

Organizational Impression Management Behaviors in Social Media: A Perspective of a Social Networking Site

Kelsey Terrell
Hospitality Management
Syracuse University

and

Linchi Kwok (Lingzhi Guo)
Hospitality Management
Syracuse University

ABSTRACT

In the macro-organizational level, Impression Management (IM) is the study of how organizations attempt to manage or control the perceptions others form of them. Among the studies about organizational IM theory, relatively little discussion was framed under the social media settings. This proposed study is designed to use text mining and opinion mining techniques to answer two research questions: (1) What IM tactics do hospitality companies use on Facebook? And (2) how effectively do hospitality companies' use IM tactics on Facebook? Research findings may help hospitality managers to better manage the impressions among consumers on Facebook.

Keywords: *Impression Management, Social Media, Hospitality, Facebook*

INTRODUCTION

Impression Management (IM) is the study of how people attempt to manage or control the perceptions others form of them (Bozeman & Kacmar, 1997; Drory & Zaidman, 2007). The goal of impression management is to steer others' opinion or impression with the use of controlling information in either a personal or social situation (Drory & Zaidman, 2007). In addition to IM being used in an individual setting, IM theory can also be applied at a macro-organizational level (e.g. Avery & McKay, 2006; Mohamed & Gardner, 2004). Organizations use IM tactics to manage their image of the organization and cultivate a positive image with constituencies outside the organization.

According to Bozeman and Kacmar (1997), IM theory was first introduced by Goffman in his dramaturgical model of social life in the late 1950s. Since then, many scholarly discussions about IM have been based on Goffman's framework. A typical IM model contains two key players: an "actor" who engages in "performances" or "IM behaviors" and an "audience" who interacts with "actors" under certain "environmental settings." IM behaviors can be categorized into two primary categories: assertive strategies, which an actor uses to establish a given desirable identity, and defensive/protective strategies, which are excuses and justifications to repair damaged identities (Drory & Zaidman, 2007).

In the organizational level, Mohamed, Gardner, and Paolillo (1999) developed the taxonomy of organizational IM behaviors to guide future research. Under their 2×2 taxonomy, organizational IM behaviors can be categorized into direct and assertive, direct and defensive, as well as indirect and assertive, and indirect and defensive tactics. Organizations use direct tactics to present information about their own traits, abilities, and accomplishments and indirect tactics to enhance or protect their images by managing information about the people and things with which an organization is associated with. Organizations also utilize assertive tactics when they see opportunities to boost their image and defensive tactics to minimize or repair damage to their images. This taxonomy provides a conceptual framework for studying organizational IM behaviors.

While the discussions about organizational IM behaviors and empirical studies in this area provide insightful information of how companies can manage consumers' perceptions towards an organization, many propositions regarding organizational IM behaviors were proposed before the Web 2.0 technology was introduced. Web 2.0 facilitated interactive web information sharing and collaboration and intrigued the development of social media (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Social media includes online or word-of mouth forums, such as blogs, discussion boards, chat rooms, e-mails between consumers, product or service review websites and forums, moblogs, and social networking websites (Mangold & Faulds, 2009). Many of these social media accounts have zero sign-up fees and can be managed by anyone with minimum Internet surfing skills. It provides a great platform for companies to communicate with their target consumers by promoting products or services, learning new ideas, and improving customer service. Companies in the travel, tourism, and hospitality industry provide intangible services to consumers; and the important role of social media plays in the service-related industry have been well recognized (e.g. Thevenot, 2007; Xiang & Gretzel, 2010; Young, 2010).

Among those popular social media sites, Facebook in particular plays an increasingly important role in today's business. Facebook was first introduced in 2004. Within four years, Facebook visitors passed MySpace (Casteleyn, Mottart, & Rutten, 2009). With 45.3 million active U.S. accounts and more than 200 million users worldwide as of February 2009 (Geoghegan, 2009), Facebook now has more than 124 million visitors per month (Casteleyn et al., 2009). In March 2009, Facebook became the No. 1 visited site in the U.S. (Rubin, 2010). Americans spend a longer time on Facebook than any other websites in the world ("Spending time on," 2010). Facebook has become a critical platform for business-to-consumer (B2C) communications. Companies may be able to effectively manage consumers' impression towards the organization through their interactions with consumers on Facebook. Research studies about how hospitality companies effectively use Facebook to manage their organizational impression could be important to hospitality managers. As a result, this study was designed to answer the following two research questions:

RQ1: What IM tactics do hospitality companies use on Facebook?

