

# The Impact of Social Media on Leadership: The Evolution of T-Mobile from Chopping Block to King of the Hill

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## **Abstract**

The use of social media by CEOs is becoming increasingly common, and yet little research has been done to understand how and why CEOs use social media and what kinds of impact it has on constituencies such as employees, customers, consumers, and industry influencers. T-Mobile's CEO, John Legere, is a social media kingpin with over six million followers on his personal social media platforms (not the company's), twice as many as his two primary competitors. During Legere's tenure as CEO from 2012–2019, T-Mobile has been highly successful in the marketplace, outperforming its industry peers. In this dissertation, I will use an exploratory case study methodology to explore the following research question: How and why does John Legere use social media to communicate with employees, customers, consumers, and other stakeholders, and what impact does his use of social media have on those constituencies? The intent of this research is to provide insight to practitioners about how social media can be used as an influence and leadership strategy and add to existing research regarding the relationship between social media and leadership.

## **Dedication**

In loving memory of my grandfather, Robert L. Bryant, for teaching me the significance of education.

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# Chapter 1: Introduction

The emergence of social media and its impact on leadership and organizations is an interesting phenomenon that is gaining increased attention from scholars and practitioners (Edosomwan, Prakasan, Kouame, Watson, & Seymour, 2011). Fueled by digital technologies for interactivity, connectivity, and collaboration, social media has directed the modern trend and paradigm shift from public relations to public engagement (Taylor & Kent, 2014). The art of leadership is ever-changing, and social media has exponentially increased that change (Hardasmalani, 2016). Social issues such as gun control and sexual harassment have been hot topics in the news in recent years. According to an article on NPR.org, four CEOs from TOMS, Levi's, Dick's Sporting Goods, and RXR Realty submitted a letter to Congress asking for background checks to be conducted on all gun sales (Noguchi, 2019). This type of activism from corporate leadership was virtually unheard of prior to now (Hardasmalani, 2016). Not only did this group write a letter—three of the four CEOs have social media accounts and took their stance on gun control to Twitter citing tighter control needed in the United States. CEOs are speaking out about social issues not directly related to the nature of their business; in many cases, they are causing concern and pushback from their board of directors and other stakeholders (Noguchi, 2019).

## ***CEO Social Media Use for Social Activism***

This kind of activism and use of social media allows CEOs to have a voice and take a stance on issues that are important to them personally and to the culture of their organizations. These issues go beyond traditional concerns of corporate social responsibility, such as climate change and clean water in developing nations, which organizations select because they coincide with the company's purpose, identity, and values (Rangan, Chase, & Karim, 2015). CEOs taking a stance on issues not necessarily related to the core business of their company can be career-launching or career-ending, inspiring or divisive, and can have positive or negative impacts on employee engagement and job seeker perception of an organization (Crane, Voegtlin, & Noval, 2019).

What drives a CEO to risk their career and engage in activism? What matter motivates them to the point where they take a stance on an issue, then create policies and rules for their organizations and ultimately demand change from legislators? Social media has played a significant role in allowing corporate leaders to have a platform to share their voices, their thoughts, their opinions, and their organizational policies in an environment where they otherwise have very little control over the conversations (Hardasmalani, 2016). How has a leader's stance impacted the brand affinity, organizational culture, or financial results of their company? Recent research has revealed that 93% of buyers will support and buy from companies whose CEOs speak out on topics they agree with (Charles, 2018).

## ***CEO Social Media Use to Promote Company Brand***

However, social issues are not the only posts and tweets created by CEOs. Many CEOs use social media to share what is important to them and their company, new products and services, to become industry thought leaders, and other interesting topics (Hardasmalani, 2016). With the plethora of things on a CEO's plate, why is it important for some to stay engaged socially and become a social media savvy chief executive or "social C"? How does the chief executive's use of social media impact their stakeholders (customers, employees, shareholders, etc.)? Are there better organizational outcomes as a result of him/her participating on social media? Is there any influence on brand affinity, organizational culture, financial results, or customer satisfaction?

## ***Focus of the Dissertation***

The use of social media by CEOs is becoming increasingly common, and yet little research has been done to understand how and why CEOs use social media and what kinds of impact it has on constituencies such as employees, customers, consumers, and industry influencers. T-Mobile's CEO, John Legere, is a social media kingpin with over six million followers on his personal social media platforms (not the company's), twice as many as his two primary competitors. During Legere's tenure as CEO from 2012–2019, T-Mobile has been highly successful in the marketplace, outperforming its industry peers. In this dissertation, I use an exploratory case study methodology to explore the following primary research question: "How and why does John Legere, T-Mobile CEO, use social media to communicate with employees,

customers (those who use T-Mobile), consumers (those in the general public who do not use T-Mobile), and other stakeholders (e.g., shareholders, Wall Street analysts, industry insiders), and what perceived impact does his use of social media have on those constituencies?” I also explore secondary and tertiary research questions, namely, “What is the perceived impact of John Legere’s social media use on organizational outcomes such as brand affinity, employee engagement, organizational culture, financial results, and customer satisfaction?” and “How does Legere’s social media use impact his perceived leadership style, according to T-Mobile constituents?”

The purpose of this research is threefold: to tell the impact of John Legere’s social media use on perceived organizational outcomes and his leadership over time; to provide insight to practitioners about how social media can be used as an influence; and to add to existing research regarding the relationship between social media and leadership. This topic is extremely important because of its timeliness, relevance for the current workplace, and presumed impacts on building communities, connecting with customers, and the construct of brand advocacy (Conner, 2018). This research will provide new and meaningful content to the field of leadership by focusing on a platform that has taken modern society to new levels of interaction, engagement, and connection. Social media and leadership are now connected in ways its pioneers could not have imagined (Edosomwan et al., 2011).

## ***Overview of the Dissertation Chapters***

In Chapter 2, I conduct a review of the literature on social media and leadership. In Chapter 3, I describe my research setting, methodology, and procedures. In Chapter 4, I share my results. In Chapter 5, I provide a discussion of my findings and theoretical conclusions. And in Chapter 6, I offer implications for future research and practice. In the appendices, I provide a list of interview questions I used with the participants in my study as well as a list of T-Mobile events and correlated stock price during those events.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

While the research surrounding social media and its impact on leadership is in its infancy, much has been written by both scholars and practitioners about social media and much has been written about leadership. However, very little has been written about how social media and leadership interrelate. In this literature review, there are many articles, both scholarly and practitioner-based, that touch on a variety of sub-topics related to social media and leadership. Some go more in-depth than others and some scratch the surface of what would be considered new research regarding the impact of social media on leadership.

### ***Early Studies on How & Why Companies Use Social Media***

Facebook is one of the long-standing social media platforms still in existence at fifteen years old (Hall, 2019). Twitter started out as a free SMS tool with a social networking element and quickly emerged into one of the fastest-growing microblogging social networking sites in 2010 when its unique visitors increased over 1,300 percent (Twitter, 2020). In the political arena, Barack Obama quickly gained traction and dominated his opponent, John McCain, in the 2008 presidential election by using Twitter as a tool to communicate with the American public (Metzgar & Maruggi, 2009). This helped launch Twitter into the general public's vocabulary. Was this social media thing really the wave of the future for all leaders in the public and private sector? This is a constant debate and question concerning company and executive use of social media and is attached to one principal shareholder tenet: business value.

In the case of John Legere, he came into the organization at one of the lowest points in the organization's history. He chose to use social media as his communication vehicle to take a stance against the ills of the wireless industry and vowed to make it right with customers so they do not have to follow a bunch of rules. He created the first Un-carrier move in 2013 and labeled T-Mobile the wireless "Un-carrier." This rebellious tone against an entire industry has gotten Legere notoriety and infamy. Rebellious optimism is what it is referred to internally and what carried them throughout his seven years as CEO. He wanted to be the exact opposite of his competitors—"un-them"—then he believed T-Mobile could win, so he coined "the Un-carrier" (Slefo, 2018).

### **The value of virtual customer environments (VCEs)**

Culnan, McHugh, and Zubillaga (2010) explored the challenges companies face when attempting to implement a social media strategy to engage with consumers. They begin this exploration by introducing a familiar concept in the social media marketing realm—virtual customer environments (VCE). The creation of virtual customer environments is enabled primarily by Facebook and Twitter and provides new and improved ways to connect with internal stakeholders and collaborate externally with customers, vendors, and prospective customers. With these improved capabilities, one would think it would be easy to adopt a social media strategy to enhance connections and collaborations with key stakeholders. However, the limited ability to measure and track results from a social media investment make it challenging and a tough sell.

Culnan et al. (2010) cited a 2009 study by McKinsey of 1,700 executives around the globe concerning their companies' use of social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter. The results showed that 64% used those social platforms internally, 56% used them to communicate with customers directly, and 40% used them to work with vendors or other suppliers. Approximately one-third of respondents shared that they had yet to provide measurable benefits using the platform either externally or internally.

This study suggests that the value of social media is not in the platform itself but in how it is used—specifically, how the company capitalizes on the intent of the platform. Figure 1 illustrates how VCEs can support multiple aspects of the sales and marketing process, including branding, sales, customer support, product development, and the value in each of those areas as shared in the article by Culnan et al. (2010).

<b>Table 1: How Virtual Customer Environments Create Value<sup>7</sup></b>	
<b>Activity Supported</b>	<b>Source of Value</b>
Branding (advertising, public relations, content delivery)	Drive traffic, viral marketing, customer loyalty and retention
Sales (includes “call for action”—e.g., link to purchase item)	Revenue
Customer service and support	Cost savings, revenue, customer satisfaction
Product development	Revenue

*Source:* Adapted from Culnan et al. (2010)

### **Figure 1. Virtual Customer Environments and Value**

Since relationships serve as the foundation for VCEs, it is important for organizations to create new and improved social media strategies that are engaging if they want to

benefit from VCEs (Culnan et al., 2010). The relationship aspect is voluntary by consumers and social media users, and the value is only realized if there is some interaction between users and organizations. The authors suggest that content creation and continuous engagement is what makes VCEs function optimally for organizations.

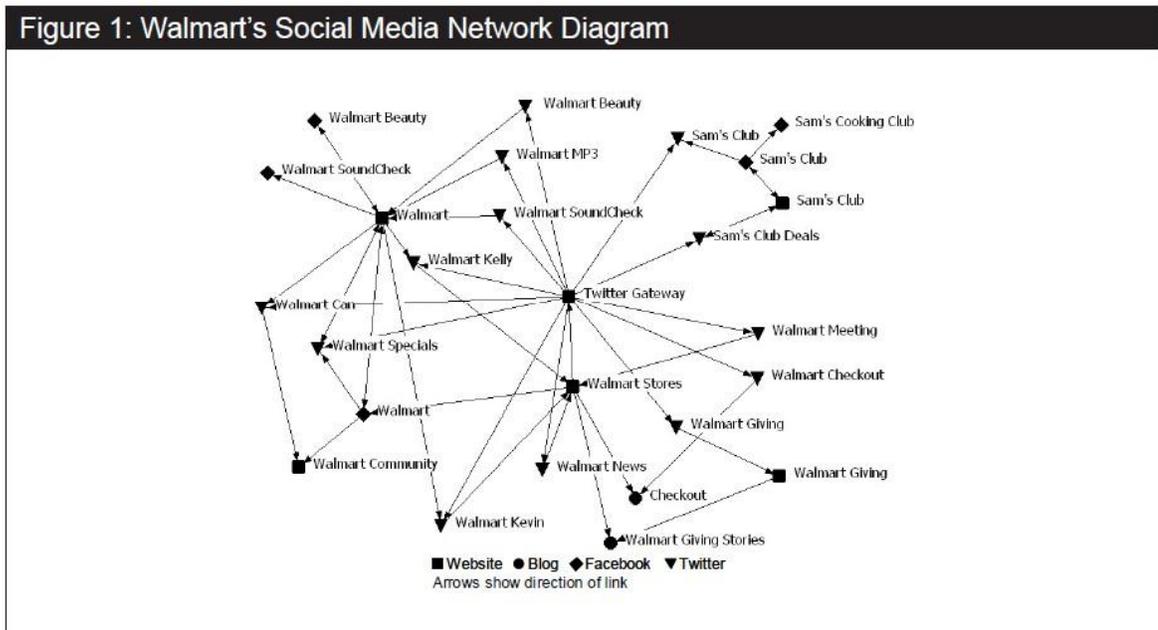
Their research was based on an analysis of Fortune 500 companies' use of four major social platforms, Twitter, Facebook, blogs, and client-hosted forums. They selected these platforms because they are extremely participative, and their purpose is to engage users. Culnan et al. (2010) revealed that merely creating the platform and adopting the "build it and they will come" adage is not sufficient for most companies when it comes to a social media plan. That philosophy works only for the small elite group of the most sought after, beloved, and recognized brands.

Culnan et al. (2010) argued that companies must implement three tactics in order to have an effective social media strategy: mindful decisions regarding initial adoption of the platforms, build communities within the social networks, and use the platforms as a learning hotbed based on the content created and generated by consumers. The authors' research illustrates that some of the Fortune 500 companies struggle with how to engage consumers and build a community. For Twitter, they found companies that had one follower up to over one million followers with an average of 36,000 followers. For Facebook, the number of fans ranged from zero to 5 million with an

average of 86,000. One hundred and twelve of the 231 Fortune 500 companies with Facebook pages had fewer than 1,000 fans and 16% had fewer than 100 fans. Two hundred and sixty-six of the Fortune 500 companies had Twitter accounts, 44% (116) had posted less than one hundred tweets, and 58% (155) had fewer than 1,000 followers.

### **Walmart's social media strategy**

Culnan et al. (2010) then turned to case studies reviewing the social media strategy of three Fortune 500 organizations who were early adopters and known for their marketing and brand management: Coca-Cola, Walmart, and Hewlett-Packard. Walmart had accounts on Twitter, Facebook, and two blog channels. One blog was called "Walmart Checkout" and was replaced by Twitter when it became available. The other blog was dedicated to social responsibility: "Walmart Gives Back." Their social media outlets were listed on the home page of their primary retail website. In Figure 2 below, Walmart's 2010 social network is diagramed.



Source: Adapted from Culnan et al. (2010)

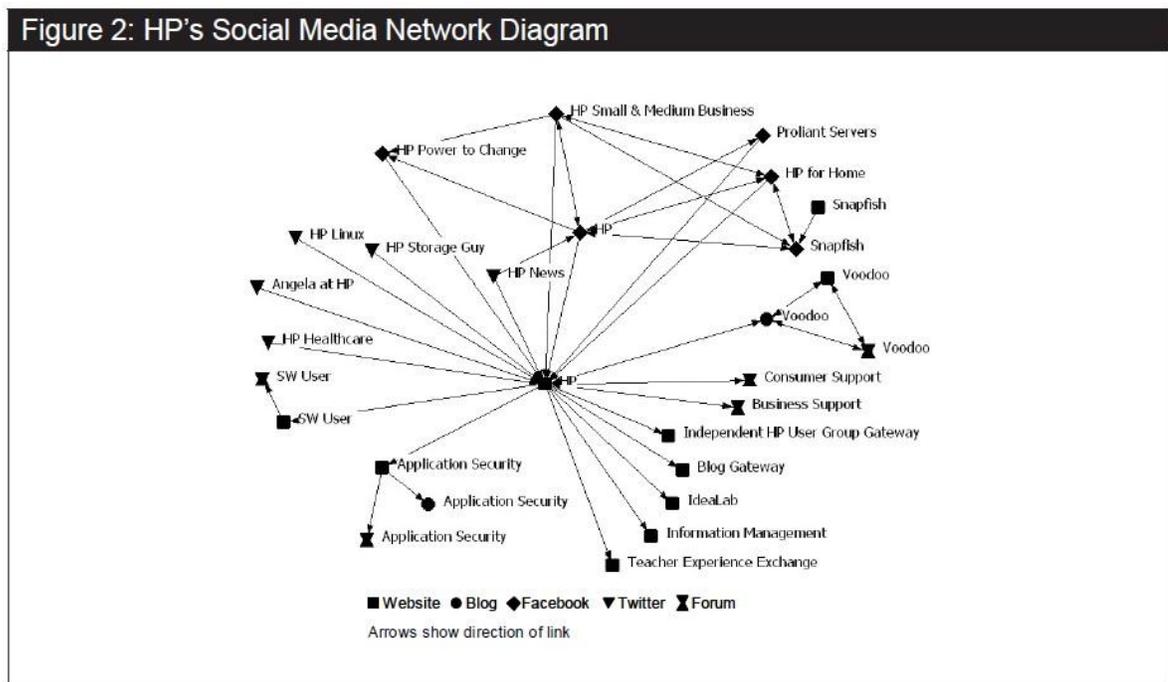
**Figure 2. Walmart's Social Media Network Diagram**

Culnan et al. (2010) noted with its intricate social networking web, Walmart was an early leader in community building through social media. Its primary Facebook page had over one million fans. They had a well-defined response process for both Twitter and Facebook as most of the Facebook complaints were redirected to another website or addressed right in the reply section, which implies their response management was centralized. On their Twitter page, it clearly stated that store and customer service issues would not be addressed via Twitter.

**Hewlett-Packard's social media strategy**

Hewlett-Packard's social media line-up included Twitter, Facebook, blogs, and company-hosted forums (Culnan et al., 2010). All of their social sites were used to

interact with their business and consumer customers predominantly for service and support. Their response management strategy was both centralized and decentralized. Their blogs and forums were linked from the company’s main website, while the Facebook and Twitter pages were not linked to the company website or listed in the “Connect with Others” community page. The network diagram in Figure 3 illustrates how Hewlett-Packard connected its social platforms in 2010.



Source: Adapted from Culnan et al. (2010)

**Figure 3. Hewlett Packard’s Social Media Network Diagram**

Like Walmart, Hewlett-Packard’s social networking diagram illustrates their intent in building communities (Culnan et al., 2010). Both employees and customers created content on their social sites. Their forums were moderated, and their social platforms

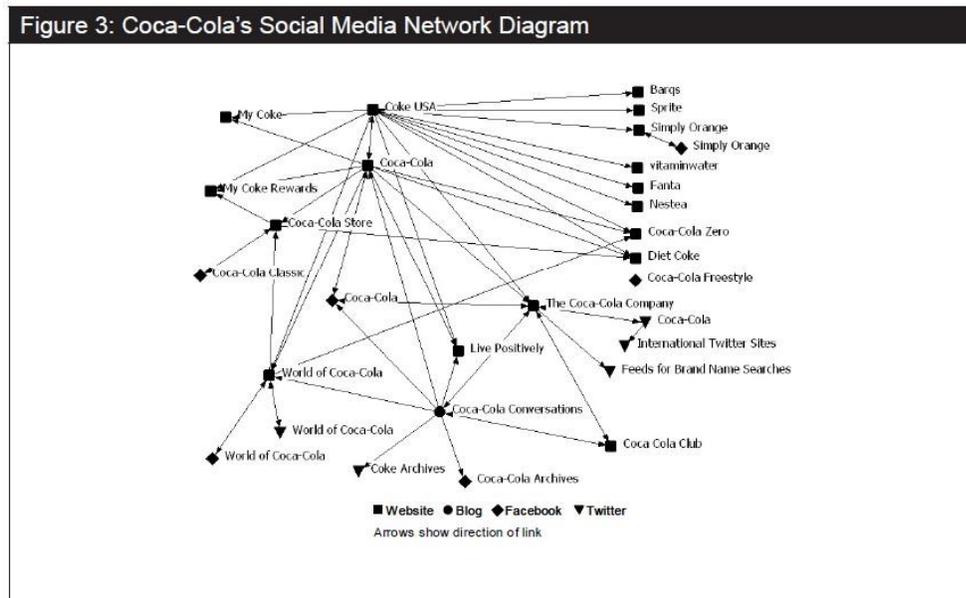
responded to most of their complaints, especially on Twitter, where there was a direct response to every post.

### **Coca-Cola's social media strategy**

Coca-Cola had eight Facebook pages, seven Twitter sites, and a blog dedicated to history/archives (Culnan et al., 2010). Their strategy focused on the Coca-Cola brands (i.e., Coke Zero, Diet Coke, Classic Coke, etc.), the World of Coca-Cola, and the Coca-Cola stores. Coca-Cola managed their responses in a decentralized fashion because each site was organized by product or corporate function. One differentiator for Coca-Cola was that they had a few fan-run social sites. Neither Walmart nor Hewlett-Packard allowed their followers or fans to run sites with their brand tied to it. Coca-Cola's primary Facebook page had more than ten million fans, which provided evidence that they, like Walmart and Hewlett-Packard, were intent on community building (Culnan et al., 2010).

However, *Source*: Culnan et al., (2010)

Figure 4 illustrates Coca-Cola's social network diagram, which looks quite different from both Walmart and Hewlett-Packard. Coca-Cola implemented a lot of rules and policies for employees, consumers, and anyone interested in representing their brand online. They monitored and responded on their primary Facebook page and on the blog.



Source: Culnan et al., (2010)

**Figure 4. Coca-Cola's Social Media Network Diagram**

### **The dynamics of social customer relationship management (CRM)**

During the early years of social media acclimation, while marketing teams were quick to embrace the new tool, most CEOs were curious and realized they needed to use social media to get close to customers (Baird & Parasnis, 2010). Social media allows them the opportunity to do just that, as noted in the IBM Global CEO Study (2010). Organizations were excitedly building social programs that would hopefully get them closer to customers or potential customers, but they had to do it in a way that would keep consumers' interest. Businesses were entering a space where consumers were showing interest, but they had to be careful and mindful to have content that would

capture their attention considering there were many other distractions on social platforms, even in its infancy as a fast-growing medium.

In 2010, there were 500 million active users on Facebook with 50% of them outside of the United States (Facebook, 2010). As of the first quarter of 2020, there are over 2.6 billion monthly active users worldwide (Statista, 2020). In Twitter's short history, they went from 5,000 tweets per day in 2007 to 500 million tweets per day since its launch in 2006 (Smith, 2020). Ten billion messages have been sent through Twitter since its launch in 2006. These numbers indicate this is where consumers were spending an inordinate amount of time, and businesses were wise to find space here. With the opportunity for businesses to be directly in front of consumers, the use of social media allowed for increased revenues, cost reductions, and other efficiencies. The year 2010 was one of exponential growth in social media.

While organizations want to be where customers and prospective customers are, it also raised challenges for traditional customer relationship management methods, which are typically used to communicate with customers to keep them engaged. One of the primary changes for CRM in the social media world is that the customer controls the dialogue and the relationship, not the organization. A customer's social network proves to be influential and serves as the driver of the conversation regarding most topics, including business-related conversations. Baird and Parasnis (2011) recommended that companies design experiences on social platforms that deliver

tangible value in return for a customer's time, attention, and endorsement to realize the full potential of social media. While consumers continue to engage more and more on social media, they are fickle about how they choose to engage and with whom.

Baird and Parasnis' (2011) research uncovered several things:

- Consumers are on social media but very few post organic content and regularly respond to posts.
- Consumers are more concerned with people they know (friends and family) not businesses or brands.
- There is a big gap between what consumers want and what businesses think they want when it comes to social engagement.
- Businesses believe social media engagement will increase advocacy and consumers are saying otherwise.

The study methodology was two online surveys with the first one sent to over one thousand consumers in the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, France, Germany, India, China, Australia, and Brazil. The second one was sent to over 350 business executives in the same countries, minus Canada. The companies represented a variety of sectors, such as Distribution, Communications, Financial Services, Industrial, and Public Sector/Healthcare. They also conducted seventeen qualitative interviews in the United States and the United Kingdom to capture information from executives who were responsible for social media programs. They partnered with

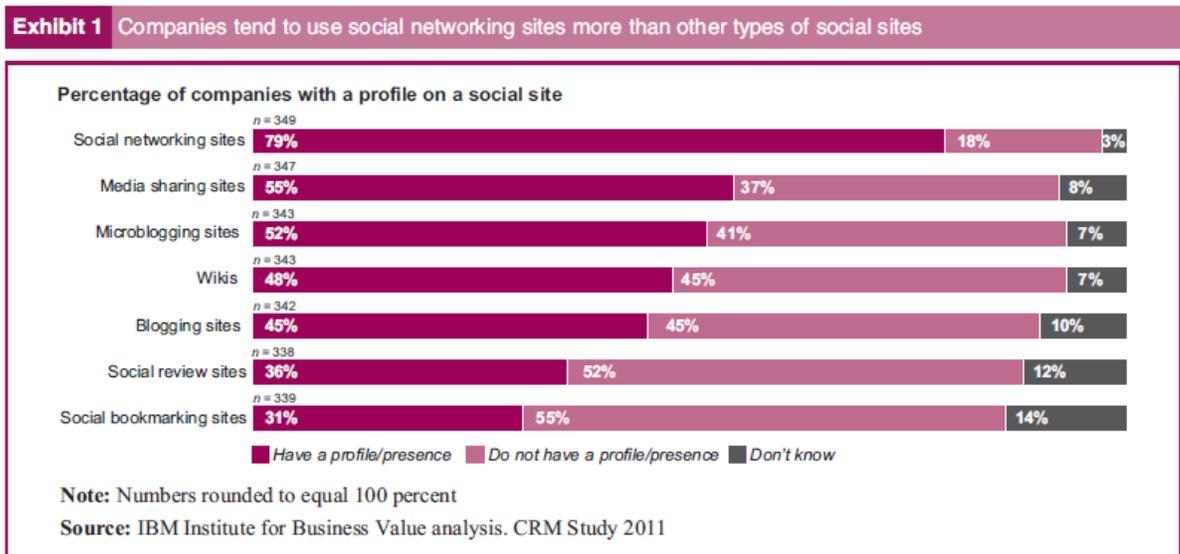
Oxford Economics and established a social CRM blog to solicit feedback from social media and CRM professionals.

The introduction of social media presented one of the biggest disruptions of modern-day times for businesses, even those who are customer-focused. Companies could have never imagined that they would have such easy access to a massive number of customers or potential customers. During these formative years, companies established the foundation for social CRM but experienced growing pains and uncertainty with this new dynamic. Almost 70% of executives admitted that their company would be perceived as “out of touch” if they didn’t have a social presence, and many of them believed their competitors were reaching consumers via social networks in the early years. Surprisingly, 68% of CEOs have no social media presence (Brenner, 2013), which makes John Legere, T-Mobile CEO, look like a superstar anomaly with over six million Twitter followers.

The reality is that only a small number of consumers are extremely engaged on social networks. Nearly 5% of consumers are considered “engaged authors,” post original content, and almost always respond to every post in their feed. The largest group of social media users is the “casual participant” at 75% of users who will occasionally respond to a post or post their own content. The second largest group is the “silent observers” at 20% of users who will sit quietly on the sidelines and read posts from others, but never contribute or participate. These participant categories help

businesses identify who should be their target and who are the true influencers in the social media space. Each group has a role; therefore, businesses would be wise to create a targeted, multi-channel plan to address each of these participants.

Figure 5 below illustrates the rapid adaption of social networking sites over every other type of social site in a 2011 analysis by the IBM Institute for Business in their CRM study.



Source: Adapted from Baird and Parasnis (2011)

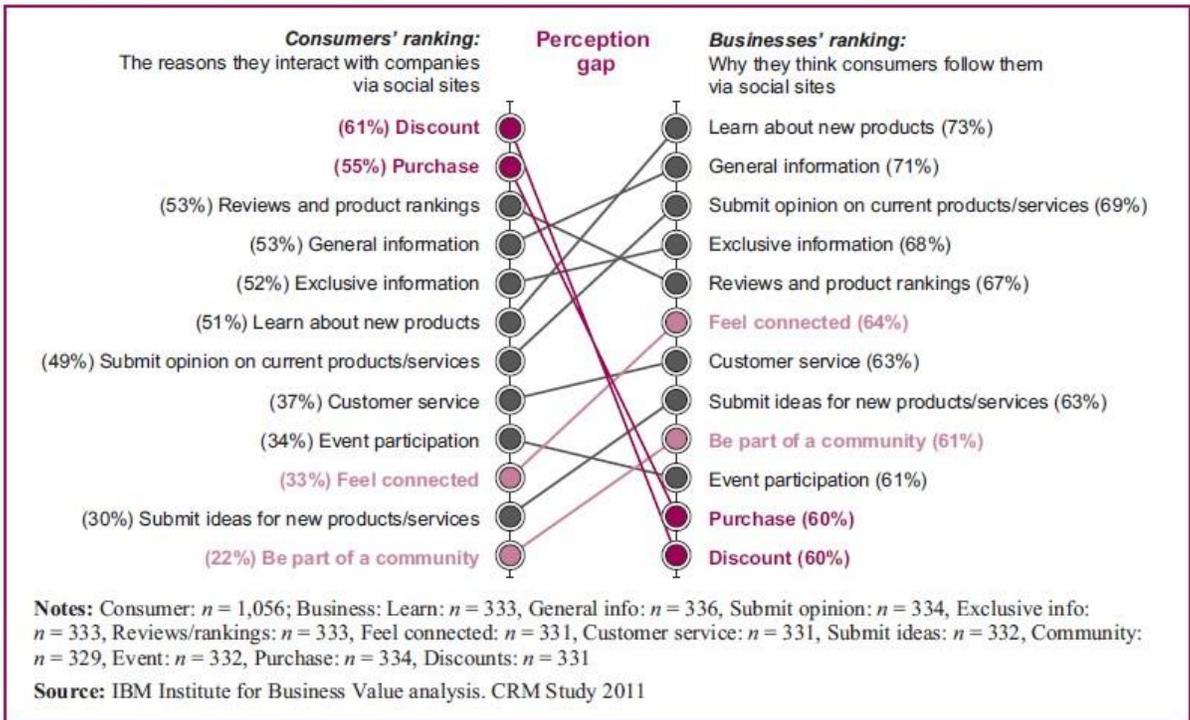
### Figure 5. Organization Social Media Sites

The bigger challenge and question are why consumers used social media in the first place? It would be interesting and germane to the peripheral issues in this study to investigate the psychological and health benefits of being socially active. There are

plenty of statistics to support the need for human beings to be social. Instead, going back to the CRM study seems appropriate and provides a plethora of relevant insight to help answer this question. A whopping 70% of consumers stated their primary reason for using social media was to connect with family and friends. Only 23% said their primary purpose was to connect with brands. Even the smallest group, the engaged authors, put connecting with brands after connecting with family and friends, which received 92% of the responses.

