

## COLLOQUIUM

includes debate by practitioners and academics on a contemporary topic

# Social Media: The New Mantra for Managing Reputation

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## Themes

Apology  
Authenticity  
Blurred Boundaries  
Corporate Communication  
Corporate Reputation  
Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)  
Crisis Communication  
Crisis Messaging  
CSR Reputation  
Digital  
Employee Relations  
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Organizational Values  
Public Relations  
Reputational Messages  
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Stakeholder Engagement  
Transparency  
Trust  
Workplace Surveillance

## INTRODUCTION

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In a world where “one angry tweet can torpedo a brand,”<sup>1</sup> corporations need to embrace all possibilities. Social media<sup>2</sup> have transformed the business and communication landscape and organizations appear to, reluctantly or willingly, recognize this change. Evolving patterns of communication, collaboration, consumption, and innovation have created new domains of interactivity for companies and stakeholders. In this changed scenario, there are opportunities for experimentation and correction, yet challenges abound. As on date, there are no definitive methodologies nor there is a ‘one-size-fits-all’ formula that can be applied to all situations for optimum results.

<sup>1</sup> Bernoff, J., & Chadler, T. (2010). Empowered. *Harvard Business Review*, July–August, 94–101, p. 95.

<sup>2</sup> We use social media and digital interchangeably, although we are aware that some distinguish between these and other related terms such as social web, web2.0, new media, and social networks sites. We apply Lievrouw & Livingstone’s (2006) conceptualization and focus not on the technical particularities but on their uses. The authors define new media in terms of ‘the artefacts or devices used to communicate or convey information; the activities and practices in which people engage to communicate or share information; and the social arrangements or organizational forms that develop around those devices and practices’ (Lievrouw, L. A., & Livingstone, S. M. (2006). *Handbook of new media*. London: SAGE Publications, p. 2).

What is definite, though, is that social media communication is the new mantra for influence and can have a huge impact on corporate reputation (CR), “the single most valued formal asset”<sup>3</sup> that “may enable firms to charge premium prices, attract better applicants, enhance their access to capital markets and attract investors.”<sup>4</sup>

Data from the United Kingdom and the United States over the last four years show a growing trend and shift in consumer preference for the use of digital media. No longer are consumers and customers dependent on traditional and company-controlled channels of mass communication. It is estimated that by 2018 there will be close to 225 million users in India. Over the last two years, urban India registered a growth of 35 per cent and rural India, 100 per cent.<sup>5</sup> With 75 per cent of India’s online population as digital consumers,<sup>6</sup> small wonder that digital is the new mantra. Even as traditional media remain valid, being relevant demands a strategic shift towards social-mediated dialogue, engagement, and conversation. This traction towards an “architecture of participation”<sup>7</sup> has just begun with a promising ecosystem.

The radical growth of social media usage has a decisive impact on the business environment, both at the micro and macro levels. In today’s corporate scenario where “online reputation is your reputation,”<sup>8</sup> it is no longer a question of whether companies should indulge in social media or not. The question whether companies should enter this space has lost significance, for joining, collaborating, and communicating with online consumers have become an imperative. The focus has shifted from ‘What are social media?’ to ‘What do we do with social media now?’ Adoption of social media tools to manage CR across all stakeholders is essential for a

“positive image or reputation is a bankable commodity for the organization that possesses a favourable one.”<sup>9</sup> Different companies are adopting customized techniques to gain a foothold in this elusive space, as they recognize that “When used effectively the internet is the best tool for improving reputation that has yet been created.”<sup>10</sup> Yet, all cognize, “[S]ocial media is no longer the adorable baby everyone wants to hold, but the angst-filled adolescent—still immature yet no longer cute—who inspires mixed feelings.”<sup>11</sup>

Research on social media is flourishing across disciplines and phenomena from consumer preferences,<sup>12</sup> demand prediction,<sup>13</sup> corporate social responsibility (CSR),<sup>14</sup> crisis communication,<sup>15</sup> leadership,<sup>16</sup> branding,<sup>17</sup> to organizational culture and participation,<sup>18</sup> just to name a few. Interaction patterns with employees are being facilitated through social media to build flexible remote relationships<sup>19</sup> and exchange of knowledge and expertise

<sup>3</sup> Gibson, D., Gonzales, J.L., & Castanon, J. (2006). The importance of reputation and the role of public relations. *Public Relations Quarterly*, 51(3), 15–18.