RQ2: How effectively do hospitality companies' currently use IM tactics on Facebook?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Since IM theory was introduced, research efforts have been focused on how individuals and organizations create and manage their impressions to the target audience (Bolino, Kacmar, Turnley, & Gilstrap, 2008). With the attempt to offer recommendations for future studies of IM in organizations, Bolino et al. (2008) reviews selective articles about IM published in mainstream management journals since 1988. They concluded that research on IM in the individual level often focused on how job candidates or employees might manage information to enhance their images during job interviews or at work. Individuals are more likely to selectively manage information to present a positive image when accountability is high and ambiguity is low. In particular, job candidates are motivated to manage impressions to obtain a desirable outcome such as a job offer.

According to Bolino et al.'s (2008) review, even though IM theory can also be applied to the macro-organizational level to study how organizations manage their images and impressions, research in IM paid much more attention to the individual level. They argued that "just as individuals use IM to influence the perceptions that others have of them, organizational representatives and spokespersons also use IM in an effort to influence the way that others view the organization as a whole" (p. 1094). IM research that is focused on the organizational level can be categorized into five areas: (a) how organizations use IM tactics defensively to restore legitimacy due to a controversial matter or an image-threatening event; (b) how organizations use IM tactics in an assertive way to increase acceptance of a controversial decision; (c) how organizations use tactics to create a desired image or a specific goal; (d) what role the audience plays; and (e) what defamation tactics an organization used to damage the reputation of their competitors, which is also the least research area. Among a variety of organizational IM tactics, acknowledgement and denials are both effective in restoring organizations legitimacy. When it comes to communicating a desired image, corporate slogans expressing the desired image appeared in annual reports and corporate web sites are successful. Assertive tactics are used in an attempt to prevent controversies or complaints from arising. Furthermore, they suggests that future IM research at the macro-organizational level need to determine if creating a desired identity makes a firm more profitable, as well as which organizational IM approach such as verbal, written, or electronic are most successful in producing the desired image. Researchers are advocated to conduct more research studies that can provide clear definitions and categories of IM behaviors

When the Internet emerged as a new medium for B2C communication in the 90s, Mohamed, Gardner, and Paolillo (1999) proposed a taxonomy of organizational impression management tactics to guide future IM studies on the macro-organizational level. Table 1 outlines the direct/assertive IM tactics at the organizational level, which organizations use to "create and enhance desirable images by presenting information to target audiences that is directly related to the organization" (p. 112). Table 2 lists the organizational direct/defensive tactics, which are used in response in situations where actors believe others may assign undesirable qualities to their organization. Table 3 describes the organizational indirect/assertive and indirect/defensive tactics, which organizations use to acquire or protect desired manage or to reduce dependence with indirect means. These organizational IM tactics will be used as the guiding frameworks of this proposed study.

TABLE 1*
Direct and Assertive Organizational Impression Management Tactics

Behavior	Definition/Description	Example
Ingratiation	Behaviors that are used by organizational actors to make the organization appear more attractive to others.	Promotional campaigns by the armed services which portray their branch of the military as providing attractive career opportunities.
Intimidation	Behaviors that present the organization as a powerful and dangerous entity which is able and willing to inflict harm on those that frustrate its efforts and objectives.	A large manufacturer that threatens a small supplier with a reduction of orders unless it terminates its relationship with one of the firm's competitors.
Organizational Promotion	Behaviors that present the organization as being highly competent, effective, and successful.	An organization that attributes the phenomenal sales of a new product to its savvy marketing campaign.
Exemplification	Behaviors that are used by the organization to project images of integrity, social responsibility, and moral worthiness; this tactic may also have a goal of seeking imitation by other entities.	Fund-raising campaigns by the United Way which highlight the moral worthiness and social benefits that accrue from the charitable causes the organization supports.
Supplication	Behaviors by the organization that portray an image of dependency and vulnerability for the purpose of soliciting assistance from others.	Domestic firms that emphasize their vulnerability to foreign competition while lobbying for tariffs and other forms of trade protection.

