and Beyond Budgeting. For example, Tweets in relation to Balanced Scorecard typically use the hashtag #balancedscorecard.

### 3.7. MeetUp

MeetUp is a social media platform which is used to organize meetings, e.g. conferences and seminars. It should be noted that most of these meetings take place in “real life,” and MeetUp is just a digital platform used to organize and facilitate meetings. In the context of management concepts and ideas, MeetUp is used to organize meetings related to, for instance, Lean and quality approaches (Table 6 in Appendix 1).

### 3.8. Blogs

Blogs and Wikipedia (Bruns, 2008) are typical examples of user-generated content on the Internet. Over time, firms have adopted blogs as a way to carry out organizational or product branding (Page, 2015). Research has found that blogs are typically read by a rather narrow audience. In politics, blog mostly read by “elites” (Farrell & Drezner, 2008). However, in a business context, elites would be “management intellectuals” (Guillén, 1994), e.g. fashion-setting actors such as management consultants, business school academics, and management gurus/spokesmen. On the demand-side, the readership of blogs is typically senior managers and young aspiring professionals on the managerial fast track, e.g. enrolled in MBA programs and executive education.

There are a large number of blogs and Wikipedia pages about management concepts and ideas (Table 7 in Appendix 1). Many of these blogs can be found on consulting or software firms’ websites and contain short presentations or discussions of management concepts. There are also several Wikipedia pages related to management concepts and ideas, e.g. Balanced Scorecard and Lean. These Wikipedia pages typically contain broad overviews of concepts and ideas, similar in many ways to descriptions found in college textbooks.

### 3.9. Comparison

Our exploratory analysis has shown that all of the large social media platforms are relevant in the context of management fashion. Although there is some variation, Tables in Appendix 1 show that most well-known management concepts and ideas can be found on at least some of the social media platforms. Some management concepts and ideas have a presence across nearly all types of social media, e.g. Balanced Scorecard, Beyond Budgeting, and Lean. Therefore, it appears that some suppliers or fashion movements have a social media strategy and recognize the importance of social media in reaching possible fashion consumers.

## 4. The implications of social media for management fashion theory

The popularity of social media has several implications for how we view the diffusion and popularization of fashionable management ideas. As will we discuss in greater detail in the following, the emergence of social media is changing the configuration of the management fashion arena and the ways fashionable ideas are diffused and disseminated. As Table 1 shows, social media change the relative roles of suppliers and consumers of ideas, supplier–consumer interaction, and the importance of gatekeeping. In addition, there are differences between print media and social media when it comes to publishing time lag, life cycle, and virality of fashions.



**Table 1. Implications of print media and social media for management fashions**

	Print media	Social media
The role of suppliers	Active	Active
	Much gatekeeping (limited space, newsworthiness, agenda setting)	Little gatekeeping (no space limitations, little editorial control)
The role of consumers	Mostly passive consumption	More active consumption (co-consumption)
		Crowdsourcing more user-generated content
Supplier–consumer interaction	Limited interaction	Interactivity
	One-way conversion (supplier to consumers)	Two-way conversation (dialog and conversation)
Publishing time lag	Long (especially for books and academic journals)	Short (instant)
Life cycle of popular ideas	Shortening	Possibly longer
Virality	Low	High (“go viral”)

#### 4.1. The role of suppliers

Suppliers play an active role in both print media and social media. Management fashion researchers have pointed out that suppliers such as consultants, practitioners, and academics are providers of media discourse (see e.g. Heusinkveld, 2004, p. 31). On the other hand, business media are not a mouthpiece for suppliers as they have to compete for access and try to influence gatekeepers at professional magazines and book publishers (Nijholt et al., 2014). We argue that social media differ from traditional print media when it comes to the role of gatekeeping. Social media differ from print media in that there are not space limitations on the number of groups on LinkedIn or Twitter accounts. Hence, there are fewer entry barriers as basically anyone can set up a Twitter account for free. On social media platforms, it becomes much easier for supply-side actors to contribute to the discourse related to management ideas, as there are fewer gatekeepers and little editorial control. In contrast with print media publications, social media platforms exercise very little editorial control over what types of concepts and ideas are discussed.