When consumers interact with brands, they are looking for something tangible and for the WIIFM (“What’s in it for me?”). They are looking for things like coupons, discounts, and purchasing products when engaging with brands on social media. The transactional desire of consumers would normally be welcomed insight for businesses; however, businesses thought consumers wished for intimacy with the brand, and that is not necessarily the case. It should be a win-win for businesses who are trying to find ways to monetize social media. Consumers are also using social media for reviews, referrals, and opinions regarding various products and services from family, friends, and even strangers. Consumers are even satisfied with the non-tangible tangibles like positive feelings or feelings of affection if they have value. Another chart from the IBM Institute for Business, in Figure 6, illustrates the disconnect between what businesses think and what consumers want regarding social media engagement with brands.

**Exhibit 2** Companies have some misperceptions regarding why consumers interact with them via social sites



Source: Adapted from Baird and Parasnis (2011)

**Figure 6. Social Media Perception Gaps**

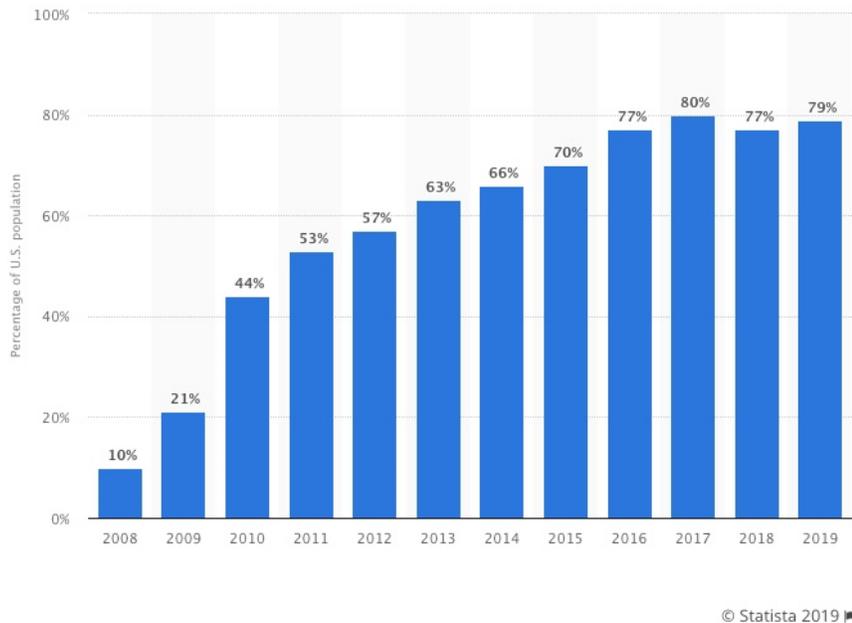
There is a large gap between business perception and consumer reality, and it is split even further when the topic of loyalty is addressed. Of the executives surveyed for this study, 70% believe reaching out to customers via social media will increase customer advocacy while consumers are split in their responses to this question. Merely 38% of consumers feel a positive interaction on social media will have an impact on their loyalty to that company, 28% are neutral, and 33% say their social media interactions will not make them loyal to a brand. The recommendation is that organizations find a way to uniquely connect and interact with consumers creating a

unique experience with their brand, offer consumers value, and maximize the power of social media. The authors recommend companies do the following to create successful social media campaigns and reignite their customer relationships:

- Recognize social media as a game-changer.
- Understand the differences between social media and the other channels
- Ensure the customer experience is seamless between social media and other channels.
- Think like a customer.
- Ask customers what they value instead of making assumptions.
- Monetize social media

### ***Recent Work on Corporate Social Media & Social CEOs***

Over the years, social platforms have experienced explosive growth and have become the heart of all digital customer touchpoints, according to the Digital 2019 report (Kemp, 2019). The growth of Americans with social media profiles has grown exponentially from 10% in 2008 to 79% in 2019 (Clement, 2020), as illustrated in Figure 7.



*Source:* Adapted from Clement (2020)

**Figure 7. Percentage of U.S. Population with a Social Media Profile 2008–2019**

Although the aforementioned IBM article is from nine years prior, there are still some gaps in what organizations believe consumers want and what consumers really want. The gaps are probably closer today than they were nine years ago, but there is still opportunity to connect and engage based on current statistics. The United Airlines debacle is a great recent example of an organization that may be disconnected and not fully understanding what consumers really want. Their organizational reputation was not the greatest before a customer was aggressively dragged off an airplane, but the video illustrating this catastrophe was the level of customer dissatisfaction required for policy change. Prior to this incident, United Airlines was not thinking like a customer.

Etter, Ravasi, and Colleoni (2019) exposed that this case exemplifies how social media changes how evaluations of the quality competence or character of an organization are shared and assessed. Social media gives a voice and power to those who were silenced and powerless. This is an important paradigm shift in organizational behavior and leadership since this was never the case prior to the development of social media. Companies were powerful and customer issues went unaddressed and sometimes even perpetuated a long list of unfairness and disadvantage. With this paradigm shift, why would an organization not have a voice of their own to help build their story and demonstrate their brand personality? That “voice” could be a team of voices to include the organization, the CEO, and other C-suite members.

Much of a brand’s reputation is about what happens (or does not happen) on social media. This phenomenon is important when considering the dynamic of social media and the power and purpose of each platform. In their most recent article, Hemsley, Jacobson, Gruzd, and Mai (2018) explored the good, evil, and neutrality of social media, and during the good exploration they discussed the unity that is created from hash-tagged tweets. It creates cohesion among broad and vague audiences who are very different in a variety of ways but are able to coexist and connect—even if momentarily—in socially meaningful ways. This is the perfect example of how virtual communities are formed, as discussed previously.

### **Social CEOs as “chief engagement officers”**

Legere’s communication strategy using social media was questioned by many stakeholders early in his tenure as CEO. It was new, different, and he wanted to get the attention of consumers and competitors, so he used social media to boldly capture his audience, addressing the pain points of the industry and identifying T-Mobile and himself (as Batman) as the savior, the answer. There was a functional and emotional aspect to his communication strategy. These strategic elements tie into the study by Ji Chen, Tao, and Li (2019), which examines how functional traits and emotional aspects of corporate messages influence public engagement on social media using theoretical insights from the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM).

According to this model, individuals process information via two distinct routes: “the central route which focuses on the quality of the argument in the message, or the peripheral route that directs to the heuristic cues such as attractiveness of the message source” (Ji et al., 2019, p. 90). There are different facets of engagement and engagement levels are extremely important to social media managers. Each social media team has a specific definition of what engagement is and how success is defined. It is no surprise that in the scholarly world, engagement is a highly disputed concept. Academic research has conceptualized engagement in two approaches: the instrumental approach (an individual’s psychological state) and the interpretivist approach (theorizing engagement as a socially situated process).

Digital dialogic communication is important for CEOs ensuring ethical communication as it requires two-way dialogue and mitigates the power relationship, which is crucial for CEO-public engagement (Men, Tsai, Chen, & Ji, 2018). Men et al. (2018) found that while fostering stakeholder engagement via social media is part of the CEO's role, they also serve as the chief engagement officer. This new role requires public relations professionals to remain engaged as social media became an important component of the overall communication strategy. Public relations experts used to serve as the sole owners of how organizations and executives communicate with the public. They are now part of the team that helps keep messages organizationally appropriate as it relates to social media.

As part of the social media strategy team, public relations experts are interested not only in protecting the brand and organizational image, but also in public engagement, functional interactivity, and message vividness (Ji et al., 2019). Functional interactivity is defined as an interface's capacity for conducting a dialogue or information exchange between users and the interface (Sundar, Xu, & Bellur, 2010). In other words, are there click through links or other hashtags that allow followers to spend time on a post. Vividness or media richness is enhanced when a post is a combination of text and pictures or videos. The emotional level of organizational and executive social media content is also a factor when measuring engagement. Ji et al. (2019) found the theoretical framework of socially sharing emotions demonstrates

that the emotional element of a message accelerates social transmission of the message and encourages interaction from followers.

Corporate social media and social-C messages frequently insert emotion to attract their followers' attention, facilitate dialogue, and strengthen their online communities (Ji et al., 2019). The essential traits of emotion are presence, valence, and strength. Posts that contain any of these emotional traits are the ones that usually quickly go viral and have high engagement rates as measured by the number of likes, shares, and comments. Each social media platform serves a different purpose, and this purpose should also be a factor in how a post is created and analyzed.

### **Social CEOs as connectors and community builders**

Social media has created a demand for real-time, two-way communication that develops relationships between brands, their chief executives, and consumers (Capriotti & Ruesja, 2018). The entire C-suite at T-Mobile has an active social media presence to supplement John's presence and the brand's efforts. Research tells us this is the right thing to do. Twitter is the platform of choice for most CEOs because of its character limitations and it is considered a good dialogical tool for connecting with organizational stakeholders and building communities (Capriotti & Ruesja, 2018).

Research on the impact of social media on organizational reputation and identity is nascent. The general public understands how social media use by leadership impacts organizational outcomes is speculative and influenced by other dramatic media

narrative. The BRANDfog research uncovers the importance of transparency, thought leadership, and brand building when executives take to social media (Charles, 2018). Ann Charles, BRANDfog CEO, summarized what her survey illustrates about the “social-C” (Edelman, 2012) and organizational reputation: “Our new findings confirm that when CEOs speak out on the issues people care about, this profoundly affects the view of the company, and shapes the reputation of the brand” (Charles, 2018, p. 2).

Social media makes it easy for CEOs to not only show their personal side, but to also take a stand on issues that are important to them (Yim, 2019). This is particularly relevant to the question regarding social issues. The BRANDfog survey revealed that eighty-five percent of respondents agree or strongly agree that when a CEO speaks out about the social issues they care about on social media, it affects their view of the company and shapes the reputation of the brand. While taking a stance on social issues is important to consumers, it can be terrifying for the risk-averse executive who is uncomfortable aligning their personal beliefs and perspectives with their organization. Taking a stance publicly on any social issue could cause controversy or praise for an executive and could also create organizational celebrity or infamy.

### **Social CEOs, transparency, & trustworthiness**

Zavyalova, Pfarrer, and Reger (2017) stated that the emotional responses from stakeholders are deeply influenced by what the media as a whole—radio, television, print, and online sources—formulates about an organization’s attributes and actions.

The content of those chronicles helps develop the celebrity or infamy of an organization. If the Chief Executive Officer is at the forefront of aiding in the narrative and inviting media attention, he/she is the primary target of the celebrity or infamy. John has created a social media status for himself. In contrast, the T-Mobile company Twitter page has 1.4 million followers. The social media strategists admit that John is the face of the brand. This is an undeniable fact as Legere's social media use has garnered the attention of multiple outlets, including the likes of *Forbes Magazine*, *CEOWORLD Magazine*, *Geek Wire*, Martha Stewart, and Snoop Dogg, to name a few. T-Mobile's biggest rival is Verizon and their Twitter page has 1.47 million followers.

Does the celebrity of John Legere have anything to do with his significant number of Twitter followers? Does it have anything to do with other organizational results? Jonathan Long (2016), a contributor to *Entrepreneur Magazine*, believed that Legere is the force behind the recent success in quarter-after-quarter record earnings. Legere is also the reason Long (2016) admitted to making the switch from a being long-time AT&T customer to a T-Mobile customer.

While this sample size is miniscule, this action to switch mobile providers because of the CEO's social media presence is powerful and invaluable. Legere has led the way in the transformation of T-Mobile's organizational reputation and creating trust-worthy and transparent dialogue that humanizes the organization and the brand. His

Twitter shout outs to their competitors and Slow Cooker Sunday Facebook live show help strategically project positive images of himself and the organization (Etter et al., 2019). Legere has not taken a stance of silence regarding the ills of the wireless industry. This has led to his influencer status on Twitter and the ways he steps up to other causes near and dear to his heart, like animal adoption. Nike took a similar approach to stand for what they believe in by taking a stance on the right to take a position and supported Colin Kaepernick (Borsin, 2018).

### **The role of social CEOs in creating organizational identity**

The millions of followers and celebrity status beg for further questions regarding the viral nature of Legere's tweets and Facebook posts. Are the content characteristics mostly positive and retweeted or liked frequently? Berger and Milkman (2011) posited that we must understand what drives people to share content. This deeper understanding can help organizations avoid backlash and create more infectious content that goes viral. Word of mouth advertising is priceless, and every sales and marketing professional covet these types of referrals. Social media has the same desirability since it is inexpensive (or free, in many cases), effective, and reaches far and wide. For any organization attempting to gain social capital, quality and engaging content it is essential.

Since the inception of social media, many researchers have been fascinated by the social implications of social media (Quinn, 2018). Social media offers a platform for users to construct their identity. Businesses have learned the value of this tool and

take full advantage of it to build communities for brand affinity, customer engagement, and employee satisfaction. One of the reasons people may be driven to share content and participate on social platforms is the desire to have social connection. Quinn (2018) discussed the cognitive benefits of social media use in older adults, but another important factor to point out is that human beings are social by nature. T-Mobile and its CEO, John Legere, make it easy for its customers and employees to engage socially. This social connectivity is a win-win for the brand and the ecosystem surrounding it.

John Legere frequently makes the varied lists of “most social CEO,” and thus far, organizational outcomes have been positive and favorable for T-Mobile. There is a pending merger with Sprint, so not only will that make T-Mobile larger, but the merger will also test Legere’s ability to navigate the social waters during an incredibly important time organizationally. Will he be able to stay authentic to whom he has portrayed himself to be? Will he remain just as social and increase his celebrity status even more? Bigger does not always mean better. His millions of followers on Twitter means that many eyeballs are watching his every tweet and analyzing every word based on what they hear or see in mainstream media. If the merger does not get approval from the approving authorities, will it be seen as a negative and Legere receives all of the criticism? If the approval is approved by the approving boards, will Legere receive all the praise? In either scenario, how will he and his social media strategy team handle it?

### **Social CEOs as creators, transformers, rebels, and saviors**

Thematically, questions like this are inevitable when considering the celebrity status of a chief executive. Lovelace, Bundy, Hambrick, and Pollock (2018) theorized that there are consequences of CEO celebrity for both the executive and the organization, and the consequential outcomes are based on the type of leadership and/or accomplishments and not necessarily for their overall achievements. Their theory guided them to four different CEO celebrity archetypes:

- Creators—those who found new businesses and/or are credited with generating bold new innovations.
- Transformers—those who reshape currently successful firms to avoid potential future problems.
- Rebels—those who steer established firms in new directions that are widely at odds with industry norms.
- Saviors—those who rescue established companies from imminent failure.

Legere has accomplishments that put him in three of the four archetypes: transformer, rebel, and savior. When he came to T-Mobile in 2012, they were the low man on the totem pole in terms of customer service, cellular service, and device options—the laughingstock of the industry. They were in a very public acquisition debacle with AT&T, and it did not look like the approving authorities were going to allow the merger to pass, according to CNET (Reardon, 2013). In March 2013, Legere announced not only that they were going to be able to finally sell the iPhone 5, but

that they were going to offer it with no contract. Consumers would put down one hundred dollars and pay the balance of the phone in monthly installments of \$20 over twenty-four months, and rate plans were reduced to keep the monthly payments reasonable to make it more palatable for consumers to adjust to the different model.

This was unprecedented and a bold shift away from the norm in what Legere coined the “Un-carrier” movement. T-Mobile was the pioneer and first wireless carrier to eliminate mobile phone subsidies and put the entire device cost on the consumer. T-Mobile’s larger competitors watched in awe at how consumers accepted the new terms easily, and each carrier immediately adapted this strategy to their service—now it is the way we all purchase expensive, high-end smartphones. This move was the “checkmate” in wireless and was the architecture of a rebel and transformer. Reardon (2013) noted that T-Mobile was losing customers at an alarming rate because they did not have the iPhone. The plan to add the iPhone in addition to removing the large financial burden of device subsidies on the organization’s bottom line helped turn the company around financially, in addition to the millions of dollars they were promised by AT&T if the merger was not approved—and, ultimately, it was not approved. This series of events made John Legere the savior.

There is a certain expectation of the CEO around communicating organizational messages by the organization’s constituents and stakeholders. In recent years, many corporate executives have embraced social activism and used their voice via social

media to connect them to something higher that they believe in (Yim, 2019). Legere has taken the stance to be the most vocal about the ills of the wireless industry, and his outspokenness has undoubtedly proven effective as far as shifting the industry to do what is right for the customer via the Un-carrier moves.

### **Social CEOs and the value of authenticity**

Scholarly researchers have scrutinized the extent to which CEO tweets could be effective but have not yet tested the perceived authenticity of CEO tweets (Yim, 2019). Authenticity is an important factor in the effectiveness of CEO social media engagement from a follower's perspective. The scholarly evidence suggests that when a public figure shares life or personal experiences on social media, it correlates to a more positive image of them (Yim, 2019). Yim's (2019) study attempts to explore the notion of expectancy examining prescriptive and predictive expectations of CEOs using social media. Prescriptive expectancy refers to what stakeholders consider desirable or appropriate within their parameters of tolerance for a business leader. Predictive expectancy refers to message consistency and communication behavior—if a CEO's current social media posts are in alignment with previous posts.

This research builds on the study by Malhotra and Malhotra (2016), in which they examined the Twitter usage patterns of twenty-five CEOs of publicly traded companies. They found a CEO was either a business maven or an expressionist. The business maven falls in line with the expectations of stakeholder expectations of how a CEO should use Twitter for thought leadership, organizational announcements, and

advertisement of events, promotions, and new products/services. The expressionist is quite different and deviates from prescriptive business leader expectations. These CEOs post more non-business content, including personal updates and opinions on social issues.

By leveraging the power of Twitter, Malhotra and Malhotra found that CEOs have the opportunity to shape the conversation about their organization rather than wait for others to lead the charge and tell their version of the story. Benefits such as increasing influence and creating positive sentiment are reward values and advantageous outcomes of CEO Twitter use. In the Yim (2016) study, reward value was defined as stakeholders' satisfaction with a CEO's activities and messaging. Authenticity of the social-C is a common theme throughout academic literature, but there have not been any studies focused solely on this theme. Yim (2016) defined authenticity as a social construct in which no utterance can be context-independent or unconcerned with a specific audience. This research will help provide some insight on the perceived authenticity of a social-C and fill that research gap.

### **Enterprise social media and employee engagement**

High employee engagement is ideal for companies of all sizes. Employee engagement can be defined as “the level of an employee’s psychological investment in their organization” (Sievert & Scholz, 2017, p. 895). Research has proven that organizations with higher engagement rates perform at higher levels and have better business results (Harter, 2018). With this widely known fact, companies realize the

value of keeping their employees engaged. Social media has proven to be a tool to increase employee engagement and creates a two-way highway for senior leadership and employees to have open, frequent dialogue regarding a variety of subjects.

Bridger (2015) described employee voice, an enabler of employee engagement, as “a key enabler of employee engagement and social media offers both employees and organizations some brilliant tools to work with voice” (p. 232).

Enterprise Social Media (ESM) is an internal version of social media and is defined as a digital platform for internal communication and social interaction within an enterprise (Cai, Huang, Liu, & Wang, 2018). While engagement is typically high on ESMs, there is a lack of consensus regarding the relationship between ESM usage and agility performance (Cai et al., 2018). There are three dimensions of agility performance, according to Cai et al. (2018): proactivity, adaptability, and resilience. Psychological safety is another key factor when exploring determinants of agility. While ESMs are an effective way to engage employees, external social sites are frequently used to engage employees. Confidential internal information is not typically shared on the external social media platforms, but there is a case to further examine the effectiveness, content, and frequency of posts on ESMs versus external social media sites. One primary benefit of ESM, as pointed out by Cai et al. (2018), is the ability for employees to build social connections and emotional ties with other employees within the enterprise. When employees perceive their work to be meaningful and the work with their organization to be worthwhile, Cai et al. (2018)

found a strong sense of psychological meaningfulness, which also means high engagement rates.

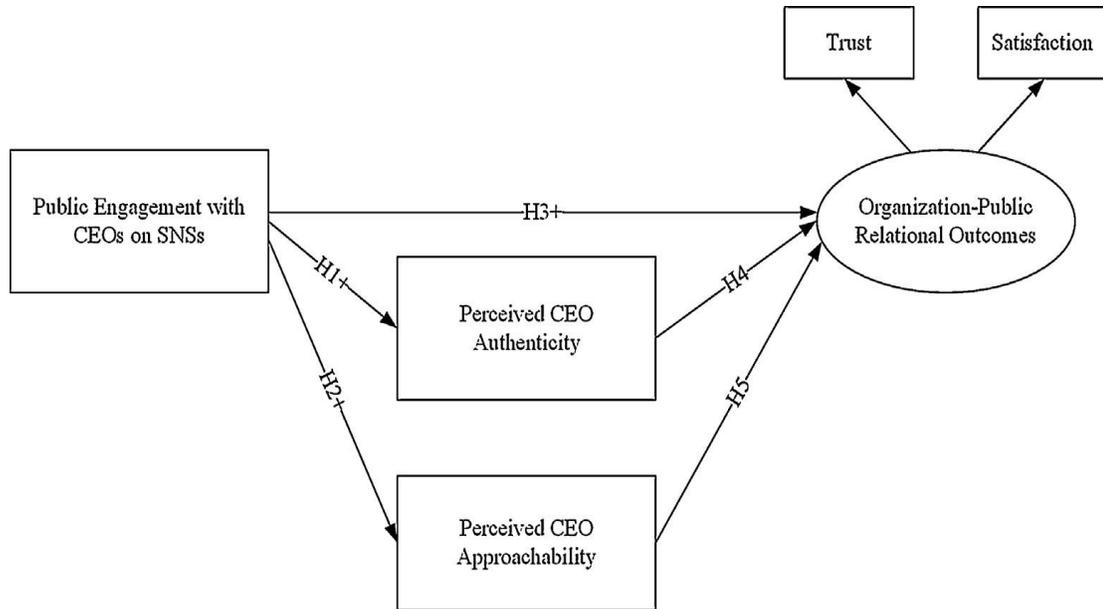
Relevant to what Cai et al. (2018) uncovered, psychological safety and meaningfulness are important tenets to the emotional culture in an organization. Emotional culture affects organizational behaviors differently than cognitive culture (Robinson, Watkins, & Harmon-Jones, 2013) and the role of internal communication helps shape organizational culture (Men & Yue, 2019). There are usually positive emotional cultural benefits that make employees proud of their work and their company. Pride arises when there is joy and when employees are submerged in a positive, encouraging work environment where they are allowed to smile and think creatively (Men & Yue, 2019). Men and Yue (2019) revealed a symmetrical communication model that advocates dialogue between organizations and stakeholders. This communication model emphasizes trust, credibility, openness, relationships, reciprocity, feedback, adequacy of information, employee-centered style, and tolerance for disagreement (Grunig, 1992, p. 558). The Men and Yue (2019) study contributed to the theoretical understanding of the role of emotional culture in organizations, practical implications for internal employee communications, and the value of building positive emotional culture. It has laid the theoretical groundwork for my case study research. With the internet readily available on a variety of devices, it makes sense for organizations to employ an internal communications strategy, even if it uses an external social media platform.

## **Social CEOs and external stakeholder engagement**

Reaching an external audience in a meaningful way is what marketers sought to do in the early days of social media. Finding the courage and proper strategy to engage organizational publics, or external stakeholders, on social media required a tweak in the interpersonal approaches (Men & Tsai, 2016) in comparison to the good old days of large public relations teams ordering the steps of the company and the executive team for offline interactions. There is extensive empirical research that supports evidence of the positive impact of stakeholder engagement using interpersonal communication tactics that increase favorable organization reputation (Chen, Ji, & Men, 2017). This research is sufficient to support any organization and its chief executive going full throttle into a social media strategy that engages all stakeholders. The engagement that requires deep involvement (Chen et al., 2017) tends to be one-dimensional, but researchers have broken that one dimension into multiple metrics considering online activity at three levels: content creation, content contribution, and content consumption.

It is unconventional to think of values when it comes to consumer engagement behaviors. Hollebeek and Chen (2014) established that perceived values are the antecedents of consumer engagement behaviors. This connection to values explains why much of the literature on public relations and social media links back to the social benefits, interactions, social support, and sense of belonging (Chen et al., 2017). Men and Tsai's (2016) proposed model of public engagement with CEOs on social networking sites (Figure 8 below) outlines a clearer connection to values as it

illustrates that the higher levels of interactivity lead to more favorable perceptions of the CEO, higher perceived authenticity and approachability, and better organizational public relational outcomes.



Source: Adapted from Men and Tsai (2016)

**Figure 8. Proposed Model of Public Engagement with CEOs on SNSs**

Leadership literature has widely acknowledged that CEOs play a crucial role in serving as a public figure for their organization, and positive image creation increases favorable organizational image and brand reputation (Fanelli & Misangyi, 2006).

## ***Literature Review Summary***

The social CEO can be a positive conduit to external audiences and energizer of their organization. The introduction of social media created the onset of Virtual Customer Environments (VCE). Other than for marketing purposes, companies were slow to dive in and figure how to capitalize on these VCE's. Culnan et al.'s (2010) research illustrated the need for engaging content if the organization wanted to see the value of VCEs in areas such as driving traffic, customer loyalty and retention, revenue growth, and customer satisfaction. Social Customer Relationship Management (CRM) provided a vehicle for businesses to digitally get closer to customers in an unprecedented way. The growth social media experienced in 2010 validated the benefit of this medium. Large companies like Coca-Cola, Walmart, and Hewlett-Packard were early adopters of social CRM and built intricate communities using their social platforms.

Baird and Parasnis (2011) discovered the need to coerce consumers with compelling content for them to engage with a brand. The early hesitance for consumers to interact with a brand created a gap between what consumers wanted from a brand and what brands thought consumers wanted. This miscommunication produced uncertainty for brands and made executives hesitate even more before diving into social media. The CEO's role on social media, during its infancy, has been convoluted and multi-faceted. With seventy-nine percent of the U.S. population on some social media platform today, organizations and their leadership began to take a deeper look at how

social media could be used effectively by leaders. Through research, CEOs were found to play a critical role from chief engagement officers to connectors and community builders to the transparency barometer and the ones who could help shape organizational identity. John Legere took on all of these roles and played each one strategically as part of a visceral reaction to the wireless industry ills and his attempt to combat them and differentiating T-Mobile.

It appears as though Legere's frustration with the wireless industry yielded unparalleled authenticity from a CEO. When a public figure shares life or personal experiences on social media, it correlates to a more positive image of them as stated by Yim (2019), and Legere was seemingly successful at creating a positive image of himself and his company. He used his expressionist approach (Malhotra & Malhotra, 2016) to share his thoughts and opinions about competitors, the entire wireless industry, and his frequent runs around various cities in the U.S. Employee and stakeholder engagement are also important tenets for the social CEO. Chen et al. (2017) summed it up best in Legere's case with the preliminary evidence that the positive impact of stakeholder engagement using interpersonal communications increase favorable organizational reputation. It looks as if this is what Legere sought out to accomplish from the first tweet.

Given all the literature reviewed for this exploratory study, these circumstances produce an opportunity for me to conduct research on John Legere and his use of

social media. Very few studies have provided an exploratory view of a social CEO and their use of social media. John Legere and T-Mobile provide a unique opportunity for us to better understand the dynamics of the social CEO and how they impact their constituencies. The following research questions are what I intend to answer:

**R1.** How and why does John Legere, T-Mobile CEO, use social media to communicate with employees, customers (those who use T-Mobile), consumers (those in the general public who do not use T-Mobile), and other stakeholders (e.g., shareholders, Wall Street analysts, industry insiders), and what impact does his use of social media have on those constituencies?

**R2.** What is the perceived impact of John Legere's social media use on organizational outcomes such as brand affinity, employee engagement, organizational culture, financial results, and customer satisfaction?

**R3.** How does Legere's social media use impact his perceived leadership style according to T-Mobile constituents?

## **Chapter 3: Research Methodology**

Based on previously discussed findings, there is a great need for more research on the impact of social media use by corporate leaders. This additional research will come in the form of a single, exploratory case study on T-Mobile's evolution since John Legere has been the CEO and a heavy Twitter user. As a reminder, the research questions guiding the inquiry are, first, "How and why does John Legere, the CEO of T-Mobile, use social media to communicate with employees, customers (those who use T-Mobile), consumers (those in the general public who do not use T-Mobile), and other stakeholders (e.g., shareholders, Wall Street analysts, industry insiders), and what impact does his use of social media have on those constituencies?" Second, "What is the perceived impact of John Legere's social media use on organizational outcomes such as customer satisfaction, employee engagement, brand affinity, and financial results?" Third, "How does Legere's social media use impact his perceived leadership style according to T-Mobile constituents?" An exploratory case study allows me the opportunity to investigate these questions in the context of a corporate setting using a variety of data sources.

### ***Case Study Design***

Yin (2018) stated that a case study design should be considered when (a) the focus of the study is to answer "how" and "why" questions; (b) you cannot manipulate the behavior of those involved in the study; (c) you want to cover contextual conditions because you believe they are relevant to the phenomenon under study; or (d) the boundaries are not clear between the phenomenon and context. In the paradigm of

this study, John Legere has distinguished himself as the “Un-CEO” and uncharacteristically uses Twitter to communicate to the broader T-Mobile audience, and it has been successful. Using the Yin (2018) case study design allows focus on the questions of “how” and “why” and does not leave room for any influencing of the behavior of the participants due to the broad range of perspectives included in the data collection. As I worked to capture honest, unbridled insight from every constituent, this design provided the perfect blueprint to create an unbiased study.