<sup>4</sup> Fombrun, C. J., & Shanley, M. (1990). What’s in a name? Reputation building and corporate strategy. *Academy of Management Journal*, 33(2), 233–258. doi:10.2307/256324.

<sup>5</sup> Retrieved 9 October, 2015 from <http://www.statista.com/statistics/278407/number-of-social-network-users-in-india/>

<sup>6</sup> EY (2014). Social media marketing India trends study: Insights from social media-savvy brands in India. Retrieved 30 September, 2015 from <http://www.ey.com/IN/en/Services/Advisory/EY-social-media-marketing-india-trends-study-2014>

<sup>7</sup> Retrieved 9 October, 2015 from <http://radar.oreilly.com/2005/10/web-20-compact-definition.html>

<sup>8</sup> Fertik, M., & Thomson, D. (2010). *Wild West 2.0: How to protect and restore your online reputation on the untamed social frontier*. New York: AMA, p. 16.

<sup>9</sup> Arpan, L.M. (2005). Integration of information about corporate social performance. *Corporate Communication: An International Journal*, 10(1), 83–98.

<sup>10</sup> Valor, J. (2009, July 29). Blogs can help schools win the marketing war. *Financial Times*, p. 9. Retrieved 14 October, 2015 from <http://www.ft.com/intl/cms/s/0/55da4e04-7a46-11de-b86f-00144feabdc0.html#axzz3ps72fBrk>

<sup>11</sup> IBM Unica (2011, June). 11 Key marketing trends for 2011. *IBM Software Thought leadership White Paper*, New York, USA.

<sup>12</sup> Trusov, M., Bodapati, A., & Bucklin, R. (2010). Determining influential users in internet social networks. *Journal of Marketing Research*, 47(4), 643–658.

<sup>13</sup> Asur, S., & Huberman, B.A. (2010). Predicting the future with social media. In O. Hoerber, Y. Li, & X. J. Huang (Eds), *Proceedings of International Conference on Web Intelligence and Intelligent Agent Tech* (pp. 492–499). Los Alamitos, CA: IEEE Computer Society.

<sup>14</sup> Du, S., Bhattacharya, C.B., & Sen, S. (2007). Reaping relational rewards from corporate social responsibility: The role of competitive positioning. *International Journal of Research in Marketing*, 24(3), 224–241.

<sup>15</sup> Ott, L., & Theunissen, P. (2015). Reputations at risk: Engagement during social media crises. *Public Relations Review*, 41(1), 97–102.

<sup>16</sup> Guinan, P., Parise, S., & Rollag, K. (2014). Jumpstarting the use of social technologies in your organization. *Business Horizons*, 57(3), 337–347.

<sup>17</sup> Edelman, D.C. (2010). Branding in the digital age: You’re spending your money in all the wrong places. *Harvard Business Review*, December. Retrieved 11 October, 2015 from <http://hbr.org/2010/12/branding-in-the-digital-age-youre-spending-your-money-in-all-the-wrong-places>

<sup>18</sup> Yang, S.U. (2007). An integrated model for organization–public relational outcomes, organizational reputation, and their antecedents. *Journal of Public Relations Research*, 19(2), 91–121.

<sup>19</sup> Archak, N. (2010). Money, glory and cheap talk: Analyzing strategic behavior of contestants in simultaneous crowdsourcing contests on TopCoder.com. In M. Rappa, P. Jones, J. Freire, & S. Chakrabarti (Eds), *Proceedings of 19th International Conference on World Wide Web* (pp. 21–30). New York: ACM Press.

is being encouraged<sup>20</sup> through crowdsourcing<sup>21</sup> and micro outsourcing.<sup>22</sup> What we have presented is just a fraction of the social media research. At this juncture, with social media on the incline, a second look at the new communication trajectory of companies with far-reaching consequences and reputational impact is required.

In response to the growing interest in social media, the colloquium, *Social Media: The New Mantra for Managing Reputation*, as a piece on thought leadership, attempts to unpack the multifaceted implications of social media on our understanding of organizational–stakeholder relationships. We are inspired by the developments in the communication landscape and are yet cognizant that there are pragmatic challenges and conceptual questions that need to be answered.

Instead of unproblematically and uncritically accepting the ‘power’ of digital, we bring together scholarly and practitioner views to present a grounded understanding of the phenomenon. The articles in the colloquium draw upon practice and research perspectives to illuminate the ways in which we can collectively make sense of social media for CR.