#### 4.2. The role of consumers

Social media also change how ideas are consumed by the demand-side of the management fashion market. This involves not only how managers learn and become aware of new ideas (Rossem & Veen, 2011), but also how managers deal with these ideas after adoption when they are implemented as practices in organizations (Røvik, 2011). Whereas consumers of print media publications take a passive role, in social media there are opportunities for more active consumption, dialog, and conversation both among groups of users, but also between suppliers and consumers. In offline settings, researchers have found that fashion consumers experience live guru seminars in different ways (Groß, Heusinkveld, & Clark, 2015). Similarly, social media experiences are also likely to vary across different users.

In social media, users can take a more active role, in effect “co-constructing” or “co-consuming” management ideas (cf. Heusinkveld, Sturdy, & Werr, 2011; Rolfsen, 2011). One important trend in social media is the rise of “crowdsourcing” (Brabham, 2008; Estelles-Arolas & Gonzalez-Ladronde-Guevara, 2012; Howe, 2006). Crowdsourcing refers to the process where the community of users (“the crowd”) is actively solicited to take part in idea generation/development. For example, crowdsourcing is used in developing new product ideas (Poetz & Schreier, 2012). In the context of management fashions, crowdsourcing can be used to generate new ideas and increase the utility of management ideas.

As mentioned in Section 3, social media platforms such as LinkedIn have forums and other meeting places where users can discuss and shape the development and trajectory of management ideas. The input of users could potentially improve the success rate of management ideas and prolong the life cycle of fashions. Suppliers of fashions can also draw on crowdsourcing strategies to

popularize and institutionalize ideas. For example, users who have participated in management idea development could become important allies and supporting players, and less likely to jump ship when the next big idea comes along.

In the marketing literature, Troye and Supphellen (2012) have shown that participation in co-production positively biases product evaluations. Similarly, users participating in co-producing management ideas could possibly perceive more positive implementation effects. In the budgeting literature, it has been shown that participation leads to positive outcomes such as acceptance and commitment (Maiga, 2005). Similarly, it is possible that users, who have participated in management idea development, will be more invested and committed fashion-movement followers, with vested interests in the fashion's future development and success.

The ability for users to generate content via for instance crowdsourcing processes means that they can partake in the evolution of concepts and ideas. Therefore, the emergence of social media and trends such as crowdsourcing can lead to a "democratization" of the management knowledge market.

#### **4.3. Supplier–consumer interaction**

Social media open up possibilities for more supplier–consumer interaction than in print media. In traditional print media outlets, the conversation is usually one-way, from the supplier to the consumer, whereas in social media, there is more interaction between the supply- and demand-side. In social media, there is not just one sender and many receivers, but possibly multiple senders and receivers. Instead of management concepts and ideas being broadcasted from a sender as is the case in print media outlets, in social media there is more interactivity.

Social media also bring together suppliers and consumers of ideas in new ways. As documented in Section 3, on social media sites such as LinkedIn, there are groups and communities where consumers can learn about and discuss management ideas. Social media platforms also have functionalities which facilitate contact between users, creation of users groups and networks, as well as exchanging of knowledge and experiences about ideas. It is possible that "communities of practice" around fashionable ideas (Roberts, 2010) are more likely to develop as a result of participation in social media.

In our view, social media can function as meeting places where different actors, both suppliers and consumers, interact and collaborate and share information, and develop ties and relationships, or what Kieser referred to as an "arena within an arena" (Kieser, 1997). In the past, the conference/seminar scene has had such a role (Kieser, 1997), e.g. in the case of the Balanced Scorecard (Ax & Bjørnenak, 2005; Madsen, 2014).

