

Title: Corporate image in relation to online community communications

Broad research area: *Business studies and corporate image*

Extended abstract (1195 words excluding references):

1) Purpose of the paper

The aim is to assess how communications in online corporate community tends to affect corporate image from community members' perspective. This aim is to form determinants of a company's image formation in its community based on the company's use of an online community for communication activities.

2) Theoretical background

The power of communities and online marketing communications are shaping up how people think about a corporation (Schultz, 2012; Balmer and Yen, 2017). Communications in a company's community lead to subconscious perceptions in the members' mind (Krishnamurthy and Dou, 2008). These perceptions in addition to the communications have an impact on the members' impression about the company (Hallier Willi et al., 2014).

2.1) Research problem

Lack of psychological motivators make consumers avoid asking their questions and sharing their ideas in a company's community. These subconscious motivators stem from the consumers' level of needs for an expression of themselves to others (Krishnamurthy and Dou, 2008). The quality of corporate representatives' communication and consumers' interaction with other members are the other causes of the motivators. These motivational triggers for self-presentation are highlighted or weakened by consumers' self-concept (Markus and Wurf, 1987). The theoretical foundation of this study is Christodoulides' et al. (2012) theory of involvement with generated content (GC) that refers to how the psychological motivators of content creation lead consumers (as members) to extend their desire for expressing their views to others (Krishnamurthy and Dou, 2008). This self-expression resulted from GC involvement is usually intended to form a favourable and amicable impression" (Laughey, 2007 p. 79; Muniz and Schau, 2007).

Controlled and uncontrolled corporate communication, which are an important part of corporate identity have been investigated thoroughly by many scholars (e.g. Christensen and Askegaard, 2001; Dacin and Brown, 2002). Some data were found on the relationship between corporate communication activities in online communities and their effect on impressions, but not specifically on corporate image. Surprisingly, the relationship of some key motivators of self-expression (such as perceived co-creation, perceived empowerment and perceived community) with corporate image is missing in existing literature (Melewar and Karaosmanoglu, 2006). No data were detected on the impact of involvement with generated contents on corporate image. Furthermore, companies often do not really know how consumers' intrapersonal communications affect their desire for content creation and what impact the involvement with generated contents has on the favourable image of a company in its online community. Many of corporate activities are still based on "trial and error".

2.2) Research objectives and questions

The objective of the study therefore is to draw upon consumers' perspectives to establish the types of communication that determine a company's image formation in its community and to incorporate involvement with generated contents into Melewar and Karaosmanoglu's (2006) corporate identity framework. In pursuit of these objectives, the study identifies and develops an appropriate working model and definitions that encompass the various aspects of factors likely to affect online corporate image. The research questions address critical issues such as communication elements that can help towards the development of a favourable online corporate image in a corporate community and analogy between the impact of controlled and uncontrolled communication factors on online corporate image. Additionally, the questions tackle key concern which is mediating effect of involvement with GC and also moderating impact of perceived self-concept on the influence of intrapersonal communications on developing favourable corporate image in an online company's community.

3) Methodology

This study is looking to find relationships or associations between corporate communication using online communities and corporate image formation. The

underlying logic of the study is based on the belief that social phenomena exist regardless of the author's interpretation. Thus, a positivist approach was adopted.

The first study will make use of a qualitative research method in order to test face and content validity of the conceptual model and gain additional knowledge that relates to corporate communication using online communities and image formation. In stage one of the qualitative study twenty expert interviews will be conducted to clarify the concepts and their relationships and gain new insights from practitioners and academics. In stage two, fourteen online community members will be interviewed to clarify constructs and their relationships and to adjust an existing measurement scale of online image formation. The qualitative study will be conducted using an online community called EE community (Tashakkori and Teddlie, 2010; Bryman, 2012).

In the second phase of the study, quantitative methods will be used to generalise from the sample to the whole population of the online community. A questionnaire will be developed based on the gained knowledge from the literature review and the findings of the qualitative research. A cross-sectional survey will be conducted in which online community members will fill in a structured, self-administered online questionnaire. Since this study proposes a conceptual framework consisting of complex latent constructs, the data will be analysed using structure equation modelling. Therefore, this research adopts Churchill's paradigm (1979) which integrates a qualitative paradigm while being predominantly quantitative in nature.