Yin (2018) listed five components of research design that are particularly important when doing a case study: (a) research question(s); (b) propositions or purpose of the study; (c) the case; (d) the logic linking the data to the propositions; and (e) criteria for interpreting the findings. The first element, research question, has been discussed so moving on to the second element of case study research design—defining the study purpose—is appropriate. This is also commonly known as the purpose statement or proposition. The purpose for this case study is to gain a better understanding of an organizational phenomena from a variety of perspectives over time (Ozcan, Graebner, & Han, 2017). Specifically, how constituents of a large, Fortune 500 organization experience the ever-present social media celebrity of its chief executive officer and how it impacts other organizational outcomes.

The third element of case study research design is the unit of analysis or the “case” that will be studied. Yin (2018) noted that there are two different steps that must be

considered when identifying the “case”—defining the case and bounding the case. T-Mobile and their constituents would be the unit of analysis. The temporal boundaries include using John Legere’s tweets during his tenure and a timeline of T-Mobile milestones since he has been CEO from 2012 until 2019. The spatial boundaries include T-Mobile constituents to include employees, customers and other stakeholders.

The fourth element of case study research design is the logic linking the data to the propositions or data analysis. This approach to data analysis will provide a deeper understanding of greater insight into seeing potential future papers, as noted by Ozcan et al. (2017). More details around the data analysis can be found in the “Data Analysis” section of this dissertation. The fifth element of the case study research design is the criteria for interpreting the findings.

### ***Data Collection***

The research strategy to collect data for this single case study included the following:

- Thirty-one semi-structured interviews, including ten with T-Mobile employees, nine with T-Mobile customers, nine with internal social media strategists for T-Mobile, two with wireless industry experts, and one with Jon Freier, T-Mobile’s Senior Vice President of Consumer Markets.
- Metrics from T-Mobile on Legere’s social media use on Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram and its reach and impact.
- The content of John Legere’s social media feeds.

- Stories about John Legere and T-Mobile in the business and popular press.
- Participant observations.
- Archival records.

### **Interviews**

The interviewees were selected from a variety of geographic locations and functional areas within T-Mobile. The criteria I used to select these individuals was that they had to be followers of John Legere and/or the T-Mobile brand on any social media platform as an employee, a customer, an industry analyst or insider, or a social media strategist. I used my social networks within T-Mobile and the wireless industry to identify and select people that I knew had extensive engagement with T-Mobile and John Legere's social media platforms. I also interviewed one customer that did not follow Legere or T-Mobile on social media, but their interview remains part of the data collection due to the value of their anecdotal input regarding their experience with T-Mobile. The interviewees were asked to participate in semi-structured interviews (Rubin & Rubin, 2012) answering several questions regarding their experience as T-Mobile stakeholders and how John's social media posts and activity impact them.

The employee interview questions can be found in Appendix A. They were designed to explore employee engagement and sentiment regarding social media use by both T-Mobile the brand and John Legere the CEO. They include demographic questions and questions about how often the employee visits John Legere and T-Mobile social

media sites, which sites they visit (e.g., Twitter, Facebook), what their impressions are of John Legere and T-Mobile's social media efforts, what they believe the purpose and strategy of John Legere and T-Mobile's social media efforts to be, how they have seen the John Legere and T-Mobile social media efforts change and evolve over time, how John Legere and T-Mobile's social media posts make them feel about working for T-Mobile, and what role they believe social media plays in John Legere's approach to leadership.

The social media strategist interview questions can be found in Appendix B. They were designed to explore the purpose, messaging, strategy, history, and whys regarding John Legere and T-Mobile's social media journey. They include questions about the history and purpose regarding Legere's social journey, the evolution of John Legere's social media presence, what is the measurement of social media effectiveness, what is the most and least engaging content, what are the most and least effective social media platforms for executives and the brand, and what are the benefits of executive engagement on social media. My assumption is that the social media strategists would answer these questions based on their own experiences and the extensive pool of social media metrics that they have gathered since the genesis of T-Mobile and John Legere's social media use, which proves to be true.

The customer interview questions can be found in Appendix C. They were designed to explore an external view of the T-Mobile brand and Legere's social media use and

how it impacts them. They include questions about who their previous wireless providers were, what their reasons for switching to T-Mobile were, what they think about T-Mobile and John Legere's social media efforts, what is the frequency of visits to T-Mobile and John Legere's social media pages, what social media posts made them feel proud or embarrassed to be a T-Mobile customer, how do they use social media to make purchase decisions as a consumer, what are their positive and negative customer experiences as a T-Mobile customer, and the general public's overall feelings toward John Legere's social media use.

Appendix D contains the industry expert questions. They were designed to explore the perspective of professionals who are well-versed on telecommunications, T-Mobile competitors, and the perceptions of others regarding the T-Mobile brand and John Legere. They include questions about how long they have been following T-Mobile and/or John Legere, which platforms do they follow them on, their perception of the T-Mobile and/or John Legere social media strategy, what core values come through the messaging for the brand, their perception of the evolution of the social media strategy, their comparison of T-Mobile and John Legere's social presence to competitors, their frequency of social media platform visits, when they read something that was smart or not smart on social media, how they use social media by company leaders to make purchase decisions as a consumer, and what are the primary benefits of John Legere's social media use.

Lastly, Jon Freier's interview questions can be found in Appendix E. They were created to give the perspective of an executive who is a heavy social media user and explore his journey. They include questions about his influence for getting started on social media as a T-Mobile leader, the nature of the first T-Mobile social media post, goals for using social media, impact of his social media use as an executive on T-Mobile the brand, and his favorite social media campaign. With all of the interviewee groups identified, I expected to find some similarities and some differences in their responses, depending on their stakeholder group and based on their experiences with T-Mobile and John Legere's social media, which might raise testable hypotheses about how John's social media use is supposed to work.

Outside of the interviews, I gathered strategy insights from the social media strategists to better understand the overall strategy and goals for John Legere and T-Mobile to assess what their key performance indicators are. While researching and combing through social media feeds, I discovered milestones and monumental organizational moments, and I highlighted those using the backdrop of the KPIs to help assess their implications and impact. I also provided the history and influence of two substantial social media staples within T-Mobile, Slow Cooker Sunday and T-Mobile Tuesdays.

### **Metrics on John Legere's social media use**

It is important to take a look at the type of content and frequency of different categories that John Legere has shared on social media and how it has evolved over

time to tell the comprehensive story of his social media journey and its impact on T-Mobile constituents. To fulfill this data need, I requested social media metrics for John Legere's social media platforms from 2013 to the present to analyze John's social media content volume, categories, post frequency, lead generation, and engagement and impression quantities. I wanted to fully evaluate the effectiveness of John's social media journey by adding this layer of analysis to the overall study. The social media analytics team did not have data stored from 2013 forward. However, they were able to provide me 2018 and 2019 data for both John Legere and T-Mobile social media platforms. I specifically requested the Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram data, but Instagram is a fairly new platform for both John and the brand so, in the end, I analyzed Facebook and Twitter information from 2018 and 2019 only. The lack of metrics from 2013 to 2018 limited my ability to assess how John's social media usage evolved to some degree, but I mitigated that limitation by conducting a manual search of social posts that link to organization milestones, as explained in the subsequent section.

### **Content of John Legere's social media feeds**

To add more rigor to this case study and to compensate for the missing metrics from the social media analytics team, I tracked Legere's social media use and messages from 2012 to 2019 and lined them up with events, activities, major organizational initiatives, and industry moves. These data points helped assess the evolution of T-Mobile and explore what relationship there might have been between the events and the messages and if there were any organizational outcomes that were impacted by

those events and messages. I requested help from the social media analytics team to collect more data on John's social media content.

As a reminder, the purpose of this research is threefold: (a) to tell the impact of John Legere's social media use on perceived organizational outcomes and his leadership over time, (b) to provide insight to practitioners about how social media can be used as an influence, and (c) to add to existing research regarding the relationship between social media and leadership. Significant organizational milestones were collected from the social media analytics team, company press releases, and other industry news noted in social media posts. The metrics and content from T-Mobile and John Legere's Twitter and Facebook accounts were shared by the social media analytics team to analyze the overall engagement levels and effectiveness of different types of posts. T-Mobile's content had to be thrown into the mix as they are the beneficiary of John's influencer status. Whenever necessary, notable social media responses are inserted into the findings to demonstrate the magnitude of a response or a post that John made.

### **Stories about John Legere and T-Mobile in the press**

Archives, articles, news stories, and social posts about John Legere or T-Mobile from business and popular press were also collected and incorporated into the findings. These artifacts helped bring the study full circle by including outsider observations, interviews, and news stories to help limit bias (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007) based on all of the internal data I accumulated. There is a plethora of external data citing the

journey of T-Mobile's growth as a wireless provider, and this was also used as part of the data collection.

### **Participant observation**

My fifth source of data was participant observation (Spradley, 2016). This was a longitudinal study, and, as an employee of T-Mobile, I witnessed and experienced a variety of behaviors associated with social media posts by the CEO and other senior executives. During this time, I took field notes on what I observed regarding the use of social media by other senior leaders within the organization, the use of enterprise social platforms within the organization, and the major milestones unfolding mostly around the merger and the announcement of John Legere stepping down.

### **Archival records**

Outside of the interviews, I gathered strategy insights from the social media strategists to better understand the overall strategy and goals for John Legere and T-Mobile the brand to assess what their key performance indicators are. While researching and combing through social media feeds, I discovered milestones and monumental organizational moments, and I highlighted those using the backdrop of the KPIs to help assess their implications and impact. I also provided the history and influence of two substantial social media staples within T-Mobile—Slow Cooker Sunday and T-Mobile Tuesdays.

### ***Data Analysis***

Ozcan et al. (2017) suggested that a holistic single case design is more appropriate for this type of research question, which examines an entire organization. By doing a

holistic single case design, creating an in-depth case history to help organize the large amount of data that I collected was the most advantageous. I used the Gioia method of grounded theory to analyze my data (Gioia, Korley, & Hamilton, 2012). I coded first order concepts, second order themes, and aggregate dimensions. The focus of my findings is primarily around the second order themes and aggregate dimensions since that is where the most significant findings were embedded.

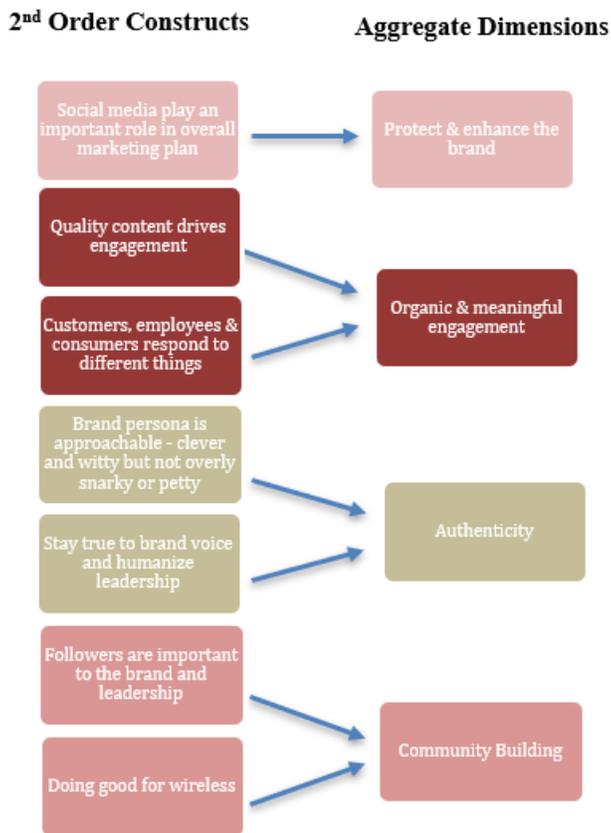
The interviews were the primary source of data from T-Mobile constituents. After every two interviews in each group, the pair of interviews were coded manually and assessed for emerging themes. This process allowed for analysis before moving on to other members of the team in case there was a need to adjust my interview questions. I used this process throughout all the interviews.

With the type of data gathered for this longitudinal study using timelines, key words, and social media metrics, a combination of a few approaches provided the best outcome. This multi-faceted strategy at different levels of analysis also allowed for some cycling of the data involving my research question, the data, my handling and interpretation of the data, and my ability to state some findings and draw conclusions (Yin, 2018).

### **Themes and aggregate dimensions from the social strategists**

The four primary aggregate dimensions that came out of the social strategist interviews were (a) protecting and enhancing the brand; (b) organic and meaningful

engagement on social media is essential to the overall marketing plan; (c) staying true to the brand voice and personality to be cool, fun, witty, approachable, and positive with rebellious optimism is important; and (d) community building is essential to all stakeholder groups (see Figure 9).

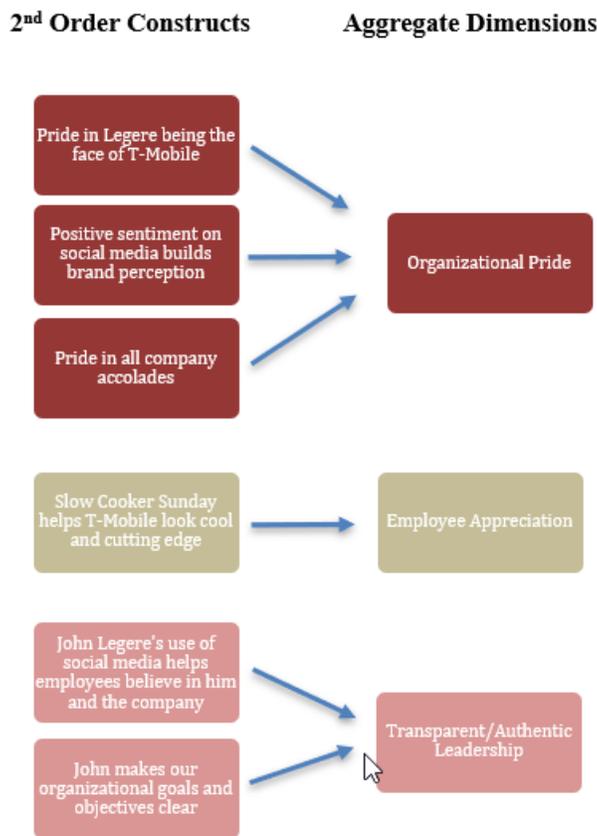


**Figure 9. Social Strategists Data Structure**

**Themes and aggregate dimensions from employees**

Figure 13 illustrates the employee data structure and the three primary aggregate dimensions that came out of those interviews: (a) organizational pride, (b) employee

appreciation for a leader who cares about more than the bottom line, and (c) transparent, authentic leadership. These themes were threaded throughout multiple interviews and responses from all employees in five different functional areas: sales, marketing, engineering, finance, and dealer support.

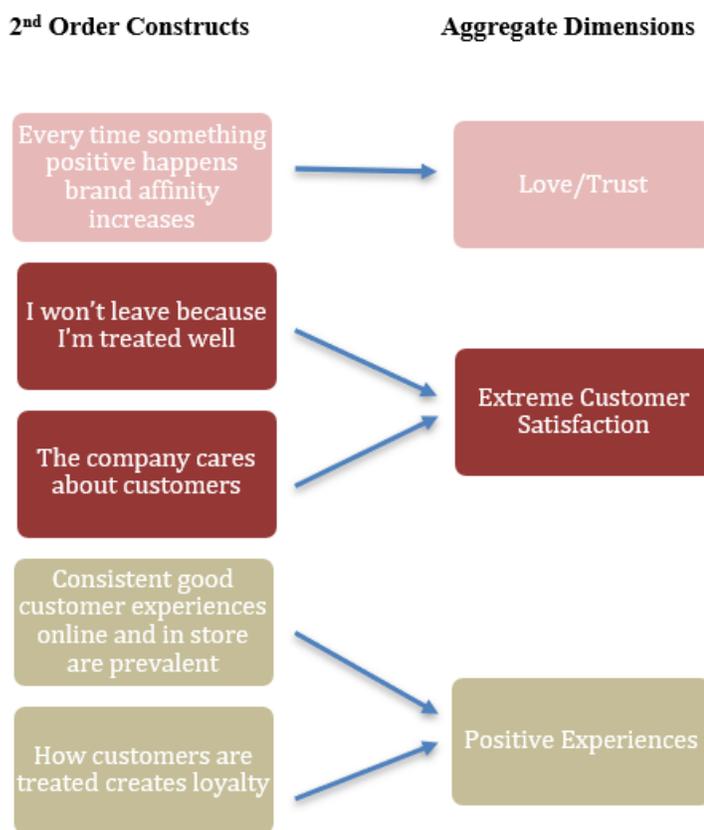


**Figure 10. Employees Data Structure**

### Themes and aggregate dimensions from customers

The three aggregate dimensions that came out of the customer interviews were (a) love/trust, (b) extreme customer satisfaction, and (c) positive experiences. One

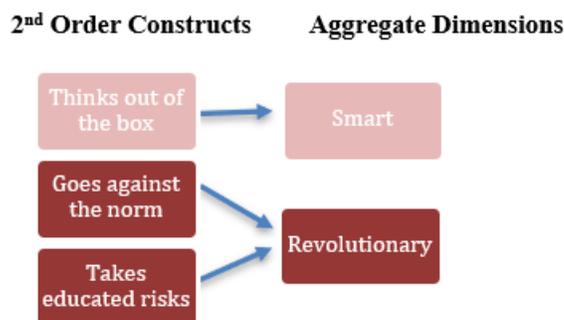
customer follows John Legere on three major social platforms—Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook; five customers follow John Legere on Twitter only; two customers follow John Legere on Facebook and Twitter; one customer wasn't on social media at all, but I kept their interview for the customer service anecdotal value. Figure 11 shows the breakdown of the second order themes and aggregate dimensions from customers.



**Figure 11. Customers Data Structure**

## Themes and aggregate dimensions from industry insiders

Two primary themes emerged from the industry insider interviews: smart and revolutionary, as shown in Figure 12. Industry experts who follow the wireless industry have a love/hate relationship with John Legere. They love the fact that he is cutting-edge, keeps things interesting, and wants to change the industry, but they hate when major announcements come across their Twitter feed because they have to drop everything to cover the story. The two industry insiders I interviewed shared a plethora of insights about the industry as a whole and how John's social media use impacts the entire industry.



**Figure 12. Industry Insiders Data Structure**

## ***Theoretical Proposition/Expected Results***

As ubiquitous as it has become, social media research in the realm of leadership is minimal to none. Very little research has been conducted on how leaders use or should use social media or how the social-C impacts organizations and their constituents. Even less research has been done to evaluate if a social-C even makes a

difference for an organization. Most of the research regarding social media and organizations revolves around reputation management and marketing impacts. I can make an educated guess and a few claims based on my marketing and business acumen. This exploratory case study shares the reactions, views, and thoughts of a small sample size of actual stakeholders who have a vested interest in T-Mobile. Their insight provided first-hand data regarding the impact of a social CEO on a dynamic organization with a difficult past.

The primary contribution is to provide deep insight into how people from multiple constituencies, employees, customers, and industry insiders experience and think about a social CEO's posts and how it influences their levels of employee engagement, organizational identification, brand affinity, financial results, and customer satisfaction. A secondary contribution is that today's leader cannot be afraid to have a social presence and must be comfortable driving relevant, timely social conversations as the benefits far outweigh the risks. Third, I have made a scholarly contribution to the existing research on social media, leadership and organization reputation management. Social media is a borderless platform that allows for communication and information flow that can be controlled mostly by the organization, and that makes it a powerful tool that all leaders should capitalize on. I am hoping to strengthen any theoretical contribution by the triangulation of data types that will be used in this exploratory case study. Conducting future research on a larger

group of T-Mobile stakeholders or another organization and doing some comparative analysis would strengthen any theories or conclusions from this initial study.

## Chapter 4: Results

### **Overview**

This chapter explores my primary and secondary research questions. First, “How and why does John Legere use social media to communicate with employees, customers, consumers, and other stakeholders, and what kind of impact does his use of social media have on those constituencies?” Second, “What is the perceived impact of John Legere’s social media use on organizational outcomes such as brand affinity, employee engagement, organizational culture, financial results, and customer satisfaction?” Third, “How does Legere’s social media use impact his perceived leadership style according to T-Mobile constituents?”

I begin with a review of T-Mobile’s financial performance during Legere’s tenure. The review shows that shortly after Legere became CEO in October 2012, T-Mobile stock went from \$16.25 per share on May 1, 2013, during its initial public offering (IPO) to \$77.56 per share on November 18, 2019, when Legere announced his retirement.

I then examine Legere and T-Mobile’s social media strategy during the same period of time (early 2013 through late 2019) and juxtapose it with the financial results. During this time, Legere and T-Mobile were working to build a unique brand of “rebellious optimism and genuine customer care” in the highly competitive and notoriously un-customer-friendly wireless industry. I show how the number of

followers on Twitter and Facebook for both Legere and for T-Mobile grew rapidly, how Legere and T-Mobile divided their social media communications into 15 distinct categories, and how certain of these categories (those more personal and humanizing yet still true to the rebelliously optimistic and genuinely caring T-Mobile brand) were assigned to Legere and others (those more focused on products, services, promotions, giveaways, cultural moments, and building the T-Mobile community) were assigned to the T-Mobile social media team.

Next, I provide three detailed examples of unconventional moves T-Mobile made under Legere's leadership that advanced the brand of rebellious optimism and genuine customer care: The Un-carrier Movement, Slow Cooker Sunday, and T-Mobile Tuesdays. The Un-carrier movement was a series of initiatives led by Legere to "fix a stupid, broken, and arrogant [wireless] industry" and put the customer first. Slow Cooker Sunday was a popular cooking show started spontaneously by Legere when he was cooking for his family that served to humanize him, build community, and connect him directly with a wide range of constituents. T-Mobile Tuesdays was a customer appreciation initiative that gained a huge following by taking the unusual step of rewarding customers with free giveaways and no strings attached. From 2013–2019, Legere and T-Mobile leveraged these and other initiatives to build their brand and drive their dramatic growth.

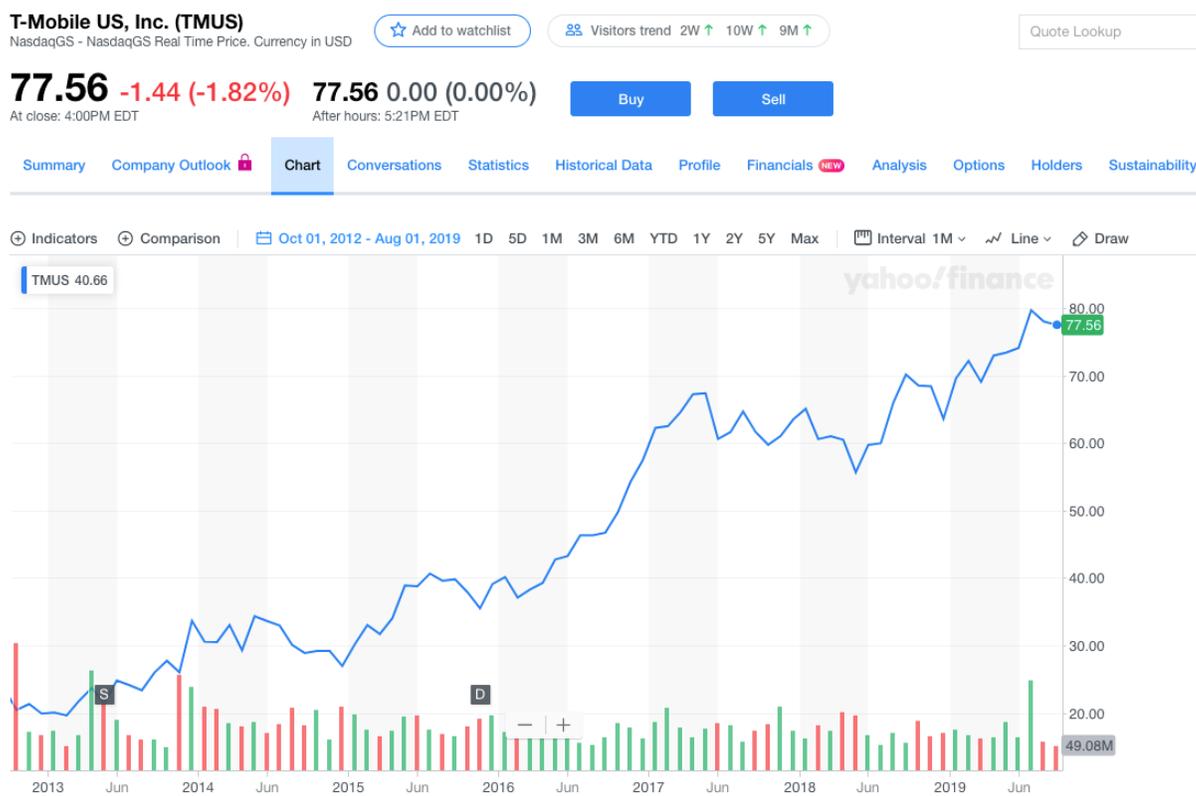
Finally, drawing on my interview data, I attempt to “get inside the heads” of T-Mobile social media strategists, T-Mobile employees, T-Mobile customers, and wireless industry insiders to understand their experience with Legere’s use of social media and the impact it had on them. The social strategists valued Legere’s social media involvement because it (a) enhanced the brand, (b) drove organic and meaningful engagement, (c) advanced an image of rebellious optimism, and (d) built community across stakeholder groups. For employees, it generated (a) organizational pride, (b) appreciation for a leader who genuinely cares about people, (c) and respect for Legere’s transparency and authenticity. For customers, it created (a) love and trust for Legere and the T-Mobile brand, (b) extreme customer satisfaction, and (c) positive experiences that led to customer loyalty. For competitors and industry insiders, it created mixed emotions. It garnered respect because it revealed Legere’s creativity, courage, resolve, and effectiveness, but it also created resentment because Legere consistently criticized the industry, did the unexpected, and fueled disruptive change.

### ***T-Mobile Financial Performance 2013-2019***

When John Legere came onboard in October 2012, T-Mobile was a private company owned by German-based Deutsche Telecom, starved for cash to acquire the assets necessary to successfully compete in the United States. Just before he arrived, the company had experienced a failed merger with AT&T, massive layoffs, a toxic organizational culture, and devastatingly high attrition rates. Within the first nine

months, Legere and his team made several significant moves to turn around an ostensive sinking ship.

In March 2013, they launched what they called “the Un-carrier movement” to “fix a stupid, broken, and arrogant [wireless] industry” (see full description of the Un-carrier movement below) and completed a reverse merger (when a private company takes over a public company) with Metro PCS. In May 2013, they took T-Mobile public on the New York Stock Exchange, and in the same month, they gained approval to sell the iPhone (T-Mobile, 2013). These four significant moves set the stage for much of what T-Mobile accomplished during Legere’s tenure. From 2013 through 2019, T-Mobile’s stock price rose from \$16.25 to \$77.56 per share (see Figure 13). See Appendix F for a list of key T-Mobile events and corresponding stock prices from 2013–2019.



Source: T-Mobile US, Inc. (2019)

**Figure 13. T-Mobile's 7 Year Stock Price**

To demonstrate the consistency of T-Mobile financial results, the most recently published quarterly results from 2018 demonstrate T-Mobile's best customer results yet. The measure of these results includes discussion around churn—the rate at which customers stop subscribing or drop the service—and net adds—the number of new subscribers minus the number of customers that drop the service. Q4 postpaid churn was the lowest ever and there was a total net adds for both postpaid (pay at the end of the month service) and prepaid (pay in advance service) subscribers of 2.4 million. Below are highlights of the fourth quarter specifics:

#### Preliminary fourth quarter 2018 customer highlights

- 2.4 million total net additions—best quarter ever.
- 1.4 million branded postpaid net additions—best Q4 ever.
- 1 million branded postpaid phone net additions—best Q4 in 4 years.
- Lowest ever Q4 branded postpaid phone churn of 0.99%, down 19 basis points year-over-year.
- 135,000 branded prepaid net additions.
- 79.7 million customers in total at year-end 2018. (T-Mobile, 2019a, p. 1)

#### Preliminary full-year 2018 customer highlights

- 7.0 million total net additions—accelerated year-over-year.
- 4.5 million branded postpaid net additions—best in 3 years.
- 3 million branded postpaid phone net additions—accelerated year-over-year.
- 460,000 branded prepaid net additions. (T-Mobile, 2019a, p. 1)

According to the latest fiscal year earnings release for 2018 released February 7, 2018, T-Mobile experienced the best postpaid phone growth in the industry (T-Mobile, 2019a).

### ***John Legere & T-Mobile's Social Media Strategy***

According to T-Mobile's social media strategists, the primary goal of their social media strategy is “to keep T-Mobile in front of consumers so that T-Mobile is top of mind when it is time to switch or select a wireless carrier.” They try to accomplish this by humanizing the brand using a cool, fun, witty, approachable, and rebelliously

optimistic brand voice that is “out to change the wireless industry for good.” Within this strategy, John Legere’s focus is “top funnel awareness.” The top of the funnel includes the first or early stages of a sales cycle. Usually, a Chief Executive does not play a role in the sales cycle, but with his millions of followers, T-Mobile has chosen to capitalize on Legere’s broad audience, knowing that many of them are not existing T-Mobile customers. As CEO, Legere’s goal is to increase preference for the T-Mobile brand by humanizing it using his voice. This is intended keep T-Mobile top of mind for consumers when they consider switching or selecting a wireless carrier. While the marketing and branding functions typically play this role for organizations, T-Mobile is happy to let John lead the way as he is an influencer with more than six million followers on social media.