We start by taking a step back to review some of the key developments that social media have triggered, entrenched, and challenged in the way organizations communicate, and what are the attendant implications for reputation management.

## HOW IMPORTANT IS SOCIAL, REALLY?

An oft-cited Internet fact, by extrapolation, spells out the importance of the social as well: “It took radio 38 years to reach an audience of 50 million, television 13 years, and AOL just two and a half years.”<sup>23</sup> The speed, the interactivity, and the acceptance of the Internet and

the social media have made ‘social’ the most favoured mode of communication. Further, consumers have begun to view social media as more trustworthy than the TV, radio, or other traditional sources.<sup>24</sup> Social media is being used to assess and rank a company on its success parameters, leadership, CSR, and/or ability to change and develop public image.<sup>25</sup> Trusov and colleagues<sup>26</sup> posit that word-of-mouth peer referrals have a greater influence and higher impact on membership growth than traditional media.

In a 2012 survey of managers in 115 countries and 24 industries, conducted by *MIT Sloan Management Review* and Deloitte, 52 per cent of the respondents affirmed the significance of social media to their business. A whopping 86 per cent stated that within three years, social media will gain heights.<sup>27</sup> The change is clearly evident in 2015 with businesses talking about their social media initiative in infancy or at the conceptual level. None, though, deny the significance of social media. The time is right for businesses to develop a “strategy for getting into the results for users who matter”<sup>28</sup> to them.

Ernst and Young’s study (2014)<sup>29</sup> found that almost 75 per cent of the online customers were digital consumers who relied more on peer feedback from communities than company-controlled media channels. The companies had an overall 15 per cent of their total marketing budget for social media. They had three key objectives of indulging in social media: building brand awareness, building a community, and engaging with the customer. Reputation management, thought leadership, and recruitment were also focal areas for companies. The report asserted that customer engagement did not emerge as a key objective in a similar study conducted in the year 2013, as companies were engaged in building communities. Not surprisingly, within a year, the budget increased

<sup>20</sup> Benbya, H., & Van Alstyne, M. (2010). How to find answers within your company? *MIT Sloan Management Review*, 52(2), 65–75.

<sup>21</sup> Di Gangi, P. M., & Wasko, M. (2009). Steal my idea! Organizational adoption of user innovations from a user innovation community: A case study of Dell IdeaStorm. *Decision Support Systems*, 48(1), 303–312.

<sup>22</sup> Goldman, M., Little, G., & Miller, R.C. (2011). Collabode: Collaborative coding in the browser. In M. Cataldo, C. de Souza, Y. Dittrich, R. Hoda, & H. Sharp (Eds), *Proceedings of the 4th International Workshop on Cooperative and Human Aspects of Software Engineering* (pp. 65–68). New York: ACM Press.

<sup>23</sup> Bunting, M., & Lipski, R. (2001). Drowned out? Rethinking corporate reputation management for the Internet. *Journal of Communication Management*, 5(2), 170–178, p. 171. doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/13632540110806758>

<sup>24</sup> Foux, G. (2006). Consumer-generated media: Get your customers involved. *Brand Strategy*, 202, 38–39.

<sup>25</sup> Aula, P. (2011). Meshworked reputation: Publicists’ views on the reputational impacts of online communication. *Public Relations Review*, 37(1), 28–36.

<sup>26</sup> Trusov, M., Bucklin, R.E., & Pauwels, K. (2009). Effects of word-of-mouth versus traditional marketing: Findings from an internet social networking site. *Journal of Marketing*, 73(9), 90–102.

<sup>27</sup> Kiron, D., Palmer, D., Phillips, A.N., & Kruschwitz, N. (2012). Social business: What are companies really doing? *MIT Sloan Management Review Research Report*, 53(4), 1–32.

<sup>28</sup> Weber, L. (2007). *Marketing on the social web: How digital customer communities build your business*. New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons, p. 165.

<sup>29</sup> Op. cit., EY (2014).

by 30 per cent and the focus shifted from building to maintaining loyalists as advocates and champions who could transform customer experience.

With enhanced number of social media users and increased budgets for social media spend, customer engagement has been on a steep incline. At the same time, changes in communication patterns have also led to scepticism over company policies, products and services. The key to success is developing a coterie of trusted employees and empowering them to innovate and communicate or 'socialcast,' manage customer relationships, and innovate for competitive advantage.