*Mohamed, Gardner, and Paolillo (1999)

TABLE 2*
Direct and Defensive Organizational Impression Management Tactics

Behavior	Definition/Description	Example
Accounts	Explanations of a predicament-creating event which seek to minimize the apparent severity of the predicament.	Top management downplays the severity of their firm's bankruptcy, stating that Chapter 11 really means, "There's still hope."
Disclaimers	Explanations given prior to a potentially embarrassing action in order to ward off any negative repercussions for the actor's image.	Notices by brokerage firms which warn performance is no guarantee for the future.

Organization Handicapping	Efforts by an organization to make task success appear unlikely in order to provide a ready-made excuse for failure.	Remarks by an aerospace manufacturer's CEO that it is unlikely to outbid a French firm for a foreign contract because it is subsidized by the French government.
Apologies	Admissions of blameworthiness for a negative event, which include expressions of remorse and requests for a pardon.	A manager tells a customer, "We're sorry for the delay in shipping your order. We pride ourselves on timely deliveries, but we slipped up this time. Please forgive us."
Restitution	Offers of compensation, which are extended by the organization to the offended, injured, or otherwise, harmed an audience.	Airline passengers who are bumped from a flight due to overbooking are provided with vouchers for free round-trip tickets to any domestic destination of their choice.
Pro-social Behavior	Engaging in pro-social actions to atone for an apparent transgression and convince an audience that the actor merits a positive identity.	A southern university that attempts to atone for past racial discrimination by offering extensive array of minority scholarships and aggressively hiring minority faculty and administrators.

*Mohamed, Gardner, and Paolillo (1999)

TABLE 3*
Indirect Organizational Impression Management Tactics

Behavior	Definition/Description	Example
<u>Assertive Tactics</u>		
<u>Connection Focused Tactics</u>		
Boasting	Proclaiming a positive link to a favorable other.	An advertising campaign that portrays a firm as an "Official" sponsor of the U.S. Olympic team.
Blaring	Proclaiming a negative link to an unfavorable other.	7-Up ads which inform customers that the "UnCola" is caffeine-free ("Never had it, Never will")
<u>Other-Focused Tactics</u>		
Burnishing	Enhancing the favorable features of a positively linked other	A business that extols that virtues of a local sports team.

Blasting	Exaggerating the unfavorable features of a negatively liked other	FedEx advertisements which humorously portray rival express mail delivery firms, as slow, unreliable, and grossly inept.
----------	---	--

Defensive Tactics

Connection-Focused Tactics

Burying	Disclaiming or obscuring a positive link to an unfavorable other.	Saturn Corporation’s decision not to display GM’s logo on its automobiles or literature.
---------	---	--

Blurring	Disclaiming or obscuring a negative link to a favorable other.	A university’s administration downplays its past opposition to a popular faculty union.
----------	--	---

Other-Focused Tactics

Boosting	Minimizing the unfavorable features of a positively linked other.	A corporation which downplays the sexual and violent content of a TV show that it sponsors.
----------	---	---

Belittling	Minimizing the favorable traits of a negatively linked other.	An economy hotel chain that describes the luxurious accommodation of an upscale rival as unnecessary frills that produces inflated room rates.
------------	---	--

*Mohamed, Gardner, and Paolillo (1999)

METHODOLOGY

Text mining and opinion mining are techniques that are part of a system that will be able to collect and examine text and opinions about the company or product through comments or reviews within social media sites such as Facebook. These techniques will be adopted to answer these two research questions. First, the Facebook pages of the top 10 U.S. hotel companies (H&MM, 2009) with the most Facebook “fans” as of December 1, 2010 will be selected. These top 10 U.S. hotel companies must operate a variety of hotel brands/products that represent different market segments. The Facebook pages of the top 10 U.S. restaurant chains with the highest annual sales will also be included. The selected Facebook pages will then be extracted from the Internet. Text classification techniques (Joachims, 1998), feature analysis techniques (Yu, 2008), and sentiment analysis techniques (Pang & Lee, 2008) will be used for sorting and analyzing the messages sent by companies as well as Facebook users’ descriptive responses (comments and the number of “Likes”). The messages sent by hospitality companies will be categorized using Mohamed et al.’s (1999) 2x2 taxonomy of IM behaviors: direct and assertive, direct and defensive, as well as indirect and assertive, and indirect and defensive tactics. The results of such analyses will be used to answer Research Question 1. Lastly, the same text mining and opinion mining techniques will also be used to analyze the descriptive responses from hospitality companies’ Facebook fans. Based on the Facebook fans’ responses to a company’s IM tactics, the effectiveness of different organizational IM behaviors will be assessed. The results will be used to answer Research Question 2.