It should be noted that John Legere and T-Mobile use their social media platforms as more than just a marketing tactic; they use them to communicate with all organizational stakeholders: the media, employees, shareholders, customers, consumers, and competitors. T-Mobile lists its social media handles, along with Legere’s, as official media for disseminating material company information, including financial results. Below is what is written at the bottom of many of their news releases:

### **T-Mobile Social Media**

Investors and others should note that we announce material financial and operational information to our investors using our investor relations website, press releases, SEC filings and public conference calls and webcasts. We also intend to use the @TMobileIR Twitter

account (<https://twitter.com/TMobileIR>) and the @JohnLegere Twitter (<https://twitter.com/JohnLegere>), Facebook and Periscope accounts, which Mr. Legere also uses as a means for personal communications and observations, as means of disclosing information about the Company and its services and for complying with its disclosure obligations under Regulation FD. The information we post through these social media channels may be deemed material. Accordingly, investors should monitor these social media channels in addition to following our press releases, SEC filings and public conference calls and webcasts. The social media channels that we intend to use as a means of disclosing the information described above may be updated from time to time as listed on our investor relations website. (T-Mobile, 2019a, p. 7)

The inclusion of this verbiage on news releases is significant affirmation to the importance of social media to the organization as a whole.

### **John Legere & T-Mobile's social media growth from 2013–2019**

Legere's social media journey began in May 2013. In an interview with *Fortune*, he admits one of his daughters set up his Twitter account one evening during dinner. After a few tweets, T-Mobile corporate security called him stating someone fraudulently opened an account with his name. He reassured them it was really him who opened the account. T-Mobile's legal team told him it was a bad idea to start tweeting—he admits ignoring their advice. From those first few tweets to January 2019, Legere's following grew to more than 6,000,000 followers on Twitter and over 324,000 followers on Facebook. Since January 2020, he has more than 6.4 million followers on Twitter and 455,000 followers on Facebook. In addition to this explosive growth, he received a notable top honor from Twitter when they created an emoji just for John Legere (see Figure 14). This accolade had been previously reserved for one other person before him—Pope Francis. Other brands or people who have a Twitter

emoji have paid for them through promotions or partnerships, but his was a gift to him. Why? Twitter said he caught their eye with his social savviness. They chose to highlight Legere because he paved the way for other CEOs on social media mixing personal and professional tweets. (Rodriguez, 2016).



*Source:* Adapted from Rodriguez (2016)

**Figure 14. Twitter Emoji of John Legere**

Table 1 illustrates how much Legere’s social media following grew from 2017–2019. It shows an average annual growth of 33% for Twitter and 96% for Facebook. The majority of the growth was organic, although there were times when there were paid promotions to increase followership.

**Table 1. John Legere Twitter and Facebook Growth 2017–2019**

<b>JJL TWITTER</b>		
<b>Date</b>	<b>Followers</b>	<b>Growth</b>
Jan-2017	3,454,688	
Jan-2018	5,201,756	+50.57%
Jan-2019	6,002,089	+15.39%

<b>JJL FACEBOOK</b>		
<b>Date</b>	<b>Followers</b>	<b>Growth</b>
Jan-2017	88,991	
Jan-2018	216,200	+142.95%
Jan-2019	324,061	+49.89%

*Source:* Adapted from T-Mobile Social Media Analytics Team (personal communication, November 19, 2019)

T-Mobile the brand also had significant growth in their social media following. Table 2 shows the growth of T-Mobile’s Twitter and Facebook platforms from 2013 to 2019. It shows an average annual growth of 39% for Twitter and 19% for Facebook. Follower growth is important to the T-Mobile brand and to Legere as CEO since the overall goal is to become one of the most loved and must-follow brands in the country. Social media has the reach and continuity required to share multiple messages to a targeted audience in a push format. In addition, it allows the brand to be able to go into social platforms and areas of interest where the T-Mobile target demographic dwells. Follower growth for both John Legere and the brand are attributed to a simple philosophy of continuing what works well and reevaluating what does not work.

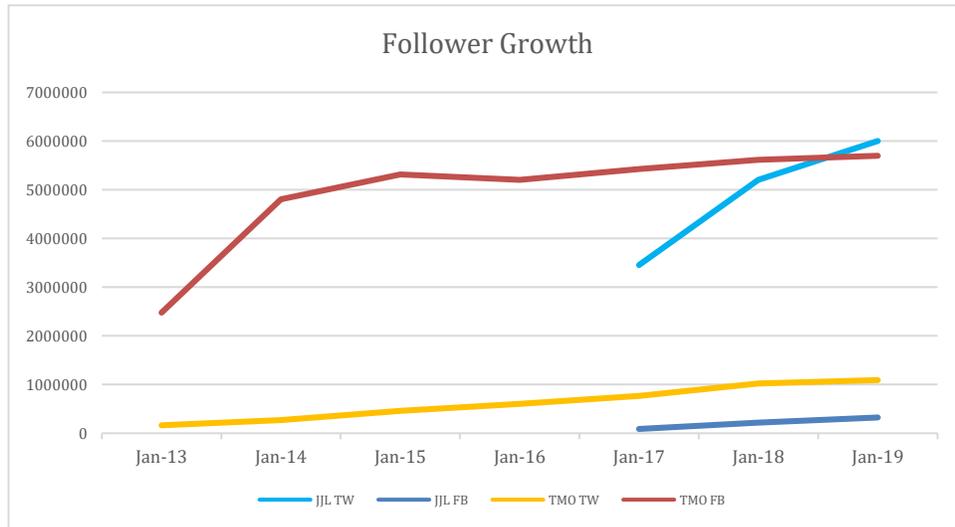
**Table 2. T-Mobile US (TMUS) Twitter and Facebook Growth 2013–2019**

<b>TMUS TWITTER</b>		
<b>Date:</b>	<b>Followers</b>	<b>Growth:</b>
Jan-2013	164,150	-
Jan-2014	272,076	+65.75%
Jan-2015	462,560	+70.01%
Jan-2016	603,215	+30.41%
Jan-2017	769,861	+27.63%
Jan-2018	1,018,936	+32.35%
Jan-2019	1,091,988	+7.17%
<b>TMUS FACEBOOK</b>		
<b>Date</b>	<b>Fans</b>	<b>Growth</b>
Jan-2013	2,476,910	
Jan-2014	4,803,330	+93.92%
Jan-2015	5,316,810	+10.69%
Jan-2016	5,203,149	-2.14%
Jan-2017	5,427,301	+4.31%
Jan-2018	5,614,006	+3.44%
Jan-2019	5,697,826	+1.49%

*Source:* Adapted from T-Mobile Social Media Analytics Team (personal communication, November 19, 2019)

Through the combined efforts of the social media strategy teams for both the T-Mobile brand and for Legere, their overall following took off from 2013–2019. Legere had the majority of his share on Twitter, and the T-Mobile brand had the majority of its share on Facebook, as noted in Figure 15Figure 9. The blue line in Figure 15 (JJLTW) represents the number of John Legere’s Twitter followers, the

purple line (JJLFB) represents the number of Leger’s Facebook followers, the yellow line (TMOTW) represents the number of T-Mobile’s Twitter followers, and the red line (TMOFB) represents the number of T-Mobile’s Facebook followers.



*Source:* Adapted from T-Mobile Social Media Analytics Team (personal communication, November 19, 2019)

**Figure 15. T-Mobile US (TMUS) and John Legere Follower Growth**

### **John Legere & T-Mobile’s use of distinct social media categories**

The T-Mobile and John Legere social media strategy teams were not purposely looking to divide the content by categories, but they began to do so when they noticed that there was more engagement with certain types of content than with others. They organized the types of posts into 20 categories, each with their own set of metrics. The categories are described below. They are benefits, brand, brand hero moments, carrier jabs, compete, CSR, cultural moments, devices, events and sponsorships, evergreen, executives, John, merger, network, new products, offers, periscope, Slow Cooker Sunday, Sprint, and T-Mobile Tuesdays.

- **Benefits:** Posts offering customer benefits such as Live Nation tickets, GoGo wireless (complimentary inflight Wi-Fi on United and American Airlines), Simple Global (flat fee for international calling), and Netflix on Us (complimentary Netflix subscription as long as you are a T-Mobile customer).
- **Brand:** Posts sharing stories about T-Mobile brand values and brand narratives, such as diversity and inclusion and the “Are you with us?” mantra.
- **Brand hero moments:** Posts about T-Mobile’s biggest brand moments of the year. They are typically outliers in performance because T-Mobile creates their own “moments,” like Scam Block Party (when T-Mobile created a product to allow customers to block “Scam Likely” calls) and #TMOBell (the partnership with Taco Bell and T-Mobile Tuesday to give customers free tacos).
- **Carrier jabs:** Posts about Verizon and AT&T and how their policies cause customers pain.
- **Corporate social responsibility (CSR):** Posts about social good, including environmental initiatives, charitable donations, and responses to tragic events.
- **Cultural moments:** Posts about social holidays (e.g., #nationalpizzaday, national pet day), actual holidays, major events (e.g., Thanksgiving, Pride Parades), or trending moments (e.g., 9G Reply was a T-Mobile post in response to AT&T after they inserted 5G E on their customer’s LTE phones, and Where Y’all Sitting was a post about what type of texter are you based on ten different options).
- **Devices:** Posts about unboxings (when there is a new device launched and a Dez, the T-Mobile unboxing mobile expert, creates a video opening or “unboxing” the

device), announcements (e.g., when Samsung or Apple announces release dates for upcoming devices), and preorders (e.g., when Samsung or Apple announce preorder dates).

- **Events and sponsorships:** Posts about major on-the-ground activations and partnerships (e.g., the annual Coachella Valley Music and Arts Festival, Ariana Grande partnership and celebrity endorsement, MLB multi-year partnership, Little League multi-year partnership)
- **Evergreen:** These are random posts, quotes, articles, and off-topic content pieces (i.e., content not intended to be promotional for T-Mobile) posted by the T-Mobile brand team. An example of this is a post about how to clean your mobile device.
- **Executives:** Content shared by T-Mobile executives with other handles such as #SlowCookerSunday.
- **John:** These are John Legere's organic posts, which means they are sent from Legere's Twitter and Facebook accounts rather than from T-Mobile accounts. As mentioned above, Legere's posts consistently reach as many or more followers as T-Mobile's, but it is also true that Legere's posts often contain retweets of T-Mobile content, especially content from the brand and evergreen categories. Legere's organic posts include things like Ruff Friday with Seattle Humane Society, Magenta (anything related to the T-Mobile brand, Travel (when John shares his business or personal trips), PAM Shuffle (the dance he does on Slow Cooker Sunday), Slow Cooker Sunday (his Facebook live cooking and business

show), Legere Doll (the animated character created in his image), running (every time he goes for a run and shares it), and any other posts originating from Legere's accounts.

- **Merger:** Posts related to the pending Sprint merger and New T-Mobile (the name of T-Mobile once Sprint and T-Mobile merge). This includes 5G content that is included in the merger with Sprint.
- **Network:** Posts about coverage maps, network improvements, and 5G content that is not related to the merger with Sprint.
- **New products:** Posts announcing new products such as T-Vision (T-Mobile's home television service), T-Mobile Money (T-Mobile's pre-paid card), and Family Mode (T-Mobile's all-in-one solution to help parents control kids' online activity and screen time).
- **Offers:** Posts about new device offers and promotions that include BOGOs and discounted devices.
- **Periscope:** A mobile app that allows users to live broadcast video in real time from their smart device.
- **Slow Cooker Sunday:** Whenever the T-Mobile brand is pushing content related to Slow Cooker Sunday.
- **T-Mobile Tuesdays:** Content related to the T-Mobile Tuesday program in general or tied in with one of the featured brands that week. For example, the Quibi partnership was part of T-Mobile Tuesday and before it was offered to customers, the brand posted about the upcoming benefit on Twitter. This also includes polls

that do not include #TMobileTuesday per se but incorporate the week's offer. For example, customers are sometimes surveyed if they liked a particular new offer in T-Mobile Tuesday.

Table 3 shows how often, represented in percentages, Legere used each of the above social media categories on his personal Twitter and Facebook accounts in 2019. Table 4 does the same for T-Mobile. Overall, Legere posted six percentage points higher than T-Mobile on Twitter, which explains why T-Mobile relied so heavily on Legere as a social influencer on Twitter.

On Twitter, apart from his own organic tweets, brand tweets are most frequent for Legere. These are usually retweets or tweets containing content the brand team asked him to post, which illustrates the brand team's use of Legere's influence to get the brand message out to T-Mobile constituents. The other important metrics related to Legere are the Slow Cooker Sunday and carrier jabs categories. These are two categories that are exclusive to John Legere and two of his primary differentiators as a CEO. Neither the AT&T nor Verizon CEO have a cooking show or share any other unorthodox content while sharing business results, nor do they compare themselves outright to other competitors in jest or otherwise.

Another important note here is the amount of energy John gives to Twitter vs. Facebook. His category percentage for Twitter is only slightly higher than that for Facebook.

**Table 3. John Legere’s Twitter and Facebook Use by Category**



John*	24%
Brand	18%
Evergreen**	14%
Slow Cooker Sunday	12%
Carrier Jabs	8%
Merger	7%
Cultural Moments	5%
T-Mobile Tuesday	2.47%
Device	2.10%
Compete	2.10%
CSR	1.88%
Periscope	1.45%
Benefits	1.18%
Brand Hero Moment	0.65%
Executive	0.27%
Events & Sponsorship	0.16%
Network	0.16%
Offers	0.05%



Brand	26%
John*	21%
Slow Cooker Sunday	15%
Merger	14%
Cultural Moments	7%
CSR	3.49%
Benefits	3.28%
T-Mobile Tuesday	2.40%
Device	1.97%
Carrier Jabs	1.53%
Brand	0.87%
Evergreen**	0.87%
Brand Hero Moment	0.44%
Benefit	0.44%
Offer	0.44%
Executive	0.22%

*Source:* Adapted from T-Mobile Social Media Analytics Team (personal communication, November 19, 2019)

The breakdown for T-Mobile in Table 4 shows a stark difference in category percentages and the omission of categories exclusive to Legere, specifically John, Slow Cooker Sunday, and carrier jabs. T-Mobile invested significantly more time on Facebook than John did at twelve percentage points higher. The reason for this came up in one of my interviews with a brand strategist: T-Mobile wanted to capture more share of the Facebook community since John already had a strong position in the Twitter community.

T-Mobile Tuesdays was revealed as a differentiator for the brand, appearing as the number one category for T-Mobile on both Twitter and Facebook. Cultural moments (posts about social holidays, actual holidays, major events, or trending moments) showed up as a strong second place. This category is an illustration of T-Mobile's desire to connect with its constituents around common experiences, build community, and share the values of T-Mobile and the important connectors for the brand.

Connecting people and building community around shared cultural moments on both Twitter and Facebook were among the most important strategies used by the T-Mobile social media team to humanize the T-Mobile brand.

Table 4 shows how often, represented in percentages, T-Mobile used each of the social media categories—benefits, brand, brand hero moments, carrier jabs, compete, CSR, cultural moments, devices, events and sponsorships, evergreen, executives,

John, merger, network, new products, offers, periscope, Slow Cooker Sunday, Sprint, and T-Mobile Tuesdays—on its Twitter and Facebook accounts in 2019. Table 3 showed these percentages for Legere’s accounts.

**Table 4. T-Mobile Twitter and Facebook Use by Category**



T-Mobile Tuesdays	21%
Cultural Moments	20%
Brand	11%
Events & Sponsorships	9%
Devices	7%
Executive	5.29%
Compete	5.29%
CSR	5.10%
Brand Hero Moment	4.73%
Merger	3.78%
Benefits	3.02%
Network	2.84%
New Products	1.32%
Offers	0.19%



T-Mobile Tuesdays	33%
Cultural Moments	12%
Device	11%
Executive	9%
Brand	7%
Merger	5.29%
CSR	5.29%
Events & Sponsorships	4.85%
Benefits	4.41%
Network	3.96%
New Products	3.08%
Brand Hero Moment	1.76%
Compete	0.44%

*Source:* Adapted from T-Mobile Social Media Analytics Team (personal communication, November 19, 2019)

## The attraction of promotions, contests, deals, and giveaways

Interestingly, both for Legere and for T-Mobile, the Twitter and Facebook posts that garnered the most engagement from constituents were those that included some kind of contest or giveaway. Engagement rates (ER) on social media are determined by a simple formula of total engagements/impressions. Legere's tweet with the highest engagement rate was in 2016 regarding the iPhone 7 pre-sale (Figure 16). The ER was 33.66% and garnered 99 retweets and 448 likes from the original post. Legere's tweet with the greatest number of replies and likes was in 2018 when he did a free phone giveaway. This post acquired 8,373 replies and 2,888 likes.

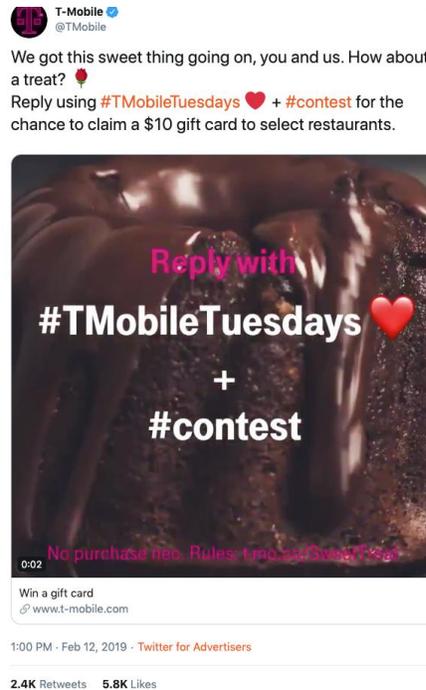


*Source:* Adapted from Legere (2018b, December 31).

### Figure 16. John Legere Free Phone Giveaway Twitter Moment (Dec. 31, 2018)

The T-Mobile tweet that collected the most replies and likes happened in February 2019 around Valentine's Day (Figure 17). It was an invitation to enter a contest for a

\$10 sweet treat restaurant gift card. It garnered 33,123 replies, 2,400 retweets and 5,948 likes.



*Source:* Adapted from T-Mobile (2019b, February 12)

**Figure 17. T-Mobile Valentine’s Day Contest Twitter Moment (Feb. 12, 2019)**

On Facebook, Legere’s post with the greatest number of replies and likes was a post promoting an aggressive offer on the new iPhone in September 2019 (Figure 18).

This post garnered 2,279 replies and 3,211 likes. Most of the replies were customers announcing they were going to take advantage of it or customers who had issues and requested help from John.



*Source:* Adapted from Legere (2019a, September 12)

**Figure 18. John Legere Half-off iPhone 11 Twitter Moment (Sep. 12, 2019)**

T-Mobile's Facebook post with the most replies and likes was a live stream video from the signature store in Times Square New York where Dez, the famous T-Mobile technology guru, unboxed the Samsung Galaxy S9. It was an hour-long unboxing event that included contests, deals, and giveaways and created buzz and excitement for this new device in May 2018. It acquired 2,566 replies and 2,184 likes. This is a milestone for T-Mobile but is also huge when considering a major global brand like Coca-Cola, with 106 million Facebook followers, received 739 replies and 1,500 likes on February 14, 2020 when it released its cherry vanilla flavor, a major launch.

## ***Building a Brand of Rebellious Optimism & Customer Care***

As mentioned above, social media is essential to T-Mobile's brand persona of "rebellious optimism." According to one social strategist I interviewed, rebellious optimism includes being "clever and witty but not overly snarky or petty," and this is exactly the voice that John Legere and T-Mobile work hard to project. Nowhere can this be heard more clearly than in the messages communicated by Legere and T-Mobile via social media surrounding their Un-carrier Movement, Slow Cooker Sundays, and T-Mobile Tuesdays.

### **What is the Un-carrier?**

The Un-carrier is the exact opposite of what the other wireless carriers are. Through the Un-carrier, T-Mobile strived to fix the wireless industry by finding customer pain points and fixing them. In a 2018 interview in *Ad Age*, Legere said that he wanted to be "the exact opposite of what the other carriers are—the 'un-them'—then we could win. So, I coined the term the 'Un-carrier'" (Slefo, 2018). Legere continued, "Through the Un-carrier, we were going to fix a stupid, broken, and arrogant industry" (Slefo, 2018). This was his first public announcement of what the Un-carrier would be. As the architect of the Un-carrier, Legere created moves that were structural, permanent changes in the industry that solved ills like contracts, confusing billing, and international roaming. Un-carrier became synonymous with customer satisfaction and commitment. Sixteen Un-carrier moves were made between 2013 and 2017. Table 5 provides an outline of these sixteen moves, offering insight into the detail and pain points.

**Table 5. T-Mobile Un-carrier Moves 2013–2017**

	<b>Move</b>	<b>Details</b>	<b>Pain Point</b>	<b>Date</b>
1.0	Simple Choice	No contracts. No limits. No overages. Customers no longer locked into their carrier.	Service plan contracts	Mar 2013
2.0	JUMP!	Upgrades for all! Allows customers to upgrade as soon as they paid off half their device.	More frequent upgrades	Jul 2013
3.0	Simple Global	Staying connected abroad shouldn't be another travel expense. Customers get unlimited 2G data and texting in 210+ countries, destinations.	International calls included in plans	Oct 2013
4.0	Carrier Freedom	If you want to break up with your current carrier, T-Mobile decided to pay off ETFs or device payments for qualified customers.	Contract restraints	Jan 2014
5.0	Test Drive	No one wants to blindly buy into a new carrier. Potential customers can take the network for a spin, commitment-free.	Fear of a new network/carrier freedom	Jun 2014
6.0	Music Freedom	Music free from data constraints. T-Mobile customers rock so music from top services no longer count against data usage.	Data preservation with music	Jun 2014
7.0	Wi-Fi Unleashed	Introduced Wi-Fi calling for all, and customers on Gogo-equipped U.S. flights get free texting and visual voicemail included in their plan.	Overage charges and in-flight access	Sep 2014
8.0	Data Stash	Allows unused high-speed data to carry over month to month for up to one year.	Unused data going to waste	Dec 2014
9.0	Un-carrier Business	Businesses deserve same treatment as others. Introduced simplified pricing and 24/7 support.	Equity for businesses	Mar 2015
10.0	Binge On	Giving customers more of what they crave, unlimited streaming video from top services.	Data overage	Nov 2015
11.0	T-Mobile Tuesdays	Loyalty programs usually mean you have to spend more to get rewarded. T-Mobile starts thanking customers every week with rewards and promotions, just for being themselves.	Rewards for loyalty	Jun 2016
12.0	T-Mobile ONE	Mobile Without Borders. No high-speed data roaming charges and unlimited talk and text roaming in Canada and Mexico.	Neighboring countries use	Aug 2016
13.0	JUMP On Demand	Expanded JUMP. Allowed customers to upgrade their phones up to three times per year.	Upgrade challenges	Jun 2017
14.0	Unlimited TTD	We introduced a signature unlimited text, talk, and data plan that abolished data limits forever.	No data limits	Sep 2017
15.0	Taxes, Fees Included	No more surprise charges on your monthly bill. All sales taxes, surcharges, and regulatory fees on select plans. What you see is what you pay.	No extra fees	Jan 2018
16.0	Netflix on Us	T-Mobile's family plan comes with Netflix at absolutely no extra charge	Added value	Jan 2018

*Source:* Adapted from T-Mobile Marketing Team (personal communication, November 19, 2019)

The first two Un-carrier moves, Simple Choice and JUMP (Just Upgrade My Phone), are the most notable as they are the pioneering, radical changes that transformed the industry and how consumers purchase expensive smartphones. Prior to Un-carrier 1.0, consumers were offered smartphones subsidized by their wireless carrier and only paid a fraction of the device price. Every wireless carrier subsidized the balance of the device and counted on service revenue to make up for the difference. This was an expensive policy for wireless carriers who adopted this approach to help consumers ease into the notion of paying for an expensive mobile device after leaving landlines. Once consumers realized this also meant they were locked into a service agreement, it became difficult to navigate switching carriers, replace broken phones, and take advantage of newer technology as it evolved, thus making service contracts a pain point for consumers. John Legere and team had the notion to pass along the cost of the expensive devices to consumers and remove any service agreements to eliminate this pain point. They called it Simple Choice. This was revolutionary, and it was Legere's first big move of "rebellious optimism."

Simple Choice also included unlimited calling and text with 500 MB of data for \$50 per month. This rollout came during a time when minutes were still rolling over monthly at AT&T, and customers were being charged for going over minutes at Verizon. If this worked, the entire industry would be jolted and changed forever. Would it work? The entire industry—competitors, industry analysts, consumers, and

shareholders—all stood and watched with bated breath waiting to see how T-Mobile customers would respond to this new way of purchasing a phone by paying \$20 per month for your device on a lease, \$50 per month for talk, text, and data, and no service contract. As history tells, it worked.

Un-carrier 2.0, JUMP (upgrades for all), was rolled out three months after Simple Choice. JUMP was Legere’s second “rebellious” move, and it also revolutionized the wireless industry. It allowed customers to upgrade as soon as they paid off half of the cost of their existing device, which gave them more freedom and helped relieve the customer pain point of wanting more frequent upgrades.

From October 2013 through January 2017, fourteen additional big, bold Un-carrier moves were made: providing financial incentives for customers to switch from other carriers; unlimited talk, text, data, music, and video streaming; and free Netflix for those purchasing a Family Plan. All of these moves allowed John Legere and T-Mobile to establish the Un-carrier brand of rebellious optimism—“clever and witty but not overly snarky or petty,” according to one social media strategist—a brand that stands up for the customer, challenges the status quo, and is committed to fixing “a stupid, broken, and arrogant industry,” as Legere frequently declares.

Promoting the Un-carrier brand was a significant part of Legere’s and T-Mobile’s social media strategy. As seen above in Table 3, tweets about the Un-carrier

movement account for a full 18% of Legere’s Twitter activity (#2 highest category) and 26% of his Facebook activity (#1 highest category). As seen in Table 4, tweets about the Un-carrier brand account for 11% of T-Mobile’s Twitter activity (#3 highest category) and 7% of its Facebook activity (#5 highest category).

### **Slow Cooker Sunday**

Early in his tenure at T-Mobile, Legere brought this same spirit of connecting with customers, easing pain points, rebellious optimism, and “Un-carrier thinking” into his personal life. One of the ways he did this was by launching Slow Cooker Sunday in 2016. He attributes the birth of Slow Cooker Sunday to being a CEO and a single dad with a crazy busy life. Single parenthood, a crazy busy life, and Legere’s transparency and good humor were four things millions of Americans could relate to and allowed Legere to establish an immediate connection with them.

#### The history: Slow Coker Sunday

John was struggling to stay healthy and active and re-discovered the power of the slow cooker—easy, healthy meals. From his cookbook, Legere (2018d) said, “I loved having meals waiting for me after a long day of doing battle with the competition” (p. 2). He used the slow cooker frequently, searching for new recipes and even experimenting with new ones of his own. He became so into it that he started talking about it at work and people would ask, “What’s going into the slow cooker next?” Once it started gaining popularity around the office, he knew he had to go bigger.

As a huge fan of social media, he spent hours, daily, listening and talking to customers and potential customers from everywhere. Legere (2018d) believed that you have to “be where your customers are, and you have to be authentic, so in addition to exchanges about T-Mobile, I started sharing pictures of my slow cooker creations just to see what people thought. People seemed to get a kick out of it” (p. 2).

Legere (2018d) admitted the following in his cookbook, *Leadership, Life and Slow Cooking with CEO and Chef, John Legere*:

At first, no one believed that I was really cooking for myself this way. The CEO of T-Mobile slow cooking? But as people began oohing (and sometimes booing) over pics of my creations, asking for my recipes by the dozens—then by the hundreds—and began sharing their own, I realized I was tapping into something. (p. 2)

Facebook invited him to try Facebook Live while all of this was brewing. During his first Slow Cooker Sunday, airing in February 2016, approximately 16,000 people tuned in to watch the show. The first episode was aired with a tripod, his phone camera that was turned sideways, and his slow cooker, all while using Facebook live for the first time. He shared that the first episode did not go well. While streaming live, he lifted the phone off the tripod to check for comments or questions. He saw a steady stream of comments that were mostly, “You’re sideways!” or, “John, you’re crooked!” Unbeknownst to him, he locked his phone in portrait mode, so it never turned upright while on the tripod.

Shortly after launching the show, Legere asked for help with filming so he could focus on cooking and talking. He became so committed to Slow Cooker Sunday, he did shows even when on the road in hotel rooms and airports. By the end of 2018, he had recorded 150 episodes with more than 5 million viewers each week. A big part of the appeal was that Legere kept it real. He gained so much attention that he attracted celebrities to his show such as Martha Stewart, Snoop Dogg, and Kate Hudson. David Wasielewski, managing partner of world-renowned restaurant franchise Din Tai Fung, invited John to film his two-year anniversary episode at their Bellevue, Washington, Lincoln Square location to make chicken soup and dumplings. Legere was the first amateur cook invited behind the glass at Din Tai Fung.

#### The brand benefits of Slow Cooker Sunday

In addition to allowing Legere to communicate directly with customers, potential customers, employees, and other stakeholders, Slow Cooker Sunday humanized Legere and the T-Mobile brand and further established the brand as authentic, transparent, and connected to the real life of its customers. It portrayed Legere's quirky side with stunts like the PAM shuffle (spraying PAM on the floor and proceeding to dance and shuffle his feet), the business savvy side (talking about financial results and current or upcoming Un-carrier moves), and the human side (cooking meals for his family). Slow Cooker Sunday further solidified Legere and the T-Mobile Un-carrier brand as rebelliously optimistic and a brand that stands up for the customer, challenges the status quo, and is committed to fixing the wireless industry.