#### **4.4. Life cycle**

Social media may also affect the life cycle of management fashions. Several years before the advent of Web 2.0 and social media, it was noted that the life cycle of fads and fashions was shortening (Carson et al., 2000; Kieser, 1997). It is unclear whether social media will lead to a shortening or extension of the life cycle of management fashions. For example, in social media, there will be opportunities for supply-side actors to extend the life cycle of management fashions via field-level institutionalization efforts. This includes both theorization and institutional work. Theorization involves problematizing what is "wrong" within a field and how the new concept/idea can be a possible solution (Greenwood et al., 2002; Nielsen et al., 2014). Institutional work is activities aimed at anchoring fashionable idea as a more permanent practice (Perkmann & Spicer, 2008). For instance, suppliers may post educational videos or blog about new ideas on social media platforms with the aim of educating potential users and convincing them of the idea's benefits.

However, there are also characteristics of social media which may have a different effect on the life cycle of fashions. For example, supply-side actors such as consultants and gurus may find it

harder to control the message in the age of social media. In recent years, we have seen that advertising campaigns in social media have been “taken over” or “hijacked” by consumers. Social media crises where users upload videos or pictures can seriously damage brands (Canhoto et al., 2015). However, suppliers of ideas may manage social media crises (Grégoire, Salle, & Tripp, 2015) and try to influence the conversation in different ways. In the context of management fashion, disillusioned fashion users could create problems or potentially a crisis if they broadcast implementation failures or abandonment of a fashionable idea. This would be particularly damaging if the disgruntled user represents a high-profile and well-known user organization, as this could lead to other fashion users jumping ship and discourage other potential adopters. Such negative social media attention could “contaminate” the fashion and leads to its downturn phase (Benders & Van Veen, 2001).

Criticism is also likely to surface sooner in social media because of possibilities for two-way communication and generally higher levels of interactivity. Not only is it easier for consumers to voice their opinions in social media, but suppliers of other competing concepts and ideas may also take advantage of these new opportunities to undermine the idea. For example, suppliers of competing concepts and ideas may join groups or participate in social media conversations by questioning claims or directing consumers to their own ideas and solutions. In the past, we have seen such efforts in the context of other management ideas, e.g. in the case of benchmarking (Longbottom, 2000). Such undermining behavior is particularly relevant in the later stages of a fashionable management ideas’ life cycle, when the idea starts getting “worn out” (Benders & Van Veen, 2001).

#### **4.5. Publication time lag**

Print media and social media also differ when it comes to publication time lag. First of all, traditional magazines or journals have a monthly or quarterly publication frequency. In addition, in print media, there is usually a long lead time, in particular when it comes to book publishing. Hence, in traditional media, most of the articles in the early phase tend to be written by consultants and the like who are enthusiastic and upbeat about the new idea, while more critically inclined academics tend to publish in academic journals with slow-moving publishing process. Therefore, there is typically a long time lag before critical articles appear. In social media, however, there are instant publication possibilities and therefore negative articles and commentaries may surface much earlier and possibly “wear out” fashionable ideas at an earlier stage (Benders & Van Veen, 2001). Therefore, social media can make a new idea’s “honeymoon stage” where the new concept/idea is immune from criticism, much shorter than before, or at least dampen the enthusiasm in a fashion’s takeoff stage.

#### **4.6. Virality**

The last point we will discuss is whether social media increase the virality of management ideas. A key characteristic of fashionable ideas is that they are contagious and infectious and hard for managers to resist (Madsen & Slåtten, 2015; Røvik, 2011). In traditional print media, ideas become viral in the fashion’s upswing phase. Management fashion research has shown that publication activity and the intensity of discourse increases rapidly during a fashion’s upswing phase (Abrahamson, 1996; Abrahamson & Fairchild, 1999; Carson et al., 2000). Increased interest in a fashion triggers bandwagon effects on the supply-side as actors such as consulting would like to get in on the action and get a piece of the market associated with a given concept (David & Strang, 2006; Klincewicz, 2006). It is unclear how social media influence the virality of management ideas, but it is clear that some ideas “go viral” online (Berger & Milkman, 2012) in ways not seen in print media. Social media offer many new functionalities which provide opportunities for suppliers of management ideas. For example, suppliers may draw on insights from viral marketing (Ho & Dempsey, 2010) when marketing and promoting their repertoire of solutions. For example, suppliers may enroll allies who forward and share content such as success stories, e.g. on Twitter or YouTube, or possibly even use tools such as “Twitter bots” to generate attention and make a fashionable idea seem more popular than it really is.