The questionnaire will be first administered to a sample of the EE community. In order to validate the measurement model and test the relationships of the constructs, the questionnaire will be further administered to a sample of a different online community, called O2 community.

4) *Main findings*

It is anticipated that by November 2021, data for this study will have been collected and analysis started and that it will be possible to have preliminary findings. The data collected will reveal what factors of communications in an online community are considered to be salient communicators by members. It is also expected that anticipated outcome will show how perceived self-concept and involvement with

generated contents affect corporate image in the community. Overall, the findings will demonstrate the novel process of the online consumer-based corporate image formation process through incorporating involvement as psychological state.

5) *Potential contribution*

The findings of the current study will demonstrate what online controlled and uncontrolled communication elements are more pertinent for developing favourable online corporate image in a corporate community. In addition, the findings will provide the measurement of the impact of the involvement with GC as a mediator and perceived self-concept as a moderator of the relationship between the other intrapersonal communications and corporate image. Therefore, this study brings together various strands of theory and combines them and the findings of the present study will significantly add to the understanding of the phenomenon of corporate communication in online communities.

Understanding how corporate image is formed in online communities can help companies to determine if and how shareholders expect members of companies to participate in online networks and how this affects corporate image. In addition, this study aims to contribute to the understanding of online communication, i.e. how the targeting of people who meet in online communities can be managed better and how new online communication strategies can be found. This creates a new value dimension with significant differentiation potential. This type of differentiation is neither contained in a product nor in a brand but reflects the fact that a customer feels that he or she belongs to and is taken seriously.

Keywords: corporate image; corporate identity; corporate communications; planned and unplanned corporate communication; online community

References:

Aaker, J.L. (1997) 'Dimensions of brand personality', *Journal of Marketing Research*, Vol. 34, pp. 342-352.

Aaker, D.A., Kumar, V. and Day, G. (2001) *Marketing Research*, New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

Abdullah, Z., Nordin, S.M., and Abdul Aziz, Y. (2013) 'Building a unique online corporate identity', *Marketing Intelligence & Planning*, Vol. 31(5), pp. 451-471.

Abratt, R. (1989) 'A new approach to the corporate image management process', *Journal of Marketing Management*, Vol. 5(1), pp. 63-76.

Abratt, R. and Kleyn, N. (2012) 'Corporate identity, corporate branding and corporate reputations: Reconciliation and integration', *European Journal of Marketing*, Vol. 46(7/8), pp. 1048–1063.

Alwi, S.F.S. and Kitchen, P.J. (2014) 'Projecting corporate brand image and behavioral response in business schools: Cognitive or affective brand attributes?', *Journal of Business Research*, Vol. 67, pp. 2324–2336.

Alwi, S.F.S. and Silva, R.V.D. (2008) 'Online corporate brand image, satisfaction and loyalty', *Brand Management*, Vol. 16(3), pp. 119–144.

Balmer, J.M.T. (1998) 'Corporate Identity and the Advent of Corporate Marketing', *Journal of Marketing Management*, Vol. 14(8), pp. 963–996.

Balmer, J.M.T. (2001) 'Corporate identity, corporate branding and corporate marketing—Seeing through the fog', *European Journal of Marketing*, Vol. 35(3-4), pp. 248-291.

Balmer, J.M.T. (2008) 'Identity based views of the corporation: Insights from corporate identity, organisational identity, social identity, visual identity, corporate brand identity and corporate image', *European Journal of Marketing*, Vol. 42(9–10), pp. 879–906.

Balmer, J.M.T. (2012) 'Strategic corporate brand alignment: Perspectives from identity based views of corporate brands', *European Journal of Marketing*, Vol. 46 (7/8), pp. 1064–1092.

Balmer, J.M. and Gray, E.R. (1999) 'Corporate identity and corporate communications: creating a competitive advantage', *Corporate Communications: An International Journal*, Vol. 4(4), pp. 171–177.