Humanizing Legere and promoting the personal side of the Un-carrier brand through Slow Cooker Sunday, while at first unplanned and spontaneous, later became an important part of Leger and T-Mobile's social media strategy. As seen in Table 3, tweets about Slow Cooker Sunday account for 12% of Legere's Twitter activity (#4 highest category) and 15% of his Facebook activity (#3 highest category). Because it was a personal expression of Legere's, Slow Cooker Sunday was not a significant part of T-Mobile's Twitter or Facebook activity.

### **T-Mobile Tuesdays**

A third example of how Legere and T-Mobile built the Un-carrier brand was T-Mobile Tuesday, a unique, no-strings-attached customer appreciation approach. T-Mobile Tuesdays won 35 awards for loyalty programs in its first four years of existence.

#### The history: T-Mobile Tuesdays

T-Mobile Tuesdays was part of Un-carrier 11.0, which was announced June 6, 2016. The goal was to do something different in a loyalty program by thanking customers and making them feel appreciated. The head of T-Mobile Tuesdays programming, also known as the Godfather of Tuesdays, explained to me that they wanted to thank customers in an industry that doesn't treat people right. This was the mission statement for T-Mobile Tuesdays. As stated by the Godfather, while the team was researching loyalty programs, they were in the hunt for best-in-class practices. They were unable to find any examples in the wireless industry, and while searching in

other industries, they found there are many pain points with consumers related to loyalty programs. They were not working for everybody.

According to the T-Mobile Marketing Team, the average U.S. household at the time was subscribed to approximately fourteen loyalty programs and actively participating in only six of them. Eighty one percent of customers did not understand exactly what they signed up for or how the programs work. Ninety percent of social sentiment towards loyalty programs was overwhelmingly negative (personal communication, November 19, 2019). With this grim view of loyalty programs, the T-Mobile team wanted to do something radically different with the Un-carrier stamp on it. A T-Mobile Tuesday manifesto was created to make sure customers felt appreciated:

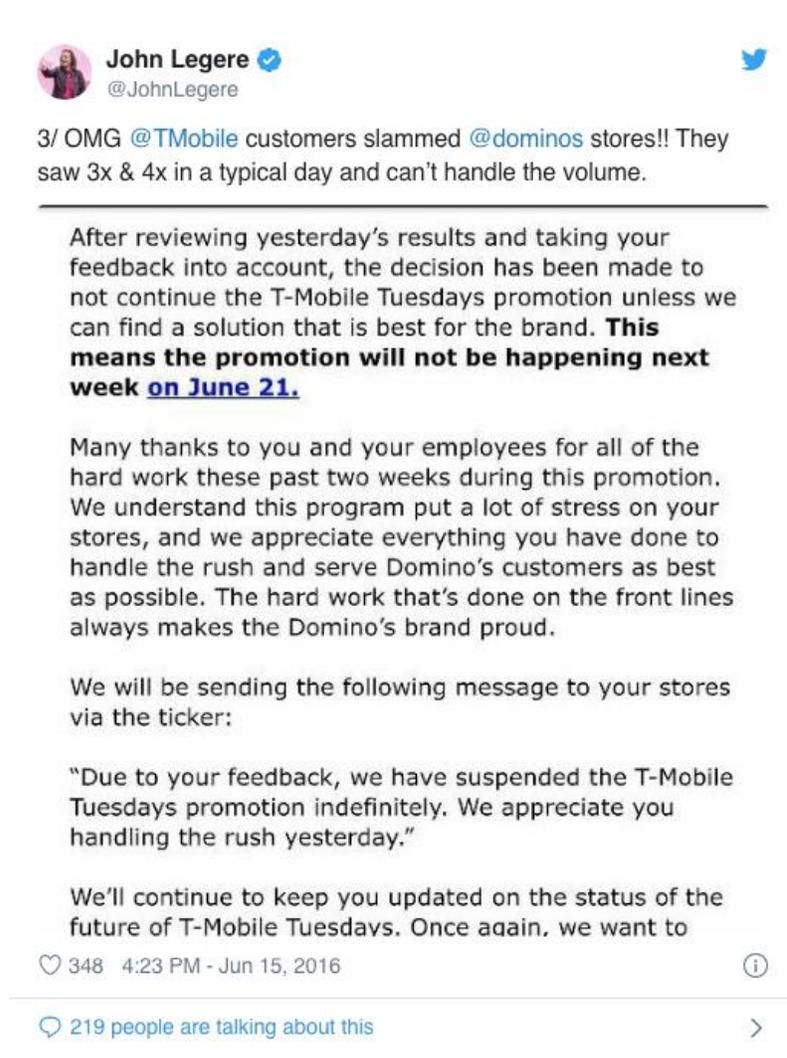
This is not a traditional loyalty program. It's something that's predicated first and foremost on instant gratification and customer appreciation. Get thanked. Every week free stuff. Great deals and epic prizes from brands you really love. No strings. No joke. It's simply our way of saying thanks for being part of the Un-carrier revolution.

Tuesday was T-Mobile's weekly appointment with their customers to help inspire their love for T-Mobile. This way of thanking customers not only benefited T-Mobile's loyalty efforts but also those of their partners, such as Domino's Pizza.

#### From pizza to concerts on T-Mobile Tuesdays

T-Mobile Tuesdays launched with pizza—a free pizza giveaway in partnership with Domino's Pizza. The first week, 1.4 million people showed up at locations across the country to claim their free pizza, and this volume ultimately crashed the T-Mobile

Tuesdays app and overwhelmed Domino's stores. They saw traffic three to four times higher than a typical day and could not handle the volume. There was a different expectation from Domino's in terms of the promotion limitations, and when customers were trying to stack coupons using three app coupons from three different family members, it wreaked havoc on Domino's ability to keep up with the volume. To take the pressure off of Domino's, T-Mobile terminated the promotion the next day, and Legere sent the following tweet thanking Domino's for their efforts on T-Mobile's behalf (Figure 19):



*Source:* Adapted from Legere (2016a, June 15)

**Figure 19. John Legere Domino's Pizza Slammed by T-Mobile Customers  
Twitter Moment (Jun. 15, 2016)**

T-Mobile ended up swapping the Domino's Pizza deal for a \$15 credit toward a Lyft rideshare. From that point forward, T-Mobile used the key performance indicator (KPI) of 1.4 million participants as the baseline for how success was measured in the T-Mobile Tuesday's program. After the first year, there was a strong upward trajectory in unique downloads and participation in the program. As of September 2019, T-Mobile Tuesdays reached 3.8 million participants when they offered free Burger King Impossible Whoppers—it was the most popular offer ever and an all-time program record. In between the Domino's debacle and the Burger King success, there was a 2019 T-Mobile Super Bowl commercial to launch the "Taco Tuesdays" campaign in partnership with Taco Bell.

In 2019, over 10 million customers participated in T-Mobile Tuesday giveaways, which is 22% of eligible customers. That equates to \$250 million in value that customers have received in appreciation. T-Mobile classifies these 10 million customers as the most fanatical base of customers, the ones who love T-Mobile more than anyone else. Often, these T-Mobile customers also become fans of T-Mobile's partner brands (e.g., Lyft, Burger King, and Taco Bell) as an app is usually required to download your T-Mobile Tuesday freebie.

In addition to free food, discounts on gas, sweet treats, and other products, T-Mobile swag is very popular giveaway. With such a fanatical customer base, T-Mobile-branded gear creates excitement, and many T-Mobile customers love to take any branded items that are offered. Putting free swag in T-Mobile retail stores is a way to drive foot traffic into the stores and allow retail teams to capitalize on that traffic by adding lines, selling accessories, and discussing other T-Mobile products and services. Fun fact: The number one traffic day in the last five years outside of Black Friday was a Tuesday in 2018. This Tuesday, the swag giveaway was a T-Mobile backpack that drove customers through the doors in record numbers.

Promoting the Un-carrier brand through T-Mobile Tuesdays became a major part T-Mobile's social media strategy and a minor part of Legere's. As seen in Table 4, tweets about the T-Mobile Tuesdays account for a full 21% of T-Mobile's Twitter activity (#1 highest category) and 33% of its Facebook activity (#1 highest category). As seen in Table 3, tweets about T-Mobile Tuesday account for only 2.5% of Legere's Twitter activity (#8 highest category) and 2.4% of his Facebook activity (#8 highest category).

### ***The Perspective of T-Mobile Social Strategists***

As illustrated in Figure 9 in Chapter 3 of this dissertation, the four aggregate dimensions identified in the nine social strategist interviews are (a) protecting and enhancing the brand; (b) organic and meaningful engagement on social media is essential to the overall marketing plan; (c) staying true to the brand voice and

personality to be cool, fun, witty, approachable, and positive with rebellious optimism is important; and (d) community building is essential to all stakeholder groups. In this section, I peel back the layers of how these themes comes to life.

### **Protect and enhance the brand**

The entire purpose of John Legere’s social media strategy team is to “refine the ways John Legere wants to reach T-Mobile constituents and make it relevant, relatable, and unique,” according to one content social strategist for the senior executives of T-Mobile. The entire purpose of the brand team is to “protect the brand and make T-Mobile one of the most loved brands in the world.” The entire purpose of the social strategy team is to “create organic content that makes it easy for employees to share content on their external platforms.” While all three teams have stated different purposes, the common thread of their purpose is to protect the T-Mobile brand.

After visiting T-Mobile’s Business Operations Center in Bellevue, Washington, I learned there are over 300 social listeners on the social media team. The center is a room full of monitors and theater-style, tiered seating where the social media listeners watch social media feeds, news feeds, the weather channel, and other social diagnostics to keep track of any major global or domestic events. The listeners are responsible for monitoring the social media feeds of the brand, the executive team, and the team of experts customer care unit. These jobs did not exist seven years ago when Legere first took the CEO job at T-Mobile. Now, if you mention T-Mobile, John Legere or any T-Mobile executive on Twitter, Facebook, or Instagram, your

post will be flagged by this team. You must have more than ten thousand followers on Twitter in order for it to be seen. NetBase, a data aggregation tool, is used solely for John Legere's social media feeds to show native posts and everyone that responds to his posts. The social listeners are empowered to remove egregious comments that are offensive or inappropriate to minimize negative messages getting traction on the T-Mobile platforms.

The social listeners are also responsible for monitoring the social media share of voice (SOV). Share of voice, a measure of the activity and noise a brand owns compared to competitors, is an important metric to the T-Mobile brand when analyzing social media. It is a dynamic number with slight shifts and acts as a gauge for the brand visibility, illustrating how much the brand dominates the conversation in the wireless industry. The following table illustrates all wireless carriers' SOV. T-Mobile's SOV (23%) is second to AT&T (36%) when considering all social platforms and how the brands are amplified. T-Mobile jumps to 55% when Legere initiates a contest.

Contests by Legere or T-Mobile garner the most engagement and responses from followers. No matter how large or small the prize is, contests always outperform from an engagement perspective. T-Mobile is satisfied with being second to AT&T in SOV because many of their mentions come from the other brands they own, such as HBO or Time Warner. All high percentage SOV is not positive. Verizon jumped up to 87%

when they were throttling firefighters—intentionally slowing of data service to minimize bandwidth congestion—after they announced they support and prioritized first responders. Their SOV also increased after they bought Tumblr and Tumblr was having technical issues, so the complaints increased on social media.

**Table 6. Wireless Category Share of Voice (SOV)**

<b>Brand</b>	<b>%</b>
T-Mobile	23%
Verizon	21%
AT&T	36%
Sprint	20%

*Source:* Adapted from T-Mobile Data Analytics Team (personal communication, November 19, 2019)

### **Organic and meaningful follower engagement**

“Followers of Legere feel so comfortable with him that they often reach out to him directly to request help with an issue with their bill or phone,” said one social listener. While Legere redirects them to the team of experts customer care team, there was one instance where the customer demanded Legere himself respond and help resolve the issues. According to one social listener, Legere had to respond directly to ensure the customer that the team of experts customer care representative is more than equipped to help handle their issue, and if they aren’t satisfied with the outcome, they are able to contact him again. He never heard from the customer again. This is an example of

openness and vulnerability that leads to meaningful engagement that most CEOs do not demonstrate or experience.

The strategy for overseeing social campaigns has three pillars at T-Mobile: connecting with customers/consumers, thought leadership positioning, and PR/news outlet. Then there is John Legere. With his six million followers on Twitter and more than three hundred thousand on Facebook, his role is to use his influencer status to help get T-Mobile's messages out to the masses. Major announcements are made around 6:00 a.m. PST in order to hit the east coast at 9:00 a.m. EST to ensure T-Mobile news is at the top of everyone's social feed through our most public profile, the CEO. John Legere has set the bar for other C-level executives that says you don't have to color inside the lines or play by the rules; just be authentic and be yourself. "There is proof that if your brand or chief executive has a strong social presence it can help move the business forward," says the lead content social strategist for the executive team. An example is Slow Cooker Sunday, where a customer posted that they were switching to T-Mobile because of John's consistent presence on Facebook with his weekly cooking show. "Benchmarks are always used to determine and measure if a goal for a specific campaign was achieved or surpassed. Legere is notorious for Tweet storms which generate a lot of impressions and engagements," said one social strategist. The social team is responsible for determining if those posts or stories during a Tweet storm are relevant on other platforms. An example is a funny scene from the TV show the Bachelor where Legere posted a funny GIF, and

the GIF was trending so much that the executive producer from the Bachelor retweeted John's post.

In addition to organic humorous content, contests and giveaways are the most engaging posts for Legere and the T-Mobile brand. For one executive social media strategist, engagement is more than just impressions, "it's the speed of our response, speed of triage (when needing to get something to local leadership), and the number of likes that is still important." Another major, recent instance of high engagement from the customer base surrounded a contest during the T-Mobile and Taco Bell partnership campaign called "T-MoBell." One of the T-Mobile executives offered a contest and the winner would receive a brand-new phone.

Effective social media campaigns for T-Mobile are based on benchmarks such as impressions and engagements. The ultimate goal is to move T-Mobile into the upper echelon of "must follow" brands. This is difficult to accomplish as T-Mobile has 1.4 million followers and John Legere over 6 million followers, which means the CEO gets more attention than the brand, and the brand team has accepted this reality but are working on how to get better and to get more followers. Since the goal is to become a "must follow" brand, the goal is to increase followers without doing a follower growth campaign but finding a way to create organic content that would interest followers. This thought process is in the works as of the last social strategist interview in July 2019.

### **Stay true to brand/authenticity**

The number one goal of one executive, Jon Freier, Sr. Vice President, Consumer Markets, is to be humanized through his social voice. His executive social strategist shared that Jon's social audience is very employee-centric, but the goal is to speak to a more external audience of influencers, industry insiders, and consumers. "Being internally focused shows, he cares about employees in his organization and who they are as people and professionals." This has been the focus since he started in 2009 and has shifted in January 2019 with increased responsibility and a new social strategy team. Twitter serves as the best platform to achieve the goal. Posts about beer and family produce the most engagement, in addition to showing vulnerability. One day, Jon posted a vulnerable question, "Did anybody else screw up today?" and it saw likes and responses jump to over two thousand collectively within the first five minutes of the post.

Retweets are increased with deals/promos. Sentiment has also been turned around when an executive chimes in. As an example of humanizing this executive, there was a plain clothes police officer that walked into a T-Mobile store with a gun and the store employees asked him to leave and return without the gun. The customer went to Twitter to say T-Mobile doesn't support law enforcement due to the incident. One executive attempted to diffuse the situation and was able to turn the sentiment around by chiming in and informing the customer that T-Mobile does support law enforcement and he would like to help resolve this issue (Figure 20). His response

created more responses from other law enforcement officers and customers stating that this is why they love T-Mobile.



*Source:* Adapted from Freier (2018, October 9)

### **Figure 20. Jon Freier Reply to Blue Lives Matter Twitter Moment (Oct. 9, 2018)**

A tweet that stated “I just fixed my carburetor” received over 700 likes. Tweets like this show the human and personal side of this senior level executive. Executives are typically at the top of the funnel in terms of the traditional sales funnel, but there are times when an executive must move to the middle of the funnel and encourage consumers to go inside a store and buy a phone or take advantage of a promotion. Humility and humor are two key elements of the social voice of Jon Freier. This voice helps him to speak straight from the heart, remain diplomatic, and be authentic to who he is as a leader. This executive’s high engagement level is “not due to a top-secret social strategy but because of how his authenticity shines through his social posts. He

shows that he cares about customers and employees in action, not just words”, says one executive social strategist.

John Legere frequently shares his runs while in different cities around the country with Twitter followers. These posts typically demonstrate increased engagement. His social strategists see this as a way to humanize the CEO and show authenticity (Figure 21).



*Source:* Adapted from Legere (2019b, September 9)

**Figure 21. John Legere Running in Carson City, Nevada, Twitter Moment (Sep. 9, 2019)**

## **Community building**

One social media strategist for John Legere saw John's passion for using social media as a tool to reach T-Mobile constituents in a way that no other wireless carrier CEO did in 2013.

John threw everything out there to see what would stick and whittled it down to what worked. Slow Cooker Sunday originated so he could be accessible to T-Mobile constituents in a relatable way doing something he loved (cooking) and talking about something most stakeholders cared about, T-Mobile business priorities, results, and upcoming initiatives.

The "Un-carrier" name and initiatives were John's brainchild, and since 2013, contain sixteen Un-carrier moves that have not only defined his legacy as a thought leader at T-Mobile but in the wireless industry. Un-carrier is the name Legere and team came up with to identify T-Mobile as the antithesis of the typical wireless carrier. "The first four moves were the switch to unlimited data and the transition of subsidizing devices for customers to making the customer pay for their device in full over time", noted one social strategist. John initiated the Un-carrier movement and used social media as a communication tool to share with all T-Mobile constituents his plan to change wireless for good. This strategist also noted that John initiates much of his content.

The social media strategy team refines the content and concepts and brings forth other ideas to supplement his normal posts. Engagements and impressions are important to the overall social strategy. Jokes and humor cause high engagement rates on Twitter. Many social strategists share the same sentiment that Legere is the face of the brand.

With over six million followers, it is evident who is leading the course of sharing the T-Mobile narrative with the masses. “John cares about T-Mobile the way the founder of a start-up cares about his/her company. It is very close to his heart like Jobs and Apple, Zuckerberg and Facebook, Musk and Tesla. He not only bleeds magenta, he wears it on his chest. It is authentically who he is,” states one social strategist. His six million followers are the community that John built and may consist of more than just T-Mobile constituents. The social strategy team did not have the breakdown of John’s followers, but they assume more than half of his follower base is employees and customers. However, they are interested in learning the demographics of his followers.

The brand is focused on community building as well and they connect with the community to say, “we love you back and we care about the things that you care about.” The word “followers” takes on a new meaning when thinking about the role of social media in this organization. Who are the followers and how do they impact the social content? T-Mobile is known for its award-winning customer service, according to J.D. Power, and has won the prestigious award three years in a row. While a large, undisclosed percentage of T-Mobile’s social media followers identify as employees, the other percentage is a combination of customers, consumers, and industry insiders. These statistics illustrate the power of social media to communicate and effectively influence a large audience of T-Mobile constituents. These statistics

also illustrate that John has an alluring persona that makes people want to follow him to see what he will say or do next.

Followers are important to the brand and leadership at T-Mobile. Followers are the core of community building and relevant and engaging content are what compels followers to participate with a brand or person. There are three interest areas where the T-Mobile brand focuses: sports, music, and gaming. They understand their followers have deep passion points for these areas of interest, and the brand team works to bring them closer to these interests in any way possible. The T-Mobile brand is responsible for warming up the consumer, which means they reside in the upper third of the funnel using a sales funnel analogy.

When reaching out to consumers in their social communities, “we try to develop ideas that are platform agnostic and focus on the idea or content first”, says one strategist. Subsequently, they figure out how to make it work in either 240 characters on Twitter or create a long form video for Facebook. An example of this strategy manifested with the T-Mobile Pride campaign when they partnered with Wattpad, an internet community for readers and writers to publish new user-generated stories in a variety of genres. The brand team pushed a lot of content to this audience about T-Mobile’s support of Pride and initiated a writing contest to let them know they appreciated them and what they were about. The goal was to reach a younger audience that may

not otherwise pay attention to the brand and let them know that T-Mobile cares about them and is an inclusive brand. The campaign was summarized as a success.

We were hoping for 10,000 submissions and asked the users to enter the contest with writings regarding their thoughts and feelings about Pride. We received over 14,000 submissions and exceeded all of the impression benchmarks. This kind of reaching out to small communities is what T-Mobile hopes will increase their brand affinity. There was no request for personal information, no sales pitch, and T-Mobile awarded nice prizes such as Beats headphones. Community building is essential to all stakeholder groups at T-Mobile and this campaign proved its effectiveness.

T-Mobile identifies the three C's of social growth as culture, creativity, and community. "T-Mobile is creating a proprietary system that will help measure brand social communications and these three elements will help create that strategy", says the lead brand social strategist. The goal is to consistently communicate socially by playing in culture—meaning you are being authentic to your brand voice, being highly creative, and building communities. Remaining authentic to the brand voice of T-Mobile is essential the success of social media for both Legere and the brand. The brand is cool, fun, and there is a hint of rebellious optimism. It strives to be "clever and witty but not overly snarky or petty," he stated. The rebellious optimism is what drives John Legere to call himself #batman. His intentions are to fix the pain points of the wireless industry for customers, and he will speak against T-Mobile's competitors to get their attention and help customers have better experiences.

### **Summary—Social media strategists**

The social media strategists work diligently and collaboratively to ensure the T-Mobile brand, John Legere, and the other C-suite executives work in orchestral

harmony to protect the brand, demonstrate the brand voice and persona, and humanize the brand and executives. This team is laser focused on achieving the goal of becoming one of the most loved brands in the world, even though this is a challenge to accomplish in this industry which is known for frustrating consumers with policies and rules that are not customer friendly. John Legere's vision and influencer status helps make their job easier, and they have made significant strides in the past seven years to create authenticity and engaging content which helped build a loyal community of followers and fans.

### ***The Perspective of T-Mobile Employees***

As illustrated in Figure 10 in Chapter 3 of this dissertation, the three primary aggregate dimensions that came out of the employee interviews are (a) organizational pride, (b) employee appreciation for a leader who cares about more than the bottom line, and (c) transparent, authentic leadership. In this section, I illustrate how the ten T-Mobile employees interviewed share their thoughts, feelings, and experiences about their employer as a whole and the senior leadership team.

#### **Organizational pride**

Ruff Friday is a weekly post where John Legere posts a picture and brief biography of a chosen dog in partnership with the Seattle Humane Society and is one of the posts that made employees the proudest (Figure 22).



Source: Adapted from Legere (2019c, December 27)

**Figure 22. John Legere’s 2019 Seattle Humane Shelter Dogs Featured for Adoption Twitter Moment (Dec. 27, 2019)**

One hundred percent of the employees interviewed are engaged with T-Mobile social media in some capacity. Eighty percent of the employees interviewed follow John Legere on Twitter, two employees follow John Legere and/or T-Mobile on two or more social platforms, and only one employee has been following the brand or the CEO for less than a year. Everyone else interviewed has been following the brand or the CEO for two years or more. Needless to say, the social media bug is extremely contagious at T-Mobile. So contagious that there is an employee social advocacy program in beta using a tool called *Everyone’s Social*. Social media strategy takes an internal approach with this project. There is a social strategist whose sole job is to make it easy for employees to share social content. She defines it as employee social

advocacy through giving employees organic content to share on external social platforms. “Trying to turn our passionate employees into advocates for the brand and the company. The content is developed to help employees evangelize on their personal social platforms using suggested content from our team,” stated the strategist responsible for this project. “It’s the most boring thing ever to have our employees post or retweet articles from the media so we’re not going to do that.”

Ideally, employees will see content from this tool as interesting, engaging, and compelling enough that they will not feel like they are posting about work. As shared by the employee social strategist, “Our ultimate goal is to increase T-Mobile's, share of voice in the social world through individual employees to help humanize the brand.” This goal is in alignment with the larger organizational goals and adds another track to the plan. It provides a safe outlet for employees to participate in the organizational narrative and demonstrate their pride and shout from one of the most public platforms that they bleed magenta, and here are some reasons why.

Eighty percent of the employees interviewed are proud of John Legere’s use of social media and his influencer status makes them feel better about working for T-Mobile. An engineer and fourteen-year employee of the company found John Legere’s use of profanity entertaining but different because “it makes him human and approachable unlike other CEOs.” Having a CEO who used that kind of language made this employee uncertain about Legere’s leadership abilities in the beginning. He believed

it would be tolerated if he could come in and do everything he promised, turn the company around after it had been through a failed merger, improve a less than ideal network, and increase their very low stock price. Legere came onboard with an aggressive plan to accomplish all of that and make the company a better place to work and grow the customer base. He used social media to chronicle that story. This tenured employee appreciates Legere for turning the company around. He notes, “Legere’s social media use has made the company better because it makes the public pay attention to T-Mobile and know the good things that are happening internally.” For example, a proud social media moment for this employee was when Legere announced T-Mobile would start employee resource groups, including one for diversity and inclusion (Figure 23). It is the constant social conversation Legere has surrounding diversity and inclusion that makes him proud.



*Source:* Adapted from Legere (2018c, June 6)

**Figure 23. John Legere Thank You for Top-Rated CEO for Diversity Recognition Twitter Moment (Jun. 6, 2018)**

These are proud moments for this employee because he shared, “I have friends who work for companies that don’t have those kinds of groups but as an immigrant they are very helpful for me to connect with other employees with similar interests.” By visiting Legere’s Twitter page two to three times every week and his Facebook page daily, he hopes to hear the thoughts of the CEO directly through his posts. Slow Cooker Sunday is a fun and distinctive way for Legere to talk about industry hot topics, company news, and to engage with employees, customers, and consumers. This engineer tunes in at least once a month for Slow Cooker Sunday. While this engineer is very proud to work for T-Mobile and feel secure at work, the types of posts that create the most question or doubt are about the most recent merger announcement with Sprint.

The entire topic of the merger creates questions about job stability and organization health. One hundred percent of the employees interviewed believe Legere has the best approach to reaching out to customers and consumers by using the medium where most people are engaged. Coworkers in the engineer’s inner circle love to read John’s social media posts and like his approach of taunting the competition and fixing customer issues because it is all an attempt to “make the company better overall”. This is a source of pride for these engineers. Followers, from any constituent group, respond well when they believe the content is genuine. Slow Cooker Sunday creates a lot of buzz and followers often respond to Legere’s comments, recipes, and company news that he shares. According to one social listener, a proud employee moment

happened one Sunday when a few employees came out of nowhere and started posting how happy they are and how great the company is during Slow Cooker Sunday. Shortly thereafter, others started responding that they must have been paid to make those comments. Other employees quickly chimed in and came to their defense, stating they are all genuinely happy and T-Mobile is a great company with great leadership.

One employee smiled when he discussed the humble beginnings of T-Mobile when he started in 2004. He notes, “There were fourteen million subscribers when I got here and now there are over eighty million subscribers as of the third quarter in 2019.” This employee is very engaged, like other employees I interviewed, and follows both John and the T-Mobile brand on multiple social media platforms including Twitter, Facebook, and LinkedIn. He retweets and shares company updates and information from Legere’s feed as well as the brand. He notes that Legere’s frequent use of social media makes it easy to share content that is safe and relevant. From this employee’s perspective, over the years, Legere’s posts are more focused on taunting the competition while the brand social media posts focus on the value proposition of T-Mobile products and services. All of this makes him proud.

Another sales employee shared, “it feels like Legere’s use of social media shows that T-Mobile is a progressive company who cares about the industry, customers and their employees.” One finance employee views Slow Cooker Sunday as a way to provide a

personal touch that piques the interest of those who may not be interested in the wireless industry. By sharing a little bit about T-Mobile, a lot about recipes, and a little bit about his personal life. “It makes him relatable.”

Although he’s not a social media expert, the finance employee noticed that John uses each platform in different ways based on the social platform’s purpose. His most proud social media moment as an employee, along with three other employees, was when the company received accolades from *Forbes* magazine as one of the best 100 companies to work for, in addition to all of the J. D. Power customer service awards (Figure 24).



*Source:* Adapted from Legere (2015, July 30)

**Figure 24. John Legere Thank You to T-Mobile Team for J. D. Powers Award Twitter Moment (Jul. 30, 2015)**

One sales employee mentioned that they love following their T-Mobile leaders and colleagues because “Everyone I follow is very active and shares accomplishments, birthdays, and other milestones for themselves or team members.” It became clear from an interview with one engineering employee that company pride “is easy because we feel good about contributing to helping make customers’ lives easier.” A finance employee follows leaders and employees from a couple of T-Mobile competitors and noticed they are not as socially active as T-Mobile leaders and employees.

The current level of social engagement makes him feel good about Legere’s use of social media as an employee of the company because of all of the good things he does through his posts with Ruff Friday, contests, and giveaways, and sharing the T-Mobile story in every way. One way the T-Mobile story has been shared and created positive sentiment in the sales organization was during the hurricane in Puerto Rico in 2017. T-Mobile was one of the first companies from any industry to offer support and relief to the people of Puerto Rico and continue to offer their support over the years (Figure 25).



*Source:* Adapted from Legere (2017b, December 20)

**Figure 25. John Legere in Puerto Rico to Thank T-Mobile Heroes Twitter Moment (Dec. 20, 2017)**

Another proud social media moment for this sales employee was when the military discounts and senior (55+) discounts were announced: “It felt like T-Mobile was a cutting-edge company doing something different and good for groups that deserved special attention.” The other proud moment was T-Mobile’s involvement in Pride parades around the country, specifically in Chicago (Figure 26; Figure 27).