## 5. Summary and conclusion

### 5.1. Contributions

The current paper set out to provide a conceptual elaboration of the role of social in relation to management fashions. The paper has discussed how the emergence of social media changes the structure, configuration, and workings of the management fashion market, and how management ideas are diffused. Our discussion has shown that the emergence of social media has several implications for management fashion theory. In our view, social media change the role played by suppliers and consumers and their interaction, as well as publication time lag, life cycle, and virality of management fashions.

Second, our paper has implications for theories about how management ideas are diffused and disseminated. Social media should be considered a new communication channel in the management fashion arena. In our view, social media platforms have the potential to become what Kieser referred to as an “arena within an arena” (Kieser, 1997, p. 64) in reference to the brick and mortar conference/seminar scene. In a similar vein, in 2015 and beyond, it is likely that social media will continue to rise in importance, and possibly assume a more important role as a “carrier” of management knowledge (cf. Sahlin-Andersson & Engwall, 2002).

The high level of interactivity and opportunities for networking and sharing of user-generated content offered by today’s social media platforms make them an attractive “information hub” not only for suppliers but also consumers of ideas. Fashions are increasingly using social media platforms to put their products and services on display and to interact with potential and current clients. However, social media are also attractive to potential consumers interested in learning about new ideas, as they can facilitate supply-side and demand-side interactions.

### 5.2. Limitations

The aim of this paper has been to provide a preliminary elaboration of social media in relation to management fashion. Hence, a limitation of the paper is that it is conceptual and speculative in nature. Our empirical analysis has also been limited to illustrative examples, and future studies should gather evidence in a more systematic way. This means that our arguments should be interpreted with some caution. This is especially the case since the social media landscape changes rapidly. The relative popularity of the various platforms is constantly changing, and it is possible that new platforms could leapfrog or replace the platforms discussed in this paper. However, we argue our paper provides insights which could lay the groundwork for more research on management fashions in a social media context.

### 5.3. Future research directions

The limitations identified above offer several areas for future investigations, which we now will turn to. First of all, more research is needed to determine whether social media really are “game changers” in the context of management fashion, or if the social media phenomenon can be considered a management fashion (Bergquist et al., 2013). More data are needed to find out whether social media are a lasting trend or if their popularity will taper off in the future. Will traditional print media in the future regain some of the lost terrain?

Future research could also explore age and generational differences in social media usage. In the future, business school students and aspiring managers will have grown up using social media in both personal lives and school settings. It is likely that these experiences will shape future managers’ behavior as consumers of management knowledge. For example, an interesting question is how this will affect the propensity to adopt new management ideas. What types of channels will they turn to when they are interested in learning about new management knowledge? Will future managers rely on print media and “old school” paperback management literature such as the books found in today’s airport book stalls, or will they look up content on their mobile devices instead? These questions are interesting given that is only about 10–15 years ago since Røvik (2002,

pp. 117–118) noted that “management literature is probably the single most important medium for the diffusion of organisational recipes.”

Social media also have implications for the supply-side of fashionable concepts and ideas, e.g. idea entrepreneurs such as management consultants (Heusinkveld, 2013). Future research could study the commercialization strategies used by consultants in social media. What types of institutional activities are suppliers of ideas performing in social media to institutionalize fashions and make them more permanent (Perkmann & Spicer, 2008)? How does this activity evolve over the course of the idea’s life cycle?

In future work, researchers should also take more comparative approaches. For example, it would be interesting to compare how different types of management ideas are promoted and marketed in social media. To what extent are management ideas diffused in the same way in social media? Do some ideas have a better “ability to flow” in social media and what are the “secrets of the winners” that are able to go viral (Røvik, 2002)? Future researchers could also take an international perspective on social media. Social media platforms offer easy access to a worldwide audience and the ability to connect with users across borders. Therefore, cross-national comparisons of the role of social media in the take-up and reception of fashions would be interesting. Although the Internet is a global phenomenon, there may be regional differences in adoption and take-up of the Internet (Rhee & Kim, 2004; Xu, Zhu, & Gibbs, 2004), leading to differences in the infrastructure of management knowledge diffusion (Madsen & Slåtten, 2013; Strang & Kim, 2004). How do such differences impact the diffusion of management fashions?