RESULTS

The research findings of this study are expected to provide hospitality companies with useful information. By identifying the effective organizational IM tactics used on Facebook, hospitality companies may be able to develop the “right” strategies of managing their impressions among consumers.

REFERENCES

- Avery, D. R., & McKay, P. F. (2006). Target practice: An organizational impression management approach to attracting minority and female job applicants. *Personal Psychology, 59*, 157 - 187.
- Bolino, M., Kacmar, K., Turnley, W., & Gilstrap, J. (2008). A Multi-Level Review of Impression Management Motives and Behaviors. *Journal of Management, 34*(6), 1080-1109. Retrieved from Business Source Elite database.
- Bozeman, D.P., & Kacmar, K.M. (1997). A cybernetic model of impression management processes in organizations. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Process, 69*(1), 9-30.
- Casteleyn, J., Mottart, A., & Rutten, K. (2009). How to use Facebook in your market research. *International Journal of Market Research, 51*(4), 439-447.
- Drory, A., & Zaidman N. (2007) Impression management behavior: effects of the organizational system. *Journal of Managerial Psychology, 22*, 290-308.
- Gardner, W. L., & Martinko, M. J. (1988). Impression management in organizations. *Journal of Management, 14*, 321-338.
- Geoghegan, B. (2009). Your Facebook friends and twitter followers. *Hospitality Upgrade, 28*-30.
- H&MM (2009, September). H&MM's 2009 top U.S. hotel companies survey. Retrieved March 1, 2010, from <http://rss.hsyndicate.com/file/152003939.pdf>
- Joachims, T. (1998). Text categorization with Support Vector Machines: learning with many relevant features. *Lecture Notes in Computer Science, (1398)*, 137-142.
- Kaplan, A. M., & Haenlein, M. (2010). Users of the world, unite! The challenges and opportunities of social media. *Business Horizons, 53*(1), 59-68.
- Krämer, N., & Winter, S. (2008). Impression management 2.0: The relationship of self-esteem, extraversion, self-efficacy, and self-presentation within social networking sites. *Journal of Media Psychology: Theories, Methods, and Applications, 20*(3), 106-116. doi:10.1027/1864-1105.20.3.106.

- Mangold, W. G., & Faulds, D. J. (2009). Social media: The new hybrid element of the promotion mix. *Business Horizons*, 52(4), 357-365.
- Mohamed, A.A., & Gardner, W.L. (2004). An exploratory study of interorganizational defamation: An organizational impression management perspective. *Organizational Analysis*, 12, 129 – 145.
- Mohamed, A. A., Gardner, W. L., & Paolillo, J. G. P. (1999). A taxonomy of organizational impression management tactics. *Advances in Competitiveness Research*, 7(1), 108 - 130.
- Pang, B., & Lee, L. (2008) Opinion mining and sentiment analysis. *Foundations and Trends in Information Retrieval*. 2(1-2), 1-135.
- Rubin, C. (2010, September 13). Internet users spend more than on google. *Inc. Magazine*, Retrieved September 13, 2010 from <http://www.inc.com/news/articles/2010/09>
- Spending time on facebook. (2010). [Web]. Retrieved from <http://abcnews.go.com/Technology/video/spending-time-facebook-11600827>
- Thevenot, G. (2007). Blogging as a social media. *Tourism & Hospitality Research*, 7(3/4), 287-289.
- Wayne, S. J., & Liden, R. C. (1995). Effects of impression management on performance ratings: A longitudinal study. *Academy of Management Journal*, 38, 232-260.
- Xiang, Z., & Gretzel, U. (2010). Role of social media in online travel information search. *Tourism Management*, 31(2), 179-188.
- Young, L. (2010). Brave New World. *Foodservice and Hospitality*, 42(11), 24-28.
- Yu, B. (2008). An evaluation of text classification methods for literary study. *Literary and Linguistic Computing*, 23(3), 327-343