Source: Adapted from Legere (2016b, June 26)

**Figure 26. John Legere March for Inclusion and Equality Twitter Moment (Jun. 26, 2016)**



Source: Adapted from Legere (2019d, June 6)

**Figure 27. John Legere Call to Celebrate LGBTQ Pride Twitter Moment (Jun. 6, 2019)**

With most interviewed employees following John Legere and/or the T-Mobile brand, it is no wonder why the employee engagement rate is 100% based on these interviews. T-Mobile's 2018 Super Bowl commercial also sparked a lot of pride in employees. With the "Are You with Us?" mantra serving as the leading message for the brand, the super bowl commercial reiterated that question by saying no matter who you are, be yourself and come be with us. Every employee interviewed mentioned this commercial as a point of employee pride, unaided.

## **Appreciation**

One eleven-year veteran of T-Mobile marketing had just recently started following Legere on social media. She appreciated “that he was being disruptive and calling other competitors out by name and making fun of them which was very interesting to watch.” The “raunchiness” on his Instagram and Twitter posts makes him easy to separate from the T-Mobile brand. According to this marketer, Legere’s Twitter posts have evolved into more engagement with consumers and retweeting more consumers who tell their story of how they switched to T-Mobile. As an employee, Legere’s influencer status on Twitter makes it “cool” to work at T-Mobile: “I think [Legere] understands that in this era people are more receptive to a CEO or leader who is more hands-on, and this is his way of being hands-on.”

Employees, in general, are happy with their work and the culture at T-Mobile. The appreciation theme was prevalent throughout the interviews—appreciation for Legere’s authentic/transparent leadership, appreciation for his courage to do things differently, appreciation for his vision, and appreciation for looking out for employees and making T-Mobile a desirable employer. One employee shared, “John is the reason we are a great place to work. Before he got here it was a good place but now it is a great place to work.” John Legere is a strong advocate for veterans. This is a strong point of appreciation for veteran and non-veteran employees alike. Allowing visible tattoos and a more relaxed dress code is also a Legere-ism. John admits in an interview with *Fortune*, “It was upsetting that they [his daughters] couldn’t get a job at a company I was running,” he explains. “The policy was changed immediately.

When I see something I disagree with, I ask why, and when I hear the answer, I ask why again” (Pressman, 2016). Every employee interviewed credits Legere with turning the company around for good as it relates to organizational culture, employee morale, and financial results. They all appreciate him for all that he has done. The longer tenured employees remember the days of business attire in the retail stores and the lack of interest in hearing employee ideas and thoughts. “Legere is the leader that personalizes the brand and the brand voice is more fun and cutting edge,” according to one sales employee. This interviewee is the one employee that follows the brand’s social media pages more than Legere’s. This interviewee is also one that appreciates Legere’s social media use because of all of the positive things he does through his posts—Ruff Friday, contests and giveaways, and sharing the T-Mobile story.

### **Transparent/authentic leadership**

One interviewee perceives Legere’s leadership style to be open, straightforward, and humorous. This employee shared that he appreciates “John’s authentic leadership style to be himself no matter what anyone thought he should. It has helped the company grow and succeed.”

One marketing employee interviewed mentioned that she has met John Legere personally several times in her tenure at T-Mobile and believes he is genuinely who he portrays himself to be, “smart, witty, loves the stakeholders of T-Mobile and cares about fixing the ills of the wireless industry.” They believe the famous “money for questions” during question and answer sessions at all-employee meetings and the

“giving gifts to get a gift” are part of his persona that he created to be the Un-carrier CEO and “the CEO of the future” which is cool, relatable, and “not like those other guys.” This employee believes his leadership style is “relatable, visionary and cool.” It is interesting to one finance employee that he has gotten all of the C-suite executives to become more active on social media. Their assumption is he asked for their involvement so he can take a step back and allow other voices of the company to be heard and seen.

John’s leadership style comes across as transparent to thirty percent of the employees interviewed. He is direct and helps the entire company understand his vision. One interviewee believes John’s social media use helped “propel the company to where it is today.” He believes “Social media is John’s way to communicate without restrictions.” This employee heard stories about how passionate John was to make changes for the better once he arrived at T-Mobile:

John did research on the internal ills inside the company and pain points in the industry for customers and started making moves to change it for the better. Once he saw the power of those changes, he continued down that path and saw the successes. He paved the way for other CEOs to be authentic, to be themselves.

Legere is seen as a transparent leader by 100% of the employees interviewed. One employee states, “The frequency of posts and strategy behind social posts immediately following internal announcements makes me view Legere as a transparent leader.” John’s social strategy, as seen by one employee, “is to paint T-

Mobile as a disrupter in the industry.” T-Mobile is known for doing things that other wireless companies will not do and “pushes the limits in the industry as an innovator and influencer in the industry. Without social media, it would have taken Legere a lot longer to rally the troops around his vision as the new CEO.”

One fifteen-year veteran noticed John Legere’s social media use has increased in quantity since she began following him in 2014: “Legere’s social media posts are the North Star and rallying point for all employees and provides a high degree of transparency.” Her primary purpose for visiting Legere’s social media sites is to see what the leadership team is talking about and stay current on company happenings. “The T-Mobile brand does a great job of helping to get the word out on offers and keeping the brand voice fun, but their social media use is not as prominent as Legere’s use,” stated this marketing employee. One extremely proud moment for this employee is when Legere responds to a customer post and says, “Reach out to me personally and I will take care of that for you.” That statement makes this employee feel like their CEO is committed to the company, “It’s amazing that he will personally say ‘reach out to me.’ It says we have nothing to be ashamed of or embarrassed about.” Statements like this make this seasoned employee think John Legere is a servant leader: “He does not think that just because he’s at the top he’s perfect. His approach implies he’s interested in what we can do for our customers as a team.” He also spent the first three months of his time at T-Mobile listening to customer care calls to better understand customer pain points. Legere has shared this

with employees in his first year as CEO. This is another attribute of servant leadership, according to this employee, as he is trying to make customer and employee pain points go away. Legere built a team that helped him mastermind a plan to change the trajectory of T-Mobile and the industry:

The work over the past seven years is a combination of the entire senior leadership team. Without John's personality and who he is, it wouldn't have been carried out as successfully. He is somebody who can have fun with his stature in the company by giving hundred-dollar bills away and wearing jerseys.

This employee also mentioned the famous event where John crashed AT&T's developer party at the 2014 Consumer Electronics Show, a prominent telecommunications industry conference, and was asked to leave and escorted out by security and it was all shared on social media (Figure 28).



About 15 minutes later, several security guards surrounded Legere and escorted him out of the venue.



*Source:* Adapted from Cheng (2014, January 6)

### **Figure 28. Roger Cheng Runs into John Legere Crashing an AT&T Party Twitter Moment (Jan. 6, 2014)**

Sometimes, Leger’s disruptiveness can be a little harsh and can make employees feel uncomfortable. Thirty percent of employees interviewed stated they were uneasy with some of the harsh posts. One employee made a specific comment about it:

The trash talking about our competitors could be perceived as bullying. Today, bullying is a hot topic and this approach could be a turn off for some consumers who would otherwise consider T-Mobile. However, because he is seemingly accessible to constituents through social media, he appeals to the masses. When he posts something related to the business or a customer pain point, people respond directly to him and those consumer touchpoints are important and effective, we are a communications company at the end of the day. If you have direct communication with them (consumers) it feels better.

Unlike many CEOs, Legere is funny and relatable and his Twitter posts are disruptive and use social media to show his personable side. For example, he makes frequent posts about his running and biking excursions. Slow Cooker Sunday is also another way that he showcases his personable side. This makes consumers feel more comfortable to reach out to him on social media and tag him when they switch and

then he usually responds, “Hey, thanks for switching!” or “You should switch because of that bad experience with AT&T/Verizon!” (Figure 29)



Source: Adapted from Legere (2019e, June 3)

**Figure 29. John Legere Call to Switch to T-Mobile Twitter Moment (Jun. 3, 2019)**

The T-Mobile brand takes a very different approach to social media, according to this employee: “They do a good job with having consistent messaging for the brand and it looks really good but we are still missing a lot of opportunity to connect with consumers in the community.” It is clear this employee wants more socially from the T-Mobile brand: “I think there’s more opportunity with more local community-based stuff that they don’t really showcase on social. I think that’s the place it should be done because you can’t really do it from anywhere else from a media perspective.” This employee uses Twitter and Instagram the most and visits Legere’s and T-Mobile’s pages proactively when they know there is an Un-carrier move or some

other big announcement coming soon. They go on Twitter primarily to experience the engagement of T-Mobile constituents, to see how they are receiving information and their reactions (Figure 30). Most recent example of this is the Ariana Grande partnership and ticket giveaways, and this employee was interested in what winners were saying about the concerts and how they were engaging with T-Mobile while onsite (if at all). There was also a tie into Pride during the concert, and to have a such big platform used to share an initiative of inclusion and intertwined a significant part of the T-Mobile culture (inclusion) with the Ariana Grande partnership (marketing initiative) was a proud employee moment. This was also the one example where they created multiple touchpoints with the Ariana Grande concert by taking a broader, national sponsorship, activated it in a local market (Chicago) and tied it into Pride. John is credited for leading the way and the providing the vision for how T-Mobile would proceed in a variety of ways.

He came in the company wearing suits and ties with a tapered haircut. I believe he came in wanting to just fix all of the industry problems and be relatable by ditching the shirt and tie while making T-Mobile better. He showed who he was and hyped up his personality through social media. I definitely think he created this CEO of the Un-carrier company and he's living it. I think it was his plan from the very beginning.



*Source:* Adapted from Legere (2013, December 26)

**Figure 30. One of John Legere's First Twitter Moments (Dec. 26, 2013)**

During my interviews, I met a fifteen-year finance employee who has experienced many changes at T-Mobile, who explained the following:

John Legere's predecessor attempted to make changes at T-Mobile but didn't have the platforms to effectively change the company or the industry. Legere came in determined to change not just T-Mobile but the industry. When Legere first came onboard, there was a lot of uncertainty and doubt about his approach on social media because it was different and bold. Eventually employees began to accept the new approach because they knew T-Mobile needed to go in a different direction to reaccelerate and re-attract potential subscribers to T-Mobile.

Under John's leadership, there was an almost immediate paradigm shift to be better and faster to deliver the product efficiently as promised. That mindset didn't exist prior to John's tenure, according to this wireless veteran. He gave an example of a plan to spend \$10 billion for network modifications and improvements in 2011, but then the funds were diverted back to the T-Mobile parent company in Germany, and T-Mobile couldn't deliver what was promised. John Legere came in and closed the deal with Metro PCS, which helped take the company public in May 2013. John's leadership was described by the finance employee in the following way:

John built a team that would help realize his vision. He brought in a new CFO and COO and changed a few other senior leadership roles to help bring his vision to life. It was key for him to rally up a team that knew exactly what his vision was and develop a go-to-market strategy to help execute that vision. He effectively engages employees as brand ambassadors to help build out and communicate the overall organizational objectives.

One sales employee sees John Legere's influencer status on Twitter as a comfort level for many employees to post and engage frequently on social media, almost to a fault.

The interviewee told the story of one employee who posted quarterly earnings on LinkedIn and it was too soon. It hadn't been shared with the broader financial community at the time, so they were instructed to remove it promptly.

A marketing employee believes social media use by a CEO is important, especially for companies the size of T-Mobile. "The CEO needs that visibility and it allows him to share his personality which makes him relatable to the employees at T-Mobile." They go on to say, "I think when you rally that it galvanizes the entire workforce in a way that wouldn't be possible without social media." This same employee also thinks it is important for the CEO of other brands not in the wireless industry to be a part of the social conversation. They have positive brand affinity for a few brands but not because of their level of social media engagement but because they do good for the community and those good deeds sometimes make it to social platforms. TOMS is one brand that she mentioned, and the other brand is Combat Flip Flops.

This company's revenue supports three charities: (a) Aid Afghanistan for Education (AAE), an organization that provides education to marginalized Afghan women and girls over the age of ten; (b) Mines Advisory Group (MAG) is an international organization that goes to war-torn areas to do mine sweeping and unearth mines that could blow up innocent people; and (c) The Station Foundation (TSF), a non-government agency providing resources to help members and families of the Special Operations Community attain the same elite performance in their personal lives that

they have in uniform. Combat Flip Flops was founded by veterans who say it is their calling and a duty to do this work, and this interviewee says, “What they talk about and what they post about makes me purchase from them.”

Social media use allows for an unfiltered connection to employees and customers for John Legere.

He does not have a VP hiding or covering the “not-so-pretty” parts of the feedback. I don’t think he wants the “emperor has no clothes on” scenario where everybody is saying “oh you’re so great!” and really something is wrong. John is okay with having that access to direct feedback and being criticized.

Overall, John’s and the brand’s approach to social media use makes employees feel better about working at T-Mobile because it provides insight into the CEO of a large company. Slow Cooker Sunday is a favorite of many employees, and this employee is no exception: “It is not over produced and it’s enduring for John because he comes across as vulnerable, upbeat, and optimistic.” Another senior executive, Jon Freier, is noted as a favorite for this employee “because Jon is mind blowing inspirational and a great motivator. I get a lot of value from what Freier posts.”

For sixty percent of the employees interviewed, moments when there was doubt or uncertainty regarding a social media post was when AT&T was slotted to acquire T-Mobile in addition to the announcement that T-Mobile was going to acquire Sprint: “Mergers always make employees feel uneasy and wonder about the future of the

company,” states one marketer. One tenured sales employee believes Legere’s social strategy is to remain relevant and sustain the hype around T-Mobile and do “good” for the groups that are underrepresented, the 55+ demographic, and military personnel.

### **Executive interview**

John Legere was unavailable for an interview due to a tight schedule and ongoing time spent finalizing the Sprint merger. I was able to speak with another executive who is extremely active on social media and highly influential within the organization—Jon Freier. Freier is the Sr. VP, Consumer Markets, and is the most followed executive at T-Mobile, after John Legere. Freier started his social media journey on Twitter in December 2013. He shares that his leap into the social media frenzy was inspired by John Legere. He agreed with Legere’s approach to be front and center with employees, customers, consumers, and competitors: “Not being on social media as a business leader is like not having a business card. Customers expect to reach a company or representative and you’re not relevant if you’re not there. It’s a must do.” Freier believes in the value of social media to communicate with T-Mobile constituents. He uses social media to communicate directly with his team internally as well. Currently, employees are his primary followers.

One of the benefits of Freier’s presence on social media for T-Mobile is the competitive advantage it gives the company over its competitors. Like Legere, Freier is adamant to address customer issues that pop up in his Twitter feed, “Taking care of

issues directly on social media demonstrates our customer obsession.” Freier’s social posts are a combination of his organic posts and posts his social strategy team recommends. He believes in maintaining a strong social reputation and authenticity is a huge part of it: “If somebody else is doing this for you and they don’t have your voice and you come across as inauthentic, you’ll be voted off the island. I mean people see right through that.” Freier also hosts a weekly Friday conference call titled Freierside Chat, where he talks about the organization’s business as a whole, mostly from a sales perspective sharing results and upcoming initiatives. The call is a thirty minute, highly informative monologue that shows the amusing human side to Freier, who sometimes speaks fast, laughs at his own jokes, and constantly thanks employees on his team for their hard work.

On occasion, he has guests to discuss important topics from other functional areas. He leaves time at the end to field questions that come in via text or email and addresses them directly or says he will find the answer to the ones he does not know. While this is not a social media effort, the purpose of this call is another way Freier seeks to connect with employees and let them know he cares and wants to hear from them. During my employee interviews, Freier’s name came up second to John Legere regarding other executives that employees follow or who inspire them.

### **Summary—T-Mobile employees**

T-Mobile employees are passionate about their company, their work, and their CEO. The pride employees have for their organization is not only demonstrated by their

commitment to their functional roles, but it is also demonstrated in their attire. Wearing T-Mobile paraphernalia is viewed as an honor and a privilege. Any outsider can come to any T-Mobile office, including headquarters, and see employees from every functional group at every level wearing T-Mobile branded clothes or accessories on any given day. This brand pride transcends the norm of most sales or frontline employees wearing branded clothing. While there is great admiration and affinity for John Legere and his vision and leadership style, most employees attribute the success of the organization to the senior leadership team's ability to enhance and follow through on Legere's vision. Many of the senior leadership team executives have come across as transparent, authentic, and aspire to be social media influencers to some degree. These traits are appreciated and respected by the employees interviewed as well as the employees I work with across the organization.

### ***The Perspective of T-Mobile Customers***

As noted in Chapter 3, Figure 11, the three aggregate dimensions that came out of the nine customer interviews were (a) love/trust, (b) extreme customer satisfaction, and (c) positive experiences. In this section, I share the dynamics of the second order themes and aggregate dimensions from my customer interviews.

#### **What's love got to do with it?**

It is no secret that most consumers do not typically put the word "love" and their wireless carrier in the same sentence. However, during my interviews, I heard the word countless times from T-Mobile customers who used it to describe various circumstances. Out of the nine customers I interviewed, one hundred percent of them

mentioned love as it relates to some aspect of their relationship with T-Mobile. While every customer did not follow T-Mobile or CEO John Legere on social media, eighty nine percent of them did, and the affinity for their wireless carrier went far beyond social media influences. One interviewee explained, “There are no perfect cell phone companies, they all have flaws and issues. The difference with T-Mobile is they show they care about you as a customer and an individual and that’s what I love about them.” This two-year customer believes the Team of Experts—T-Mobile’s customer care associates—is the difference in how he is cared for as a customer: “The team of experts is great!” Not only did he share this with enthusiasm, but he maintained a beaming smile throughout his entire interview when talking about T-Mobile and his treatment as a customer.

Another long-term customer of seven years shares, “Love that I don’t have to use an automated service and can always get a live person 24/7.” The frequent use of the word “love” related to a myriad of experiences and helped the theme of love to rise to the top for this constituent group. It has been extensively accepted that providing outstanding customer service will result in satisfied customers who will be loyal to your business and ideally will result in more new customers. This is the brand affinity the brand social strategy team is hoping to attract and retain.

This level of affinity leads to trust. While eighty-nine percent of the customers I interviewed follow John Legere or T-Mobile on social media, they are not all diligent

about reading posts every day from one or the other. Their affinity has been developed over time (some longer than others) by other interactions in a retail store, over the phone and, in two cases, over a tweet to the T-Mobile help handle.

### **Extreme customer satisfaction**

Customer satisfaction goes hand in hand with love but expresses a different aspect of affinity for a wireless carrier. One five-year customer said, “I’ll never leave T-Mobile because of how they treat me. I love T-Mobile!” The special treatment creates extreme customer loyalty and severs the bond of affinity that T-Mobile strategizes to obtain. A four-year customer shared an actual experience that made her feel valued:

I had a really good experience with the young lady that just helped me. She was patient and helped me understand my new phone. I don’t buy new phones often and I’m old so I need a lot of help. Thank you, T-Mobile, for hiring young people who can be patient with old people (laughs).

As mentioned previously, T-Mobile has created customer satisfaction beyond words for one seven-year customer: “Love that I don’t have to use automated service and can always get a live person 24/7.” While only 33% of the customers interviewed stated that the CEO’s use of social media is important to them, 100% of those customers have made purchase decisions based on social media posts or online reviews. These customers have increased brand affinity because of their interactions with retail store associates and the outcomes from those interactions. The most animated and carrier experienced customer I interviewed has been with T-Mobile for three years and shared, “I have been with the other 3 carriers and never loved one of

them until now, since I've been with T-Mobile! The difference is how they treat me, it's like they actually care.”

The team of experts is credited by customers and industry analysts for the churn reduction at T-Mobile. It is no secret that superior customer experience translates to increased revenue because of the reduction in churn. Pro-consumer promotions in addition to increased customer care have helped T-Mobile earn industry awards by J.D. Power, YouGov, Kiplinger, *Newsweek*, and *Forbes* to name a few.

### **Positive experiences**

I stood outside of one T-Mobile store to interview random customers walking in and out of the retail store. On the way out, one nine-year customer ranted and raved about the consistent high level of customer service they receive when in the T-Mobile retail store and over the phone: “T-Mobile has always gone above and beyond to help their customers. That’s what I love about them.” They gave me three different examples of times when they were pleasantly surprised by the outcome of an encounter with a T-Mobile associate. The most recent account was an issue with their bill. They noticed a spike in their bill and could not understand why. They had not added any services or products and their bill is relatively consistent. The sales associate who helped them comb through their bill was patient, understanding, and resourceful. These kinds of experiences make them loyal to T-Mobile.

Positive experiences are attributed to T-Mobile's customer obsessed culture. Their team of experts is for the call centers, but the desire for high customer satisfaction makes every employee, especially the front-line employees, bleed magenta. Positive experiences also breed brand affinity. While the customers who were interviewed did not use the term "brand affinity," their love for the brand radiated as they answered my interview questions. I interviewed one customer who has been with T-Mobile for two years. She mentioned that she loves T-Mobile, and while her signal is not always the strongest, she will be a customer for life:

I love the customer service at T-Mobile. It is second to none. Even though the network is spotty when leaving the Chicago area, I will not leave them. I am from Springfield and I don't keep a connection when driving from Chicago to Springfield on I55 but I love T-Mobile Tuesdays (laughs). The freebies I get there and the way they treat me makes me stay.

T-Mobile has strived to be the best in customer care because of John Legere's obsession with customer satisfaction. He admits when he first started at the helm at T-Mobile, he asked for customer care lines to be wired into his office. He listened for hours to better understand how to help the team with customer pain points. He went to the call centers to talk to the customer care employees directly and get their ideas and insights on how to be better. In 2013, T-Mobile was four out of four on the list of wireless carrier customer service rankings. By 2016, they were ranked the highest in the J.D. Power (2016) Wireless Customer Care study. Another customer, 10 years in, made it no secret how much she loves T-Mobile. Her most positive experience surrounded a simple gesture by one of her team of experts to help her lower her bill

by switching from her old plan to a newer plan, which gave her more while she paid less. Her positive experience makes her loyal and she shared, “I am in heaven having T-Mobile as my wireless carrier! They are the best out there. My favorite part of my plan is the JUMP! option.” These positive experiences, in addition to T-Mobile’s exponential growth, also helped them thrust into the top 100 World’s Most Valuable Brands as cited by *Forbes* (2019).

Speaking of valuable brands, when asked about other brands that T-Mobile social strategists, customers, and employees follow, Amazon was at the top of the list. Amazon is a brand that forty percent of consumers from all thirty-one people interviewed mentioned they follow and one that influences their purchasing decisions. It is Amazon’s posts, not Jeff Bezos, that compels them to buy. The thing they love about Amazon’s social media posts is the relevance to who they are as consumers and what they want or need. They love Amazon as a brand because of their positive customer experiences and the ease of making purchases in a one stop shop environment. Positive experiences rise to the top as a benefit for other brands that were mentioned as well.

### **Summary—T-Mobile customers**

T-Mobile has dedicated many resources in its customer-obsessed culture to ensure they are the best of the best. After years of research, they created a team of experts model that has been widely recognized as one of the best customer service models in the world across all industries. John Legere made it his business to listen to customer

service calls from his office in his first few months as CEO and that started a revolution. This team of experts model has not only won T-Mobile awards, but it has also won the hearts and loyalty of wireless customers, which translates into a love for their wireless carrier and extreme satisfaction. The culture of customer obsession transcends those in customer service functional roles, it is the role of every employee in the organization to participate in taking care of T-Mobile customers. This culture contributes to the numerous positive experiences that T-Mobile customers generously shared in my interviews, in addition to those that can be found on various social media platforms.

### ***The Perspective of Industry Insiders***

As noted in Figure 12 in Chapter 3, the two primary themes that emerged from the industry insider interviews are smart and revolutionary. The two industry insiders I interviewed communicated their views of T-Mobile as a whole and how Legere's entry into the social media space impacted the industry and business in general. In this section, I share how their thoughts breakdown into these two powerful themes.

#### **Smart**

John Legere is seen as a "charismatic leader," according to one industry analyst. While he is famous for his frequent use of an infamous four-letter word, he is highly respected by industry analysts and outsiders alike who believe he is the catalyst behind the growth and success at T-Mobile. According to one analyst, "Before Legere arrived there were seeds for the contrarianism, the Un-carrier-ness at T-Mobile. John just encouraged the rebellious attitude that was already there." Because of the success

of the company since Legere has been at the helm, he is highly respected as a leader, not only by employees, customers, and shareholders, but by many industry analysts as well. T-Mobile has set a standard for churn to stop the bleeding since John has been CEO: “Churn is the final arbiter, the cumulative representation of all other strategies that T-Mobile put together. Things like expert service, competitive prices, and good in-store experiences are all things that make a retailer, a wireless retailer, effective.” Both of the analysts interviewed appreciate that John is not afraid to try something new. While he has had a few failures, there have been not many, and he is good at pulling back when he thinks something is not going to work. One example was the “Try the new iPhone 5S on our network” campaign when T-Mobile first got the iPhone in 2013. It did not take off well, so the offer was quickly ceased and a new campaign emerged. “You can go through a period where you throw everything up in the air and then there’s a point at which you mature that into something else.” These qualities are respected and classify Legere as smart and a savvy businessman.

It is evident to both insiders interviewed that Legere has always been all about growing T-Mobile’s business. According to one analyst, “To stand out he had to create the Un-carrier and that was smart.” When John took the helm, T-Mobile was dead last in fourth place out of four carriers, and T-Mobile trash talked numbers one and two: “People liked that and were attracted to that because they could relate to it; it was entertaining, it was smart,” stated one analyst. John has done many things using his social platforms that garnered attention. One analyst thinks one of his smartest moves is the creation of a Claymation video for the holidays in 2017 (Figure 31). In

the video, Legere calls foul to AT&T and Verizon’s—the Abominable Carriers—business practices through the blizzard of BS. The video features a Claymation version of himself, an elf, a reindeer, and Frosty the snowman. The video hyperlink screenshot below in Figure 31 acquired forty thousand views in less than nine hours on Twitter and ultimately received over 2.4 million views, over ten thousand retweets, and over six thousand likes. In it, the Un-carrier saves the day from a blizzard of added fees, horrifying limits, and bewildering restrictions.



*Source:* Adapted from Legere (2017a, December 19)

**Figure 31. John Legere Happy #Uncarrier Claymation Holidays Twitter Moment (Dec. 19, 2017)**

This two-minute creation was an inexpensive and entertaining way to let consumers know that T-Mobile is changing wireless for good and addressing all of your pain

points that the other carriers ignore. One industry insider shared that they were one of the ten thousand retweets.

There are several interviews and public appearances that helped coin Legere's persona. In an interview, one industry insider asked John about the Un-carrier and how it has helped T-Mobile's business? Legere replied in the following way:

If we could just be the exact opposite of what these carriers are—un-them—then we could win. So, I coined “the Un-carrier.” The first time we came out with it was at CES in 2013. I was onstage with [former Yankees manager] Joe Torre for an MLB deal. When it became Q&A, someone asked for my thoughts and ideas, and I literally snapped. I gave a talk, which became lore. I said that this industry is so horrific that if you came from Mars and landed in a spaceship, you'd see the wireless industry and go back to where you came from. Through the Un-carrier, we were going to fix a stupid, broken and arrogant industry. And what I saw was a crowd that was so engaged in what it was, I knew we were close to something. (Slefo, 2018)

Anecdotally, I remember working for a competitor leading the promotions department and hearing about this concept. My leader at the time was a CES and called me later that evening grappling with what Legere had just shared. The senior leadership team was anxious and curious about Legere's comments. What does this mean? How would it impact our business? How would we make shifts to compete with anything they could envision? His words, though visionary and aspirational, commanded attention and embodied power. He left the CEC audience and his competitors conjecturing. That was smart.

## **Revolutionary**

T-Mobile has been acknowledged for many firsts in the industry, including having their quarterly earnings call be a video call instead of a conference call. One analyst appreciates the switch and shares the sentiment when that was announced:

The manifestation for me, as an analyst, the openness that John fostered by switching to a live YouTube feed for the earnings call and asked folks to use a hashtag to send in questions. He used the call to be more real, to be the face of the company instead of a voice of the company.

This move really set John apart from T-Mobile's competitors' CEOs. It was an illustration of his commitment to be the brand and "not just make a year or a quarter, he's trying to fundamentally change the scale of the company." One analyst calls that "adolescent yearning"—being a little rebellious but just rebellious enough that people are like, "Hey, I have to take a look at this."

There are many pivotal moments at T-Mobile, as illustrated earlier in the listed Un-carrier moves in Table 5. Table 1 One twenty-year veteran analyst sees the three moves below as pivotal for T-Mobile since John Legere has been CEO:

- Adding the iPhone to the device line-up (2013)
- Purchase of MetroPCS (2013)
- Winning low-band spectrum 700 MHz (2015) & 600 MHz (2017)

When the network improvements happened, John Legere and Neville Ray, T-Mobile CTO, took to social media to over-communicate those spectrum wins, and both industry analysts noticed this. The increased communication about the improved

network moved the needle on a little-known telecommunications marketing metric called Most Wanted to Investigate (MWI). MWI is the consumers desire to learn more about a different wireless provider other than their current provider. While there is not a one to one correlation with increased MWI to positive gross additions, there is a good chance T-Mobile did well and experienced subscriber growth as a result of the their increased MWI. As outlined in the “Other T-Mobile Milestones” section, significant subscriber growth confirms that network improvement has a positive correlation to organizational results.

When John came to T-Mobile, he wanted to be a disruptor. T-Mobile was in fourth place out of four and he wanted to move T-Mobile out of last place, says a four-year industry insider: “John came to T-Mobile and made a bunch of noise. Through all of the noise, people started paying attention to the things T-Mobile did and the changes they were making.” This industry expert says competitors respect T-Mobile but wish to stay out of the mudslinging and trash-talking that Legere frequently indulges:

Legere is someone I keep an eye on. If he tweets into my feed, I read it one hundred percent of the time because you just never know with him. He could be tweeting this massive change; breaking news and I need to cover it. The other guys just don't do that.