Finally, more attention should be paid to developing methods for how to study management fashions in a social media context. Although management fashion research has shed much light on the pros and cons of utilizing print media indicators (e.g. Benders, Nijholt, & Heusinkveld, 2007; Nijholt & Benders, 2007), these indicators do not capture social media discourse. Such methodological developments could lay the groundwork for empirical studies which could answer many of the questions we have raised in this paper.

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## Appendix 1

**Table 2. Examples of activities in relation to management concepts/ideas on LinkedIn**

Concept/idea	Actor	Link
Beyond Budgeting	Beyond Budgeting Institute (Beyond Budgeting Roundtable)	<a href="https://www.linkedin.com/company/beyond-budgeting-institute">https://www.linkedin.com/company/beyond-budgeting-institute</a>
Beyond Budgeting	Beyond Budgeting Round Table North America	<a href="https://www.linkedin.com/groups/Beyond-Budgeting-Round-Table-North-1801069/about">https://www.linkedin.com/groups/Beyond-Budgeting-Round-Table-North-1801069/about</a>
Lean Six Sigma	Lean Six Sigma	<a href="http://www.linkedin.com/grp/home?gid=37987">http://www.linkedin.com/grp/home?gid=37987</a>
Lean	Lean Norway (lean consulting)	<a href="https://www.linkedin.com/groups/Lean-Norge-2803286/about">https://www.linkedin.com/groups/Lean-Norge-2803286/about</a>
Balanced Scorecard	Balanced Scorecard Group (professional association)	<a href="http://www.linkedin.com/grp/home?gid=87620">http://www.linkedin.com/grp/home?gid=87620</a>
Balanced Scorecard	Balanced Scorecard Professionals (consulting firm)	<a href="http://www.linkedin.com/grp/home?gid=3938677">http://www.linkedin.com/grp/home?gid=3938677</a>
Balanced Scorecard	Balanced Scorecard Institute (consulting firm)	<a href="https://www.linkedin.com/company/balanced-scorecard-institute">https://www.linkedin.com/company/balanced-scorecard-institute</a>
Total Quality Management	Total Quality Management Group	<a href="http://www.linkedin.com/grp/home?gid=3865731">http://www.linkedin.com/grp/home?gid=3865731</a>

**Table 3. Examples of activities in relation to management concepts/ideas on Facebook**

Concept/idea	Actor	Link
Balanced Scorecard	Balanced Scorecard Institute	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/Balanced-Scorecard-Institute-150698734704/timeline/">https://www.facebook.com/Balanced-Scorecard-Institute-150698734704/timeline/</a>
Balanced Scorecard	Balanced Scorecard Eastern-Africa	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/bsea.ke?fref=ts">https://www.facebook.com/bsea.ke?fref=ts</a>
Beyond Budgeting	Beyond Budgeting Iceland	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/beyondehf?fref=ts">https://www.facebook.com/beyondehf?fref=ts</a>
Lean	Six Sigma	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/groups/19207895362/">https://www.facebook.com/groups/19207895362/</a>
Lean	Lean Forum Norge	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/Lean-Forum-Norge-113976071970289/timeline/">https://www.facebook.com/Lean-Forum-Norge-113976071970289/timeline/</a>
Lean	Lean Production/Six Sigma	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/groups/405909143367/">https://www.facebook.com/groups/405909143367/</a>
Lean	Benchmarking Six Sigma	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/BenchmarkSixSigma?nr">https://www.facebook.com/BenchmarkSixSigma?nr</a>