Balmer, J.M. and Greyser, S.A. (2006) 'Corporate marketing: Integrating corporate identity, corporate branding, corporate communications, corporate image and corporate reputation', *European journal of marketing*, Vol. 40(7/8), pp. 730–741.

Balmer, J.M.T. and Soenen, G.M. (1999) 'The acid test of corporate identity management', *Journal of Marketing Management*, Vol.15 (1/3), pp. 69–92.

Balmer, J.M.T. and Yen, D.A. (2017) 'The Internet of total corporate communications, quaternary corporate communications and the corporate marketing Internet revolution', *Journal of Marketing Management*, Vol. 33(1/2), pp. 131–144.

Bryman, A. (2012) *Social research methods*, New York: Oxford University Press.

Christensen, L.T. and Askegaard, S. (2001) 'Corporate identity and corporate image revisited. A semiotic perspective', *European Journal of Marketing*, Vol. 35, no. 3/4, pp. 292-315.

Christodoulides, G., Jevons, C. and Bonhomme, J. (2012) 'Memo to Marketers: Quantitative Evidence for Change: How User-Generated Content Really Affects Brands', *Journal of advertising research*, vol. 52, no. 1, pp. 53-64.

Churchill, G. A. Jr. (1979) 'A Paradigm for Developing Better Measures of Marketing Constructs', *Journal of Marketing Research*, Vol. 16(1), pp. 64-73.

Dacin, P.A. and Brown, T.J. (2002) 'Corporate Identity and Corporate Associations: A Framework for Future Research', *Corporate Reputation Review*, Vol. 5, no. 2/3, pp. 254-263.

Devereux, L., Melewar, T.G., Dinnie, K. and Lange, T. (2020) 'Corporate identity orientation and disorientation: A complexity theory perspective', *Journal of Business Research*. Vol (109), pp. 413-424.

Gotsi, M. and Wilson, A.M. (2001) 'Corporate reputation: seeking a definition', *Corporate Communications: An International Journal*, Vol. 6(1), 24–30.

Hatch, M. J. and Schultz, M. (2000) "Scaling the Tower of Babel: Relational Differences between Identity, Image, Culture in Organizations", in Schultz, M., Hatch, M. J. and Larsen,

M. H. (Eds), *The Expressive Organisation – Linking Identity, Reputation, and the Corporate Brand*, Oxford University Press, Oxford.

Hallier Willi, C., Nguyen, B., Melewar, T.C. and Dennis, C. (2014) 'Corporate impression formation in online communities: a qualitative study', *Qualitative Market Research*, Vol. 17(4), pp. 410-440.

Karaosmanoğlu, E. and Melewar, T.C. (2006) 'Corporate communications, identity and image: A research agenda', *Journal of Brand Management*, Vol. 14(1–2), pp. 196–206.

Krishnamurthy, S. and Dou, W. (2008) 'Advertising with User-Generated Content: A Framework and Research Agenda', *Journal of Interactive Advertising*, 8(2), 1-4.

Laughey, D. (2007). *Key Themes in Media Theory*, Open University Press, McGraw-Hall Press, Berkshire, UK.

Markus, H. and Wurf, E. (1987) 'The Dynamic Self-Concept: A Social Psychological Perspective', *Annual Review of Psychology*, 38, 299–337.

Melewar, T.C. and Karaosmanoglu, E. (2006) 'Seven dimensions of corporate identity: A categorization from the practitioners' perspectives', *European Journal of Marketing*, Vol. 40(7/8), pp. 846–869.

Muniz, A.M. and Schau, H. (2007) 'Vigilante Marketing and Consumer-Created Communications', *Journal of Advertising Research*, 36(3), 35-50.

Schultz, D. (2012) 'More Social Media Hogwash?', *Marketing Management*, Vol. 21 (3), pp. 10–11.

Seimiene, E. and Kamarauskaite, E. (2014) 'Effect of brand elements on brand personality perception', *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences*, Vol. 156, pp. 429–434.

Tashakkori, A. and Teddlie, C. (2010) *Sage Handbook of Mixed Methods in Social and Behavioural Research*, Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Van Riel, C.B.M. and Fombrun, C.J. (2007) *Essentials of Corporate Communication*, New York: Routledge.