This is the sentiment of both industry insiders. The other industry analyst sees Legere's most influential move in creating the Un-carrier movement. The Un-carrier movement is proclaimed as both smart and revolutionary. It fits his persona as well as that of the T-Mobile brand. Legere is seen as refreshing and not generic: “John wants

to be a bad boy, relatable, and funny. He wants to troll his competitors but not customers or potential customers. He is an accomplished executive but doesn't carry himself like that," shares one of the industry analysts. Descriptions like these are the reasons these industry insiders seen John Legere as revolutionary.

### **Summary—Industry insiders**

There are limited leaders that can be seen as truly revolutionizing an entire industry. John Legere is legendarily known in the wireless industry for boldly coming into his role as CEO of a last-place, postpaid wireless company with declining market share and revenues to fearlessly advocate radical change for customers. He created the Un-carrier movement to overthrow the big guys, AT&T and Verizon, to create change in company-favored rules and policies that were grueling pain points for consumers across the country. This approach was a huge disruptor for the industry and created a buzz as he was an unlikely candidate to take on the job of radically changing the wireless industry norms. However, his aggressive approach to communicating to competitors the frustrations of customers related to consumers and industry insiders alike. His unorthodox approach is what garnered the attention of many inside and outside of the industry. After proven tactics succeeded, he was then touted as smart and revolutionary by these two industry analysts.

### ***Chapter Summary and Conclusions***

Within seven years, John Legere has not only become an influencer on social media—one of the few Fortune 500 CEOs to do so—but he has been credited with turning T-Mobile's once-sinking ship into a thriving vessel in that period of time.

Legere is credited with the company's change in direction by implementing audacious, signature moves in the first twelve months of his tenure as CEO. He created affinity for his personal brand by being authentic, witty, and rebelliously optimistic with internal and external audiences via social media. There was a halo effect from his personal brand affinity into the T-Mobile brand affinity. He used social media as his primary tool to communicate with T-Mobile constituents about his plans to create the Un-carrier and for every move that was created and implemented from the Un-carrier movement. While he publicly admits that his Twitter account was casually created by his teenage daughter, that casual encounter proved to be one of the best decisions of his tenure as CEO. He created an approach that was unprecedented, and T-Mobile started to see positive movement in organizational outcomes, such as customer growth, enhanced employee engagement and satisfaction, higher customer retention, a new-found brand affinity, and, ultimately, record-breaking quarterly earnings quarter after quarter.

His leadership style has been classified as authentic and transformational. T-Mobile constituents appreciate John's transparency and the far-reaching changes he made to making T-Mobile the country's most-loved wireless carrier. The culture that has been created by Legere's unmitigated determination to be unlike any other wireless carrier has had tremendous, positive impact on how the organization sees itself. His vision of creating the Un-carrier was met with initial uncertainty but then went ahead full steam after initial successes and is now embedded in the fiber of the entire

organization and everything they do. The entire T-Mobile constituent universe sat and watched John's leadership style unfurl and take shape while simultaneously forever changing an industry that has been slow to change in favor of customer benefits. Like a caterpillar transforming into a butterfly, this evolution has been monumental. It was exciting for T-Mobile constituents to have a front row view of the show from 2012 to 2019 as T-Mobile went from chopping block to king of the hill.

## Chapter 5: Discussion

In this chapter, I link my results to the literature and answer my three research questions. The first and primary question was, “How and why does John Legere use social media to communicate with T-Mobile employees, customers, consumers, and other stakeholders, and what impact does his use of social media have on those constituencies?” To answer and add insight to this question, I turn to recent work in the area of digital dialogic communication and suggest that Legere used social media to promote the T-Mobile brand of being the “Un-carrier,” and that he did so by crafting a rebelliously optimistic and caring “social presence” and by creating “dialogic loops” with T-Mobile’s constituencies that made them feel like they were directly connected to the CEO and that they were heard, understood, cared for, included in a vibrant community of like-minded people, and on the “winning team in wireless.” These feelings of connection, care, community, and accomplishment led to high levels of employee, customer, and consumer engagement, which in turn helped to drive profitable growth.

My second research question was, “What is the perceived impact of John Legere’s social media use on organizational outcomes such as brand affinity, employee engagement, organizational culture, financial results, and customer satisfaction?” To answer and add insight to this question, I focus on the data that shares the organizational outcomes and the importance of the CEO’s innovation and transparency on the impact of those outcomes. The findings reveal the connection to

T-Mobile, John Legere, and the authenticity of their social media content are antecedents of engagement and other organizational outcomes in this framework.

My third research question was, “How does Legere’s social media use impact his perceived leadership style according to T-Mobile constituents?” To answer this question, I looked at my data and the literature on authentic and transformational leadership styles. While most of the constituents interviewed have limited, regular, personal contact with John Legere, much of what they believe and formulate comes from other forms of communication, mainly social media. His powerful use of this communication tool secured John Legere as a social media influencer and a pioneering corporate leader at a time when most CEOs were hesitant to travel down this road as a way to engage with constituents.

***RQ1: Use of Social Media and Its Impact on Constituencies***

To answer my first two research questions—How and why does John Legere use social media, and what perceived impact does his use of social media have on T-Mobile constituencies and organizational outcomes—I draw from the literature on digital dialogic communication and social presence. In a recent study of social media use by 24 “top social CEOs” (including John Legere), Men et al. (2018) found that the CEOs primarily used one of three strategies to engage their constituencies. The most common strategy, even among the most prolific social CEOs, was one-way informative communication. This included things like sharing links to company websites and news resources and providing information of potential interest to

followers such as product launches, financial information, major events and milestones, summaries of CEO and organizational activities, and CEO announcements, statements, and opinion pieces.

### **The importance of dialogic communication strategies**

The second most common strategy was to establish functional dialogic (two-way) communication with stakeholders. Kent and Taylor (1998) defined dialogue as any exchange of ideas and opinions in which people are willing to pursue mutual understanding and reach mutual agreements, even if they do not necessarily agree with one another. Dialogic communication is built on five key principles: mutuality (i.e., recognizing organization-public interconnectedness), propinquity (i.e., being “close” to publics and willing to engage in spontaneous interactions), empathy (i.e., being genuine and supportive of publics’ needs and interests), risk (i.e., being willing to interact with publics and incorporate their perspectives), and commitment (i.e., being willing to stick with a dialogic approach and let it influence the organization over the long term) (Kent & Taylor, 2002). Ideally, dialogic communication is about engaging with constituencies to establish empathetic interactions, build understanding, make meaning, and co-create reality (Taylor & Kent, 2014).

To support dialogic communication in the context of electronic media, Kent and Taylor (1998) recommended five “dialogic internet principles”:

- Create interactive dialogic loops to solicit feedback and answer questions.
- Provide useful, relevant information of interest to constituencies.
- Generate return visitors by providing an engaging and dynamic site.
- Conserve visitors by referring them to other information provided by the organization.
- Design user-friendly, intuitive interfaces.

In their study of the top social CEOs, Men et al. (2018) found that, of these principles, generating return visitors by providing an engaging and dynamic site was most commonly used (66.1% CEO posts used at least one tactic), followed by providing useful, relevant information (58.1%), creating dialogic loops (44.6%) and conserving visitors by referring them to other information (28.6%). The design of user-friendly, intuitive interfaces was not measured.

Specifically, the “dialogic CEOs” often provided links to websites (38.1%) and other social media pages (43.2%) to offer additional information to followers and attract return visitors. They also posted summaries of the CEO or company’s activities (48.2%) and announcements, statements, and columns written by the company or CEO (15%) to build thought leadership and provide information of interest to their constituencies. To maintain a dialogic loop, the CEOs often used hashtags (27.2%) to initiate or engage in conversations and occasionally liked or reacted to followers’ comments (17.1%).

### **Enhancing engagement with authentic social presence**

The third and most effective strategy for engaging stakeholders was dialogic communication infused with authentic social presence (Men et al., 2018; Short, Williams, & Christie, 1976; Walther, 1992). The functional dialogic strategies described above were important but limited in their ability to engage because they lacked a relational human element. For example, rarely did the CEOs reply directly to followers' comments or share anything personal about themselves (Men et al., 2018). Authentic social presence creates the relational human dimension by incorporating principles such as Kent and Taylor's (2002) mutuality, propinquity, empathy, risk, and commitment as well as other attributes of dialogic communication, such as collaboration, respect, accessibility, authenticity, and transparency (Yang, Kang, & Cha, 2015). Rourke, Anderson, Garrison, and Archer (1999) consolidated the principles of dialogic communication into three primary strategies to create social presence:

- Affective strategies in which communicators express emotions, feelings, and mood.
- Interactive strategies in which they explicitly recognize others by asking questions, agreeing, and showing appreciation and support.
- Cohesive strategies in which they attempt to build and maintain a sense of community and group commitment.

Affective strategies allow communicators such as CEOs to “humanize” themselves and make themselves more “relatable” by projecting themselves socially and emotionally as “real” people (Garrison, Anderson, & Archer, 1999, p. 94). Such an emphasis creates a feeling of genuineness and authenticity and builds trust, identification, and attachment with the communicator (Kent & Taylor, 2002; Montague, 2012). Interactive strategies allow communicators to strengthen relational ties by demonstrating empathy, care, and concern for the needs and desires of others (Yang et al., 2015). They also foster engagement by demonstrating mutuality, understanding, responsiveness, and collaboration in co-creating the future (Taylor & Kent, 2014). Cohesive strategies allow communicators to expand their following and build loyalty by providing users with a sense of place, purpose, and excitement, and connecting them to a community of like-minded people (Gunawardena, 1995; Kent & Taylor, 2002).

Men et al. (2018) found that to project an authentic social presence, top social CEOs most often used cohesive strategies (54.5%), followed by affective (37.3%) and interactive strategies (20.8%). Specifically, posts using cohesive strategies emphasized a sense of community, closeness, and personal relationships by referring to followers by name (41.5%) and referring to the group with inclusive pronouns such as “we,” “us,” and “ours” (25.5%). Posts using affective strategies included emotional expressions (22.8%), sharing opinions or details of personal life (22.5%), and instilling a sense of humor (3%). Posts using interactive strategies included attaching hashtags or tagging

someone to initiate or engage in conversations (27.2%), liking or reacting to followers' comments (17.1%), and complimenting others and showing appreciation (15.5%).

Men et al. (2018) analyzed the impact of these social presence strategies on public engagement by measuring the number of likes, shares, comments, and reactions to the CEOs' posts. The results showed that personal, emotionally expressive, and inclusive ways of communicating were positively related to public engagement. Specifically, the use of interactive strategies (such as creating "dialogic loops," responding directly to public comments, using hashtags or tagging people to generate conversations, and asking questions and soliciting feedback), affective strategies (such as expressing emotions and sharing details of personal life), and cohesive strategies (such as referring to followers by name, using inclusive pronouns such as "we," "us," and "ours," and posting purely social content such as greetings and holiday wishes) were all positively associated with the engagement indicators of likes, shares, comments, and reactions.

In summary, Men et al. (2018) found that even among top social CEOs, one-way informative communication, such as providing links to other websites and news resources, offering options for additional information, and providing information of interest to their followers were more commonly used than two-way strategies to create a dialogic loop. Even to initiate dialogic loops, the CEOs most often relied merely on functional dialogic tools, such as hashtags, tagging, and liking followers'

comments. Only about one third of them regularly leveraged an authentic social presence to engage with their stakeholders. These findings support previous research suggesting that even among the most active social CEOs, the full dialogic features of social media are not widely used (Bortree & Seltzer, 2009; Chen et al., 2017; Men & Tsai, 2014).

### **The power of John Legere's authentic presence on social media**

While the Men et al. (2018) study did not identify which of the top social CEOs projected a strong authentic social presence, the results from my research suggest that John Legere was probably one of them. Through affective, interactive, and cohesive social presence strategies, Legere filled his social media communications with a sense of humanity, intimacy, rebelliousness, care, optimism, and relational connection. He often expressed his emotions, demonstrated a sense of humor, and shared details of his personal life to show his human side and project a genuine image. He also addressed others directly by name, complimented others, and used the language of “we,” “us,” and “ours” to create a sense of familiarity, closeness, intimacy, inclusiveness, and community. In Taylor and Kent's (2014) terms, Legere brought his authentic self into genuine dialogue with stakeholders based on empathetic interactions, mutual understanding, community connections, and the co-creation of reality. That process of dialogue allowed Legere to understand his stakeholders, enhance mutual understanding, and build relationships that inspired trust, confidence, excitement, loyalty, and engagement in the form of employee and customer retention

and financial performance. Below, I explore three key themes that illustrate these ideas: Social media as a disrupter, organizational identity, and employee engagement.

#### Social media as a disruptor

Disruption is what helped John Legere gain popularity. Baird and Parasnis (2011) recommended that companies design experiences on social platforms that deliver tangible value in return for a customer's time, attention, and endorsement to realize the full potential of social media. While the customers I interviewed were not as familiar with Legere's social media influencer status, those with T-Mobile longevity were aware of the noticeable, positive changes—tangible value—that have been made over the past seven years. The CEO celebrity status has not reached every customer, but according to the consumers who watch *Slow Cooker Sunday*, John Legere is a celebrity, at least on social media. The level of social media use by Legere was characterized as disruptive. He also disrupted the view of what a typical CEO is supposed to do, say, wear, and look like. According to the IBM global C-Suite Study (2010), CEOs have told us that disruption is top of mind. Social media served as a disruption as a consequence of technology. Legere and team created the Un-carrier movement as a disruptor to the wireless industry and changed the game for good.

#### Organizational identity—Who is T-Mobile?

“Are You with Us?” (Legere, 2018a). That's the T-Mobile brand mantra. It is an inclusive slogan and a cohesive strategy that is more than just a question. It's an invitation to people who are ready to be part of something, to join something bigger and experience more than just another wireless service. Because that's what the Un-

carrier is all about. This mantra is embedded in the organizational culture at T-Mobile and says a lot about who they are. Across multiple social media platforms and internally with employees, both the brand and the executives are using this slogan to invite customers and employees to be a part of the Un-carrier movement. T-Mobile the brand has a goal to become one of the most loved brands in the world. They aspire to increase their brand affinity to the levels of Apple, Google, Amazon, and Coca-Cola. Employees at T-Mobile bleed magenta. They proudly wear the magenta “T” on their chest or back as often as possible. During my interviews, one employee vowed to never leave the company and wants to retire at T-Mobile, no matter what they go through. The median age at T-Mobile is twenty-seven years old. That level of dedication and commitment is unprecedented for that age group when the average length of time spent at one company is 4.2 years, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (2018). Why is there such a commitment to this organization? Is it the benefits? The color magenta? I would venture to say it is Legere’s leadership.

As the third largest wireless carrier in the country, T-Mobile has the second largest social media presence online. They are diligent in understanding what types of posts do well and are smart about their social media strategy—they take it seriously. T-Mobile is rebelliously optimistic, witty but not snarky, and committed to fixing the wireless industry for good. Doing good for customers and for the industry is in their corporate DNA, as shared by Legere’s blog outlining the “Are you with us?” mantra. Every Un-carrier move is noted as a move “for good.” T-Mobile strives to

demonstrate this good in the office and the world wide web. Social media is the layered bread and butter of T-Mobile's organizational identity. The social media strategy team works hard to be consistent with the T-Mobile brand voice, ensuring it reflects the organizational culture. The identity of T-Mobile lies largely in those two areas, so it is essential that they match.

The pride of employees is equal to that of an avid sports fan cheering for their favorite athlete or sports team. Research has shown that individuals strive to belong to groups or organizations that would enhance their self-esteem (Dawson, 2015). There is a coolness and rebel factor associated with being part of T-Mobile. Being part of the in-crowd feels good when your clique invented the "thing" that everyone is doing now. They were at the bottom of the wireless industry and now they are the cool kids on the block. It is evident that the corporate culture and organizational identity are intertwined and mutually impacting. Researchers who typically study organizational identity typically avoid organizational culture and vice versa (Hatch, Schultz, & Skov, 2015). However, it is undeniable that there is a strong correlation as evidenced by T-Mobile's evolution.

#### Employee engagement

Employee engagement is high as evidenced by the multiple *Fortune* "100 Best Companies to Work For" and the 2019 *Forbes* "Just 100" awards. The "Just 100" award highlights the issues that matter most to Americans and a ranking of how the nation's largest publicly traded companies perform in these areas. In addition to those

very prestigious awards, T-Mobile’s award accolades continue with 15 total awards in 2019 and 14 total awards in 2018. T-Mobile won awards for the following categories listed in Table 7.

**Table 7. 2018–2019 T-Mobile Awards**

<b>2018</b>	<b>2019</b>
Best Company for Diversity	Best Company for Diversity
Best Company for Women	Best Company for Women
Best CEO	Best CEO
Best Company Culture	Best Company Culture
Best Company Perks & Benefits	Best Company Perks & Benefits
Best Company Happiness	Best Leadership Teams

*Source:* Adapted from Comparably (n.d.)

These awards speak volumes to the organizational culture that has been developed under Legere’s leadership. Organizational culture is an important piece of organizational behavior as the pervasiveness of an organization’s culture requires that management recognize its foundational dimensions and its impact on employee-related variables, such as job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and performance (Tsai, 2011). John Legere created this organizational culture by listening to employees and their pain points. He used social media to amplify his commitment to changing the internal culture and the culture of the wireless industry.

While it was not mentioned in interviews with internal stakeholders, Enterprise Social Media (ESM) is widespread at T-Mobile. Yammer is a social networking platform used for internal communications between employees. As Cai et al. (2018) discovered, it has high engagement but does not allow for proactivity or adaptability. The benefit of ESMs is for employees to build social connections and emotional ties with other employees across the entire organization. With the development of the new internal social media platform, already high engagement should increase with a social tool that adapts cohesively with external platforms using content that is authorized as safe and encouraged to use both internally and externally. T-Mobile is experiencing the effects of an organization where employees perceive their work as meaningful, which creates high engagement rates (Cai et al., 2018). There is a significant amount of pride in the Magenta world. As Men and Yue (2019) shared, there is value in building a positive, encouraging work environment, and Legere and the senior leadership team created this culture understanding the practical implications for this approach.

### ***RQ2. Legere's Impact Perception on Organizational Outcomes***

My second research question was, "What is the perceived impact of John Legere's social media use on organizational outcomes such as brand affinity, employee engagement, organizational culture, financial results, and customer satisfaction?"

Below, I answer this question by addressing three key themes: social media's substantial influence at T-Mobile, organizational influences and outcomes, and the benefits of appreciation and satisfaction.

## **Social media's substantial influence at T-Mobile**

Social media is a ubiquitous tool used to connect millions of people across the globe.

I found that overall, Legere's use of social media has a positive impact on T-Mobile constituents, which in turn positively impacts organizational outcomes. Employees are more influenced by Legere's use of social media than any other T-Mobile stakeholder. However, his follower make-up consists of more than just employees.

John Legere, by nature, is an expressionist, as demonstrated by his post topics of competitor trash talking, personal runs, Slow Cooker Sunday, and Ruff Friday, all of which deviate from business leader expectations (Malhotra & Malhotra, 2016).

Nevertheless, employees, customers, and consumers alike are fond of his social media prowess. The social media strategy team adds content to make him fall in the business maven category (Malhotra & Malhotra, 2016). The impact of the combination yields phenomenal results, as witnessed by the evolution of T-Mobile. Leading with an expressionist lens is the Un-carrier way to handle social media. Because his first Slow Cooker Sunday episode was filmed with the camera sideways, people saw the human side of the CEO of a *Fortune* 500 company. He was not perfect or scripted, he was just John. This attracted many consumers to not just tune in to the show every Sunday, but to follow him to see what else he would do. John acquired an organization that was downtrodden after a failed merger, had a toxic organizational culture with a defeated attitude, an inferior network, and customers that were leaving in droves. He used social media as a tool to reach a broader audience to share his Un-carrier plans and taunt competitors. He wanted to build a community and social media was the tool of choice to go build it. As discussed in Chapter 2, the Culnan et al.

(2010) research illustrates community building as an important contributor of their early social media strategy for Walmart, HP, and Coca-Cola, and it was for T-Mobile as well. John Legere used social media to rally the internal troops at T-Mobile in order to gain their trust and better understand how to improve the morale within the organization. The importance of attraction and retention is not only relevant for customers, but it is equally, if not more important, for employees. Organizations work to strengthen their company's brand in order to contribute to grooming the reputation and increasing the attractiveness of the company (Sivertzen, Ragnhild, & Olafsen, 2013). With his rebellious optimistic tone, Legere was able to lead the team to bring his pioneering vision to fruition that eliminated contracts and did things differently than other wireless carriers.

### **Organizational influences and outcomes**

The successful use of social media by Legere has created heavy social media use by the entire organization, including members of the senior leadership team, the brand team, and employees. Social media is now woven into the fabric of T-Mobile's corporate culture. Jon Freier, Sr. VP, Consumer Markets, shared how he was influenced by Legere to start using social media. There is an internal team dedicated to rolling out an employee-centered social platform to allow employees to pull from it to post safe content about T-Mobile on their personal, external social platforms. Legere chose to take the social media bull by the horns and make his presence and the Un-carrier movement known via social media. This strategic move allowed the organization to create a brand sentiment barometer on Twitter at a time when the

brand sentiment was fragile. While Legere admits he has posted tweets and done things on social media when he was advised to the contrary, it has worked out for his benefit and for T-Mobile. He has become a Twitter influencer and an online leader who is more capable than the T-Mobile brand of influencing other members of the wireless community. Legere was the textbook case for an online leader building a community of followers. He built credibility, fostered trust, communicated with passion, and increased his social capital by encouraging inclusivity and reciprocity, which, in turn, amplified his influence (Huffaker, 2010). T-Mobile soon felt the impact of Legere taking the reins by experiencing rebounding employee morale and rising revenue, which are almost always inextricably linked. Social media played an enormous role in this phase of T-Mobile's journey.

T-Mobile's journey also took them down a new path of honor and illustriousness. The number of awards and accolades T-Mobile has received from 2012–2019 increased exponentially. They were acknowledged and awarded in categories such as purchase experience, customer service, employee satisfaction, best places to work, most military friendly, best places to work for women, best places to work for disability inclusion, America's best employers, employee's choice top CEO, and world's most ethical companies (Comparably, n.d.). All of these honors came from reputable institutions and publications with long, storied histories of scrupulous research and finding the best of the best. Strong financial performance is an obvious goal for all business leaders, and Legere was no different in his quest to turn T-Mobile into a

gravy train for their shareholders. Early on, John Legere shared his financial goals and one primary goal was to take the company public and expand their pre-paid business. He was wise in his approach to accomplish this by acquiring Metro PCS to dually achieve his goal. Shortly after the Metro PCS deal was closed, T-Mobile (TMUS) stock went public. T-Mobile saw financial results and stock prices increase quarter after quarter. The most recent consecutive quarterly earnings were record breaking earnings with seven quarters in a row touting accelerated customer growth and financial performance (T-Mobile, 2019). While the aforementioned accolades and accomplishments cannot be tied directly and only to John Legere's social media use, there is some perceived connection to his vision and leadership and how he chose to use social media to communicate his vision. There is a strong correlation between his presence at the helm of the company, his role as a social CEO, and his pervasive acceptance in both the social media world and the corporate world. Research shows that high engagement with social media content is positively related to organizational outcomes and image (Syrdal & Briggs, 2016). The stakes are high for market share in the wireless industry, and John used social media to differentiate T-Mobile in this space and achieved record financial growth as a result.

### **Benefits of appreciation/satisfaction**

While employees at T-Mobile appreciate their chief executive and the notable changes he made to the culture of the organization, they also realize he is not a one-man show. He was smart enough to take the helm at T-Mobile and bring along a smart supporting cast of chief executives. While John Legere is a celebrity CEO due

to his social-C status, the antecedents of CEO celebrity are recognizing that CEOs are not independent operators (Lovelace et al., 2018). His executive team worked hard to take his visions and make them realities. Many outsiders attribute the success and positive organizational outcomes to John Legere, which is a common occurrence (Lovelace et al., 2018). However, internally, the employees at T-Mobile recognize the strength in numbers of the talented leadership team that surrounds Legere.

Instead of using his social media platforms for social activism around political issues, Legere used the platforms to create a movement to improve the ills of the wireless industry, designating the movement the “Un-carrier.” While the perceived authenticity of a CEO’s tweets has not been fully tested, the instantaneous, reactive nature of tweets give a more candid understanding of a CEO’s thoughts (Yim, 2019). This belief in Legere’s authenticity was shared numerous times throughout my interviews. Legere came into the organization sharing his desire to do something different and shake up the wireless industry for good. The first Un-carrier move was epic and groundbreaking. He wanted to offer no service contracts for customers while the rest of the industry either did not want to or did not want to think about how to make that work. While T-Mobile moved forward with plans to eliminate service contracts and require customers to pay for their expensive smart phones in full, the industry watched to see what would happen. John Legere and T-Mobile changed the industry for good with that first move. It was courageous, deliberately disruptive, and executed on a global platform with the world, full of cynics, waiting for the outcome.

Employees, customers, and industry insiders appreciate the courage it took to make this move.

The nature of social media being interactive, collaborative, and relationship-centric (Men et al., 2018) made it easy to communicate Un-carrier moves and realize its impact. Internal moves were also greatly appreciated, such as uniform changes for the retail employees, adding employee resource groups for diversity and inclusion and a women's network, enhancing benefits with an employee stock purchase plan, and restricted stock units for certain management level employees are all attributed to John's leadership. His role as an influencer on social media helps employees believe they are working for a leader who is "in touch with reality" and cares about customer satisfaction. The dialogic communication Legere initiates on Facebook and Twitter enhances the overall engagement of employees, customers and consumers. Legere is a social-C who humanizes T-Mobile the brand and illustrates innovation and transparency, which has yielded positive outcomes like improved organization reputation and financial performance (Men et al., 2018).

### ***RQ3. Legere's Perceived Leadership Style***

My third research question was, "How does Legere's social media use impact his perceived leadership style according to T-Mobile constituents?" Below, I answer this question by addressing three key themes: Social media as an extension of Legere's persona, authenticity and increased followership, and transformational leadership.

### **Social media as an extension of Legere's persona**

The persona John created using social media is unprecedented. He became the voice and face of T-Mobile the brand when it is usually the brand that plays the valiant character and represents the entire organization. John used his self-proclaimed competitive spirit to help the world see his commitment to changing the wireless industry for the better by calling out the competitors as bullies, arrogant, and stupid. His commitment is embedded in the substance and ultimate spirit of his vision for the Un-carrier movement. He changed the narrative around what others thought of T-Mobile, and social media was his medium of choice to communicate his message. Legere is an exemplar of what an organizational leader can and should do to have a positive impact on their constituents. He used social media to amplify his messages and broaden his audience, realizing he needed the entire wireless industry to understand his commitment to changing the industry for good, not just T-Mobile constituents. This strategy made the medium the message (McLuhan, 1964). It was not that John's social media content and messages made him stand out, but the fact that he chose social media as his communication tool of choice is much more compelling to both internal and external audiences. He chose this medium at a time when CEOs were on the fence about using it or not considering social media at all. This is the truly the nonconformist approach to his use of social media, which is an extension of his persona. The organic interrelation he created was unparalleled and helped him master becoming a leader and influencer. He set agendas by initiating or facilitating authentic, dyadic dialog focused on the Un-carrier movement and framed

the discussions by shaping the way T-Mobile constituents talked about it (Huffaker, 2010).

Legere provided a macrolevel perspective of the wireless industry and highlighted everything that was wrong with the industry in order to pivot the focus on all that T-Mobile was doing to better the industry. While his messages are full of hubris, there was a genuineness and thoughtfulness to his humorous tone, which makes him likeable, not villainous. The many dyadic dialogs were unique, even innovative coming from a CEO. They produced a dynamic social system of communities and individuals where everyone was welcome to contribute, and the structure was not the traditional corporate structure where not every employee or stakeholder could access the CEO. It was the exact opposite structure. It was a structure that defied the norms of most organizational cultures and made every individual feel like they had immediate access to the CEO of a *Fortune* 500 company. This level of access enhanced John's likeability factor and was unprecedented, occurring regularly, not periodically. Legere's practice of constant, direct communication was enduring and created a sense of familiarity for his audience. His approach to creating a duality of structure in his communications brings to mind the contemporary British social theorist, Anthony Giddens' (1984) structuration theory. This theory states that just as an individual's autonomy is influenced by structure, structures are maintained and adapted through the exercise of individual expression largely determined by their

socialization into that structure allowing for both constraint and enablement (as cited in Whittington, 2015).

Legere took the lead and owned the messages of T-Mobile by creating dialogue about T-Mobile instead of allowing the dialogue to be created by outsiders and their perceptions—the medium was his enablement. He took advantage of the benefit of his medium, which allows users without status or structural position to play a more active role in the diffusion and dissemination of information by forwarding content they produce, encounter, or receive to other users (Etter et al., 2019). John Legere realized he was there to lead the charge of the message for T-Mobile. The message was not for T-Mobile to sell cell phones but to create a community of loyal customers that will allow T-Mobile to connect them in any way using all products and services that T-Mobile has to offer. Legere used social media as an extension of his persona to demonstrate the rebellious optimism for which he and T-Mobile represented, famously or infamously, depending on who is telling the story. He took advantage of the platform that was creating an irreversible power shift from the company to the consumer and used it to strengthen his organization's market position and deepen his leadership advantage when other CEOs were still communicating from their corner office. Other CEOs can learn from John's audacity to do something distinctive when communicating with constituents, his desire to make a change for the better in his industry (thus, creating new structures), and his willingness to be transparent and authentic with his audience.