**Table 4. Examples of activities in relation to management concepts/ideas on YouTube**

Concept/idea	Actor	Link
Balanced Scorecard	Harvard Business Review interview with Robert Kaplan on the Balanced Scorecard	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QM9SLX4icu0">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QM9SLX4icu0</a>
Beyond Budgeting	Bjarte Bogsnes on Beyond Budgeting	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ed1g_Crw6v8">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ed1g_Crw6v8</a>
Lean	Gemba Academy on Lean Production	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZdHGTCxcJQU">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZdHGTCxcJQU</a>
Total Quality Management	Total Quality Management video by Accenture Academy	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uJ_dX7gL5hk">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uJ_dX7gL5hk</a>

**Table 5. Examples of activities in relation to management concepts/ideas on Twitter**

Concept/idea	Actor	Link
Beyond Budgeting	Bjarte Bogsnes (spokesman and book author)	<a href="https://twitter.com/bbogsnes">https://twitter.com/bbogsnes</a>
Beyond Budgeting	Beyond Budgeting Institute	<a href="https://twitter.com/BBInstitute">https://twitter.com/BBInstitute</a>
Balanced Scorecard	Palladium Strategy	<a href="https://twitter.com/PalladiumStratX">https://twitter.com/PalladiumStratX</a>
Balanced Scorecard	Balanced Scorecard Institute	<a href="https://twitter.com/BSCInstitute">https://twitter.com/BSCInstitute</a>
Lean	Lean Thinkers (network to promote Lean-related news and events)	<a href="https://twitter.com/LeanThinkersNET">https://twitter.com/LeanThinkersNET</a>
Lean	Lean Enterprise Academy (UK)	<a href="https://twitter.com/LeanukDOTorg">https://twitter.com/LeanukDOTorg</a>
Lean	Lean Global Network (US)	<a href="https://twitter.com/LeanGlobal">https://twitter.com/LeanGlobal</a>

**Table 6. Examples of activities in relation to management concepts/ideas on MeetUp**

Concept/idea	Actor	Members	Link
Lean	Lean Forum Oslo	658	<a href="http://www.meetup.com/LeanForumOslo/">http://www.meetup.com/LeanForumOslo/</a>
Total Quality Management	American Society for Quality Silicon Valley	158	<a href="http://www.meetup.com/American-Society-for-Quality-Silicon-Valley/">http://www.meetup.com/American-Society-for-Quality-Silicon-Valley/</a>
Lean Six Sigma	Riyadh Lean Six Sigma Meetup	647	<a href="http://www.meetup.com/Riyadh-Lean-Six-Sigma-Meetup/">http://www.meetup.com/Riyadh-Lean-Six-Sigma-Meetup/</a>

**Table 7. Examples of activities in relation to management concepts/ideas on blogs/Wikipedia**

Concept/idea	Actor	Link
Balanced Scorecard	Software firm	<a href="http://qprsoftware.blogspot.fi/2014/10/balanced-scorecard-aligns-initiatives.html">http://qprsoftware.blogspot.fi/2014/10/balanced-scorecard-aligns-initiatives.html</a>
Balanced Scorecard	Consulting firm	<a href="http://blog.kainexus.com/improvement-disciplines/balanced-scorecard/what-is-a-balanced-scorecard">http://blog.kainexus.com/improvement-disciplines/balanced-scorecard/what-is-a-balanced-scorecard</a>
Beyond Budgeting	Consulting firm	<a href="http://blog.hostanalytics.com/beyond-budgeting-are-you-ready">http://blog.hostanalytics.com/beyond-budgeting-are-you-ready</a>
Beyond Budgeting	Consulting firm	<a href="http://wunder.uk/blog/beyond-budgeting-new-ways-run-organisation-autonomy-and-transparency">http://wunder.uk/blog/beyond-budgeting-new-ways-run-organisation-autonomy-and-transparency</a>
Balanced Scorecard	Wikipedia page	<a href="https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Balanced_scorecard">https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Balanced_scorecard</a>
Lean	Wikipedia page	<a href="https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lean_manufacturing">https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lean_manufacturing</a>
Total Quality Management	Wikipedia page	<a href="https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Total_quality_management">https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Total_quality_management</a>



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