### **Authenticity yields increased followership**

One theme that resonated continuously throughout my interviews is leadership authenticity. Responses from interviewees in every category mentioned authenticity and transparency or a synonym for those words as it relates to John Legere and the positive correlation associated with those words and his leadership. How has John created such an authentic persona with followers, most of whom he has never met? My conclusion is that John has mastered the ability to create high quality connections or HQCs (Stephens, Heaphy & Dutton, 2011). Stephens et al. (2011) defined HQCs as short-term, dyadic interactions that are positive in nature. Every tweet containing competitor trash talk, offering prizes for a contest, and sharing a run through New York City provide a deep personal connection to Legere in a way that most CEOs do not try to accomplish. His authenticity comes through as he shows his face up close during a sweaty run or does the PAM® shuffle on his kitchen floor, and while it may be quirky to some, it is endearing to others. His commitment to be the “batman” of the wireless industry and save the unassuming, helpless customer from this arrogant industry is enough to make consumers listen to what he has to say, even if they do not switch to the Magenta family. His authenticity is compelling to his followers, enough to pique their interest and become intrigued about the T-Mobile brand. The followers’ behaviors are critical components to Legere’s leadership process. If leadership involves actively influencing others, then followership is allowing oneself to be influenced (Uhl-Bien, Riggio, Lowe, & Carsten, 2014), and Legere’s followers admittedly accept this notion in multiple posts on Facebook and Twitter. T-Mobile has embraced what Baird and Parasnis (2011) called “social CRM.” This shift is a

new strategy which recognizes that instead of managing customers (followers), the role of the organization is to facilitate collaborative experiences and dialogue that customers value. This relationship building harvests communities that provide the space and audience where a leader, even a chief executive, can be transparent and authentic.

### Followership

Followership theory is not the view of followers from the leader perspective but the study of how followers view and implement follower behaviors in relation to the leader. Research stereotypes followers as passive participants at the mercy of leaders who direct their actions and every move. There is also very early research that notes subordinates or followers as inferior to leaders (Taylor, 1911). Taylor (1911) stated that followers require direction and control and because of this, they force the leaders to dictate the behaviors required for the desired outcomes. Social media has absolutely changed this view and the way leaders interact with their followers both online and offline, internally and externally. I interviewed followers of John Legere, and the control and power are actually coming from those constituent groups. John Legere is listening to his employees and customers to better understand what they want and/or need to remain loyal and feel like they are being treated fairly.

Legere also has the character traits necessary for effective leadership, such as extraversion, assertiveness, and energy level (Stogdill, 1948). He demonstrates these character traits online and in-person at company-wide events and meetings. All-hands

meetings are full of energy before he and the top management team (TMT) arrive in the room. Upbeat music is blaring, strobe lights fill the space, and lots of t-shirts, noise makers, and other tchotchkes are distributed to eager, enthusiastic employees. During quarterly investor calls, T-Mobile adds a video link so investors can see the TMT, not just hear their voices. They are one of a few *Fortune* 500 companies to offer a video conference option. This was initiated because John Legere believed it was more authentic to hear and see the TMT when sharing quarterly earnings. This is a genuine example of assertiveness and the desire to be authentic and transparent to all constituents.

#### Behavioral approach

John's social media aptitude is evidenced by his influencer status with millions of followers. It brings to mind the behavioral approach, studied by Burke et al. (2006), which focused on the behavior of leaders in moving followers toward goals. While John Legere's social media strategists admit that while he is in the top portion of the sales funnel, he is still in the funnel. He has initiated a structure using social media platforms as the chief executive of the organization to focus on the relationships between himself and his followers. Now that he has experienced some successes, he is encouraging his TMT to create social media accounts and expand their social horizons to show their human side and be authentic. His social media successes permeate throughout the organization to appropriately scale a similar approach for everyone else in the company.

#### Charismatic approach

Charismatic leadership focuses on the leader's confidence and ability to influence and inspire followers (Yukl, 1999). John Legere has used his charisma to increase his followership externally through social media, as well as internally with employees. Employees view his actions as authentic because he over shares information. One employee associated the frequency of his posts to the level of his authenticity, citing that if there were problems or false claims, he would not communicate so frequently. While the romance of leadership is primarily a Western culture phenomenon that over attributes group successes to the leader, there is some proof that Legere deserves the credit for most of the recent successes of T-Mobile. Conger (1999) discovered that charismatic leadership considers how the follower and situational characteristics influence the charismatic relationship with the leader. John Legere frequently posts and says in interviews that he learned early in his career to be quiet and listen to customers and employees. That philosophy illustrates the situational characteristics that influence the consequential relationship he has with his followers, T-Mobile customers, and employees.

#### Leader-member exchange approach

The leader-member exchange (LMX) theory highlights the exchange between leader and follower and how this engagement leads to better outcomes and more productivity (Harris, Wheeler, & Kacmar, 2011). John Legere's daughter opened his Twitter account and posted his first tweet almost seven years ago. Figure 13 in Chapter 4 shows minute increase in stock price during a few milestones shared on social media over the last seven years, but stock prices are influenced by a variety of

factors and those milestones are just one indicator of impact. The other indicator of impact is the growth rate of both Legere's and T-Mobile's social media following over the past seven years. Social media reverses the lens in the leadership approach. Social media allows the follower to lead the dialogue and address issues publicly that may not otherwise be addressed or would have previously been swept under the rug. John Legere's use of social media forces the dyadic discourse between a chief executive and followers. I heard stories and found posts where Legere chimed in to personally assist and address an upset T-Mobile customer or offer a warm welcome to T-Mobile for an existing AT&T or Verizon customer who has threatened to switch. These random acts show the chief executive's authentic side, even if it means new customers or customer retention to the bottom line. The LMX theory is the framework in which I see social media and its impacts on authentic leadership. It is a fluid and dynamic process that occurs in a series of posts and responses whereby the leader is sometimes leading and sometimes following, depending on the situation. This is representative of authenticity at its finest.

### **Transformational leadership**

Leadership style is one of the most important antecedents of follower engagement (Prochazka, Gilova, & Vaculik, 2017). Legere came into T-Mobile not simply accepting the existing conditions and working to figure out how to exist within them. Instead, he took the time to understand the tribulations of the organizational culture and worked to fix it, create a new vision and new norms (Bass & Avolio, 1993). When considering increased employee engagement as noted by the numerous awards

and self-reported higher retention rates, customer satisfaction, and significantly better financial results (Rodriguez, Green, Sun, & Baggerly-Hinojosa, 2017), John Legere is a transformational leader. As the new leader of a large, distressed organization, building trust can be daunting and virtually impossible. John Legere chose to roll up his sleeves, make much needed changes to his organization and the entire wireless industry, and dove into social media in an unprecedented way. Social media allowed Legere a way to communicate with T-Mobile constituents to speak frankly about upcoming initiatives, organizational values, and business results (Rum, 2018). Those first several internal calls to share the new vision were not easy based on where the company stood. Transparency was vital to motivate a defeated employee base with low morale.

Using the four separate components of characteristics better known as the four “I”s of transformational leadership (Bass & Avolio, 1993), Legere hit the mark for each one. He used social media to propel his idealized influence and expanded his inspirational motivation. He created relevant social content like Slow Cooker Sunday using his intellectual stimulation and enhanced or changed policies that impacted his largest constituent groups, employees and customers, for individualized consideration. Using Jim Collins’ (2001) Level 5 Hierarchy, I would categorize John Legere as a Level 4, effective leader. He stimulates commitment to and vigorous pursuit of a clear and compelling vision and incites the group to high performance standards. He has an uncanny ability to rally the troops behind his vision and the secret may be his social

media posts have emerged transformational leadership traits that T-Mobile constituents appreciate. They are able to experience his personality more frequently, which helps them feel like they know their CEO more personally.

There are correlating character traits between an authentic leader and a transformational leader. Legere has demonstrated the positive qualities of being transparent and authentic, setting clear goals, influencing the entire T-Mobile constituent base, and has shown a genuine concern for those constituents, namely employees and customers (Rodriguez et al., 2017). Unintentionally using different elements of a variety of leadership styles, Legere has efficaciously implemented major initiatives that required major change internally and overhauled the entire wireless industry. He was able to accomplish these things while simultaneously communicating his vision and influencing followers and increasing self-efficacy for employees—all of which produced company awards for both customer and employee satisfaction. He helped make the vision plain and simple for everyone to comprehend. The strategic principles he initially communicated were simplicity, fairness, and value. This was the foundation for the Un-carrier. How would he get everyone in the organization to follow his lead on this very unorthodox approach to fixing T-Mobile's stagnation and the broken wireless industry? Transformational leadership research shows that follower engagement is enhanced when a transformational leader is at the helm (Burch & Guarana, 2014). Legere had to have faith and present his vision with confidence and genuine concern to make everything better. Authenticity and

transparency played a huge role in the buy-in of the organization. Not one person I interviewed referred to John Legere, or any leader in the TMT, as a transformational leader, but they all mentioned traits of a transformational leader. After analyzing the data and evaluating the organizational outcomes, it is difficult to deny the transformational leadership attributes John Legere possesses. It is difficult to deny it when examining his TMT as many of them have the same energy and character traits. It is difficult to deny it when observing the employees who are committed and engaged, ready to take on the world. It is difficult to deny how his influence transcends functional roles, level, or tenure. It is even more difficult to minimize the role of social media in many of these outcomes.

### ***Summary***

Social media is ultimately about interacting with others with an expectation of getting something in return. Even if that “something” is intangible, such as a feeling of connectedness or affection, participants are actively, purposefully seeking value. For businesses, the challenge is unlocking what their customers care about and creating social media experiences that deliver that value. Figuring out who you are as a brand is part of that discovery. Realizing their brand voice and brand identity has been a journey for T-Mobile. Before John Legere arrived, T-Mobile had a hint of rebelliousness in their brand voice tone. Once Legere was at the helm, he personified the brand, embraced being different than the other carriers, and put on his batman costume to rescue customers from the broken, arrogant industry who would not listen to them and make life easier as a wireless customer. Legere used innovative ways to

communicate with T-Mobile constituents to get the attention of stakeholders and let them know there is a new sheriff in town and changes were imminent. His communication style is attractive because of the positivity, the humor, and the peripheral route that directs to the heuristic cues he gives off because of those elements (Ji et al., 2019). T-Mobile was indeed the savior for the industry and helped eliminate service contracts, which made it difficult for consumers to switch carriers or take advantage of better deals. Strategic social media use was the lifeline for T-Mobile. They utilize each platform in the way it was meant to be used to amplify the T-Mobile brand voice and humanize the executive team. This research suggests a social media strategic framework that outlines the key elements of social-C social media recipe that includes transformational leadership, courageous moves, and bold goals. Stock prices are at an all-time high. Brand affinity is at an all-time high. Customer satisfaction is at an award-winning level. Employee engagement is better than ever before. In addition to all of those positive organizational outcomes, T-Mobile merged with Sprint in the spring of 2020. John Legere's tenure ended in May 2020. He has taken the organization on the journey of a lifetime, a true underdog story. No longer on the chopping block waiting for someone to purchase them, T-Mobile is the king of the hill waiting to see if they will be approved for their most recent acquisition attempt.

## **Chapter 6: Implications for Future Research and Practice**

### ***Leadership Evolution in Practice***

Leadership has always been an intriguing research topic, and social media has added a new element to its intrigue. As social media quickly moved beyond a marketing tool, John Legere was eager to adapt it, embrace it, and learned the importance of engaging stakeholders in a way like never before. Using the definition provided by Northouse (2016), leadership is a process whereby an individual influence a group of individuals to achieve a common goal. It is no secret that in order to be an effective CEO, one must be an effective communicator and in tune with customers, consumers, shareholders, and other stakeholders in order to influence them. John Legere has demonstrated a desire to connect with T-Mobile constituents and has effectively done it using his social media platforms. He is one of the pioneering CEOs using social media as a tool to connect with constituents instead of ignoring it and hiding behind the brand. One aspect of the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM), mentioned in Chapter 3, reared its head during my analysis. Based on the insight collected from my data, it is evident that the peripheral route, which directs to the heuristic cues such as attractiveness of the message source (Ji et al., 2019), is the route that T-Mobile constituents take. With John's provocative comments about competitors and unorthodox approach to communicating with T-Mobile followers, it is not surprising that this route stands out from this model. The powerful presence of transformational leadership is also hard to ignore throughout this case study. I sum up John's

transformational leadership style in a quotation by Seth Godin: “Transformational leaders don’t start by denying the world around them. Instead they describe a future they’d like to create instead” (as cited in Luenendonk, 2019).

ELM and transformational leadership should be important and interesting topics to leaders in all sectors and the business community at large. These are important shifts and trends that likely have longevity for the foreseeable future. It is an evolution of leadership that is ripe for research and analysis. This is not the only way that leadership has evolved in the technological era (Cullen-Lester, Maupin, & Carter 2017), there are many implications for the evolving views of leadership for leadership development. As we are all aware, views of leadership have changed over the past century and more recently in the new millennium. Leadership has gone from being interpreted as a role-based authority to interpersonal influence on an “emergent property of dyads, collectives or larger social systems” (Cullen-Lester et al., 2017, p. 132). Social media allows for multiple dyads which provides a broader audience for a CEO or any leader to share their message, voice, opinions, or the company’s goals and objectives for the upcoming year and years ahead. These larger social systems are what influence our society today, not only in business but in culture, fashion, politics, and social issues. Social media not only impacts these dynamics within our society in the United States, but globally. There is a growing expectation that social media is a part of everyone’s life in many ways, if not every way. In spite of its ubiquity, not many leadership development programs contain a section in the curriculum that

outlines social media management. The implications for the lack of attention by senior organizational leaders is frightening considering the next generation has access to mobile devices and massive social media exposure at an early age. Their expectation for organizational leader social media engagement will be exponentially higher than those currently in the workforce. Not only is there proof that the benefits of social media engagement outweigh the detriments, but it also provides another touch point for C-suite executives and other organizational leaders to connect and communicate with many stakeholders on different levels. It is imperative that practitioners get on board with finding ways to humanize the C-suite and using social media, in some capacity, as a tool. Neal (2017) suggested that social media engagement could be a powerful selection criterion that helps organizations identify executives who are well prepared to lead.

### ***Implications for Future Research***

As previously noted, there are many positive impacts of social media on leadership. The hope is that this research will demonstrate the positive impacts and how they outweigh any negative impacts. Researchers have begun to further investigate the importance of social media and social networks on leadership, but this work is still in its infancy and my research will contribute to the ongoing research in a meaningful way. The CEO of T-Mobile is one of the most active and influential CEOs on Twitter with over six million followers. His journey to become part of the elite social-C group and turn T-Mobile around from the chopping block to king of the hill may be one worthy of deeper research. This research strives to learn more about how his

stakeholders experience his social media use, how it impacts them, and if there is any correlation between his social media use and T-Mobile's organizational outcomes. Future research could pick up where this research leaves off and dig deeper into other organizations with similar stories to the T-Mobile journey and evaluate the role of social media and their chief executive. A comparative case study would also provide additional insight and observe the journey of a T-Mobile competitor. It would also be interesting to study other companies in other industries and research their chief executive's social media acumen and how that organization's stakeholders experience his/her social media use. This additional research would provide significant insight to existing literature and research on the impact of social media on organizational leadership. As of April 1, 2020, T-Mobile completed the merger with Sprint and John Legere officially stepped down as CEO, and Mike Sievert, President and COO, stepped up as CEO. This changing of the guards would provide the perfect research lab to follow Mike's journey as CEO. He has a very different personality and much more traditional approach to executive leadership.

### ***Theoretical Contribution***

The theoretical contribution of this research is threefold. First, this research provides a comprehensive explanation and conceptualization of strategic social media in leadership. This conceptualization goes beyond an isolated focus on employees, customers, and other constituents. It addresses the direct correlation between social media and leadership and its significant impact on defining leadership style and

persona. Second, the current research does not address the role of social media in leadership for the chief executive or any C-suite roles.

This research defines a strategic framework that outlines the key elements of the social-C social media recipe. This research also demonstrates the significant impact of social media on an organization, its brand affinity, and its leader(s). The journey of T-Mobile under John Legere's leadership can be used as an exemplar for other struggling organizations to get back on track.

The third theoretical contribution is a conceptual model I created, called "Social Leader Entanglement" model. One crucial impression that is embedded in my brain is the mysterious semblance of social media impact on leadership to the scientific phenomenon entanglement theory. I call the leadership version, "Social Leader Entanglement." Entanglement is defined as the way that particles of energy/matter can become correlated to predictably interact with each other, regardless of how far apart they are (Tate, 2013). "Social Leader Entanglement" is the leadership, non-scientific, version of this phenomenon and is defined as the way a leader uses social media platforms to communicate with constituents and stakeholders to connect with them and predictably interact with them no matter where they are in the world. Social media allows the social leader the opportunity to engage dialogically with their followers. There is some additional research on the emphasis and value on the use of

dialogue over persuasion in social media (Theunissen, 2014) that may help construct this model.

## **Appendix A: Employee Interview Questions**

- 1) What is your role in the organization?
- 2) How long have you worked for the company?
- 3) Which social media platforms do you follow John Legere? T-Mobile?
- 4) Have you noticed a change in John Legere's use of social media?
- 5) What do you think of our CEO's current social media efforts?
- 6) What do you think of our company's current social media efforts?
- 7) How often do you visit John Legere's social media page? T-Mobile's?
- 8) Share a time when you read something on T-Mobile or John Legere's social media feed that you were extremely proud of?
- 9) Share a time when you read something on T-Mobile or John Legere's social media feed that you were embarrassed about or not sure how to feel?
- 10) On a scale of 1-10 with 10 being most important, how important is social media use by the CEO to you? Why?
- 11) Do you make decisions as a consumer in purchasing other products and services based on their company or CEO's social media posts?
- 12) Does T-Mobile or John Legere's use of social media make you feel better, worse or indifferent about working here?
- 13) What do you think John's strategy is for his social media use?
- 14) What do you think about Slow Cooker Sunday?
- 15) How would you describe the organizations overall feelings toward John's social media use?
- 16) How would you describe John's leadership style? What role do you think social media plays in this style?

## **Appendix B: Social Strategists Interview Questions**

- 1) What is your role in the organization?
- 2) How long have you worked for the company?
- 3) How would you describe the social media strategy for John Legere/Jon Freier / T-Mobile?
- 4) What do you see as the purpose of the strategy? What do you think it trying to accomplish? Share a story or an example of when you have seen this action.
- 5) What was your role, what did you do, and what were you thinking and feeling each step along the way?
- 6) Who else was involved, what did they do, and what were they thinking and feeling each step along the way?
- 7) What impact did it have on you, others, and the organization?
- 8) What do you see as the core values, messages, or brand the strategy is trying to communicate? Share a story or an example of when you have seen this playing out.
- 9) What was your role, what did you do, and what were you thinking and feeling each step along the way?
- 10) Who else was involved, what did they do, and what were they thinking and feeling each step along the way?
- 11) What impact did it have on you, others, and the organization?
- 12) How have you seen John Legere's/Jon Freier's / T-Mobile's use of social media evolve over the years?
- 13) What was your role, what did you do, and what were you thinking and feeling each step along the way?
- 14) Who else was involved, what did they do, and what were they thinking and feeling each step along the way?
- 15) What impact did it have on you, others, and the organization?
- 16) How do you measure social media effectiveness?
- 17) What was the most effective social media campaign or post for Legere/Frier/T-Mobile?
- 18) What was your role, what did you do, and what were you thinking and feeling each step along the way?
- 19) Who else was involved, what did they do, and what were they thinking and feeling each step along the way?
- 20) What impact did it have on you, others, and the organization?
- 21) What were the forces and factors that made it effective?
- 22) How did you know it was effective?
- 23) What was the least effective social media campaign or post for Legere/Freier/T-Mobile?
- 24) What was your role, what did you do, and what were you thinking and feeling each step along the way?

- 25) Who else was involved, what did they do, and what were they thinking and feeling each step along the way?
- 26) What impact did it have on you, others, and the organization?
- 27) What were the forces and factors that made it ineffective?
- 28) How did you know it was ineffective?
- 29) Which social media platforms are the most effective for Legere/Freier/ T-Mobile?
- 30) On a scale of 1-10 with 10 being the most important, how important is social media use by the CEO/senior leaders to the organization? Why?
- 31) When Legere/Freier/T-Mobile make positive or negative social media posts, what is the impact to organizational outcomes – stock prices, customer satisfaction, employee engagement, brand affinity?
- 32) What was your role, what did you do?
- 33) Who else was involved, what did they do?
- 34) What impact did it have on you, others, and the organization?
- 35) What were the forces and factors that created that impact?
- 36) Which positive post by Legere/Freier/T-Mobile has been the most responded to? Number of respondents?
- 37) Which negative post by Legere/Freier/T-Mobile has been the most responded to? Number of respondents?
- 38) Which tactics/strategies work best to engage customers? Employees? Consumers?
- 39) Do you believe social media can improve engagement with various constituents of T-Mobile? If yes, why?
- 40) Which constituent group (customers, employees, consumers, shareholders, industry experts) is the most engaged on social media platforms? Which platform?
- 41) What top 3 benefits can social media engagement by the C-suite lead to?
- 42) What insights have been learned by having the T-Mobile leadership team engaged on social media?

## **Appendix C: Customer Interview Questions**

- 1) How long have you been a T-Mobile customer?
- 2) Who was your provider before making the switch?
- 3) What made you switch to T-Mobile?
- 4) Which social media platforms do you follow John Legere? T-Mobile?
- 5) What do you think of our CEO's current social media efforts?
- 6) What do you think of our company's current social media efforts?
- 7) How often do you visit John Legere's social media page? T-Mobile's?
- 8) Share a time when you read something on T-Mobile or John Legere's social media feed that made you feel extremely proud to be a customer?
- 9) Share a time when you read something on T-Mobile or John Legere's social media feed that you made you feel embarrassed to be a customer?
- 10) On a scale of 1-10 with 10 being most important, how important is social media use by the CEO to you? Why?
- 11) Tell me about a time when you made a purchase decision for products or services based on their company or CEO's social media posts?
- 12) What impact does T-Mobile or John Legere's use of social media have on you as a customer?
- 13) Tell me about your most positive experience as a T-Mobile customer.
- 14) Tell me about your most negative experience as a T-Mobile customer.
- 15) What do you think John's strategy is for his social media use?
- 16) How would you describe the general public's overall feelings toward John's social media use?

## Appendix D: Industry Expert Interview Questions

- 1) How are you affiliated with T-Mobile?
- 2) How long have you been reading about or affiliated with T-Mobile?
- 3) Which social media platforms do you follow John Legere? T-Mobile?
- 4) How would you describe John Legere/T-Mobile's social media strategy?
- 5) What do you see as the purpose of the strategy? What do you think it trying to accomplish? Share a story or an example of when you have seen this action.
- 6) What was the image John Legere/T-Mobile was trying to convey?
- 7) How did it make you feel? What did it make you think?
- 8) What impact did it have on you and others?
- 9) What do you see as the core values, messages, or brand the strategy is trying to communicate? Share a story or an example of when you have seen this playing out.
- 10) What was the image John Legere/T-Mobile was trying to convey?
- 11) How did it make you feel? What did it make you think?
- 12) What impact did it have on you and others?
- 13) How have you seen John Leger/T-Mobile's social media strategy evolve over time?
- 14) What do you see as the purpose of the strategy? What do you think it trying to accomplish? Share a story or an example of when you have seen this action.
- 15) What was the image John Legere/T-Mobile was trying to convey?
- 16) How did it make you feel? What did it make you think?
- 17) What impact did it have on you and others?
- 18) What do you see as the core values, message, or brand the strategy is trying to communicate? Share a story or an example of when you have seen this playing out.
- 19) What was the image John Legere/T-Mobile was trying to convey?
- 20) How did it make you feel? What did it make you think?
- 21) What impact did it have on you and others?
- 22) What do you think of T-Mobile current social media efforts?
- 23) How does T-Mobile/John Legere's social media presence compare to competitors? Can you share an example?
- 24) How often do you visit John Legere's social media pages and which ones? T-Mobile's? What is your purpose in visiting these pages? How do they impact you and what do you gain by going there?
- 25) Share a time when you read something on T-Mobile or John Legere's social media feed that made you say, "this is smart"? Why did you think it was smart? What impact did it have on your and others? [Get multiple stories].
- 26) Share a time when you read something on T-Mobile or John Legere's social media feed that you made you say, "this probably wasn't a good idea"? Why

did you think it was not a good idea? What impact did it have on your and others? [Get multiple stories].

- 27) On a scale of 1-10 with 10 being most important, how important is social media use by the CEO to you as a consumer? Why?
- 28) Do you make decisions as a consumer in purchasing other products and services based on their company or CEO's social media posts? Give me some specific examples. Share with me how and why these social media posts influence how you think and feel and how they influence your purchasing decisions.
- 29) How would you describe John's strategy is for his social media use? How does it make you feel? What impact does it have on you and others?
- 30) How would you describe the general public's overall feelings toward John's social media use and the T-Mobile brand as a whole? Give specific examples. What impact do you see these feelings having on consumer behavior?
- 31) What perceptions do you have about T-Mobile as a whole as a result of John's social media use?
- 32) How would you describe John's leadership style? And what role do you think social media plays in this?
- 33) What do you see as the primary benefits of John Legere's social media use? Why and how do you see this working? What are the causal pathways between John's social media use and the benefits it generates? Is it about humor and being attracted to T-Mobile because of the humor? Is it about building a sense of community? If so, what is the image of that community that is being communicated...a community of rebels...a community of cool kids...a community of aspiring young people...a community of diverse, happy, hardworking, ordinary people...? Is it about caring relationship (i.e., people being attracted to T-Mobile because Legere communicates a message that he and T-Mobile care about the consumer, that they listen, that they create products and services that put power back into the consumer's hands, that they make is simple so that the "big bad phone company" doesn't have all the power)?

## **Appendix E: Executive Interview Questions**

- 1) How long have you been active on social media as a representative of T-Mobile?
- 2) What was the nature of your first post and the responses? Please share the story of how that came about. Who were you hoping to reach?
- 3) What made you decide to use social media as a communication tool?
- 4) What are your goals for using social media? What impact do you hope to have on T-Mobile constituents (employees, customers, consumers, shareholders)?
- 5) How would you describe how executive social media use has impacted the organization overall? Please share a story or provide an example if possible.
- 6) Tell me about your favorite social media effort/campaign and why?

## Appendix F: T-Mobile Events and Stock Prices

Organization Event	Date	Stock Opening	Stock Closing
Un-Carrier 2.0 JUMP!	Jul 10, 2013	\$24.09	\$24.42
Un-Carrier 3.0 Simple Global	Oct 23 2013	\$27.34	\$27.40
Un-Carrier 4.0 Carrier Freedom	Jan 8, 2014	\$33.23	\$33.31
Un-Carrier 5.0 Test Drive	Jun 18, 2014	\$33.06	\$32.68
Un-Carrier 6.0 Music Freedom	Jun 18, 2014	\$33.06	\$32.68
Un-Carrier 7.0 Wi-Fi Unleashed	Sep 10, 2014	\$30.32	30.52
News Release: T-Mobile LTE to 250M Americans	Oct 28, 2014	\$28.40	28.85
Un-Carrier 8.0 Data Stash	Dec 16, 2014	\$25.12	\$24.57
Un-Carrier 9.0 Un-carrier for Business	Mar 18, 2015	\$32.62	\$32.86
Un-Carrier 10.0 Binge On	Nov 10, 2015	\$38.16	\$37.03
Un-Carrier 11.0 T-Mobile Tuesdays	Jun 6, 2016	\$43.56	\$43.07
Un-Carrier 12.0 T-Mobile ONE	Aug 18, 2016	\$46.35	46.98
News Release: Intro to T-Mobile One Plus	Dec 20, 2016	\$57.82	\$58.06
Un-Carrier 13.0 JUMP! On Demand	Jun 26, 2017	\$63.60	\$63.15
Un-Carrier 15.0 Taxes and Fees Included	Jan 5, 2017	58.77	\$57.61
Un-Carrier 14.0 Unlimited Talk Text Data	Sep 5, 2017	\$64.17	\$63.64
Un-Carrier 16.0 Netflix on Us	Sep 5, 2017	\$64.17	\$63.64
News Release: HR4HR Hurricane Recovery	Oct 6, 2017	\$61.63	\$62.41
News Release: Acquisition of Layer3 TV	Dec 13, 2017	\$63.74	\$63.83
News Release: T-Mobile/Sprint Merger Announced	Apr 30, 2018	\$62.79	\$60.51
News Release: Team of Experts Customer Care	Aug 15, 2018	\$65.52	\$65.41
News Release: T-Mobile Park Naming Rights	Dec 19, 2018	\$64.64	\$64.87
News Release: J.D. Power Best Customer Care	Jan 31, 2019	\$68.41	\$69.62
News Release: Fortune Best Companies to Work For	Feb 14, 2019	\$69.10	\$70.50
News Release: Named World's Most Ethical Co.	Feb 26, 2019	\$71.44	\$72.53
News Release: Green America Top Wireless Score	Apr 30, 2019	\$73.47	\$72.99
News Release: First LTE Carrier in Gulf of Mexico	Jul 24, 2019	\$79.20	\$80.61
News Release: 5G For Good; 3 Supercharged Moves	Nov 7, 2019	\$82.40	\$81.86
News Release: Legere Announces Stepping Down	Nov 18, 2019	\$76.87	\$78.19
News Release: 5G Nationwide Network	Dec 2, 2019	\$78.58	\$77.64

Source: T-Mobile.com and TMUS Yahoo! Finance Stock History (2019)

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