Although companies increased the budget on social media spend, they faced hurdles in marketing of the brand. The biggest challenge identified was measuring effectiveness of the campaigns, followed by increasing engagement levels, creating content/concepts/campaigns, acquiring the right target groups, integrating with lead generation or sales, monitoring social media, and managing response, uniform communication across all channels, customer service, social media policy, and governance.<sup>30</sup>

### **HAVE SOCIAL MEDIA CHANGED ORGANIZATION-STAKEHOLDER RELATIONSHIPS?**

Social media have influenced, perhaps dramatically altered, the relationship between organizations and their stakeholders. They help companies connect with people, project leadership, share information about policies, products and services, and provide immediate response, harness favourable public sentiment, and build relationships.<sup>31</sup> Additionally, social media provide a platform for stakeholders to connect, engage with the organization, and influence other members of the cyber community on issues of mutual interest.

Easy access to the Internet has made it simple for stakeholders to communicate independently with companies. With free flowing communication, undoubtedly reputational risks have increased manifold. There have been umpteen horror stories where stakeholders have tarnished company reputation, and stories where smart organizations have

used the medium to build credibility and trust. Yet, the desire for both companies and stakeholders to stay connected has neither reduced nor dissipated. On both sides, there is a felt need to network, voice opinions, and to work collaboratively.

The relationship (good or bad) between organizations and stakeholders and the intensity in participation well enunciates the profitability curve. The improved financial performance and reputational capital are linked to cumulative stakeholder perceptions about leadership, products and services, performance, workplace culture, governance, and innovation. The associated value, be it in terms of tangible or intangible assets, has grown proportionately with increase in the number of people in a network and improved connectivity.<sup>32</sup>

### **What Do these Shifts Mean for Organizations and Organizational Reputation?**

Businesses and stakeholders have equal power over social media messages being exchanged. Stakeholders, also referred to as 'professional consumers' or 'prosumers,'<sup>33</sup> have the power to question and to provide feedback to the companies. At the same time, they can also use these messages as a weapon against businesses to serve their own agenda. The collective 'voice' of stakeholders, nature of interactivity, speed and reach have considerably reduced corporate control over communication. Indulging in a two-way communication, these empowered stakeholders have taken on simultaneously the role of a journalist, a watchdog, and an opinion influencer. Now possessed with the capability of voicing their opinions and expressing their concerns in open forums through multiple platforms as YouTube, Twitter, Facebook, Pinterest, Instagram, blogs, etc., they can cause irreparable damage to the company reputation. Consider the example of Lenskart, Nestle, etc., where an insensitive comment by the company at a wrong moment led to a drop in financial performance and a loss in the customer faith.

The importance of social media in reputation management cannot be denied. As on date, there is lack of metrics to measure the value associated with

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Kelleher, T., & Miller, B. (2006). Organizational blogs and the human voice: Relational strategies and relational outcomes. *Journal of Computer-mediated Communication*, 11(2), 395-414.

<sup>32</sup> Hendler, J., & Golbeck, J. (2008). Metcalfe's law, Web 2.0, and the Semantic Web. *Journal of Web Semantics*, 6(1), 14-20.

<sup>33</sup> Davis, C., & Moy, C. (2007). Coming to terms with business transparency. *Admap Magazine*, 487, 19-22.

company strategies. Some of the researched barriers to adoption of social media tools: are lack of support and understanding of members of the C-suite, too many competing priorities, and little advocacy on social media efficacy. What then is the associated value of social media to reputational capital?

The value of social media hinges on innovation. An innovation paradigm shift that encourages stakeholders to innovate and co-create with companies heralds engagement. For instance, some companies as Volvo, Nike, and Lego have used this consumer-friendly environment to develop innovative and consumer-specific products. Knowledge inflow and process upgradation have improved operational performance of companies. Further, these interactions have also provided insights that have helped companies in developing a vision and its strategic implementation. For instance, sentiment analysis and an assessment of customer trends have helped many a company in assessing product value. Let us consider the example of IBM that listened intently to customer sentiments before it launched its five softwares—Lotus, Rational, Tivoli, WebSphere, and Information Management—and found that the most popular of its software was least talked about and the least popular was the most talked about in the digital space. Listening to the dialogue helped the company trace customer sentiment and initiate strategic communication to manage online reputation.

### Reputations are Fragile: How can They be Managed?

“It takes 20 years to build a reputation and five minutes to ruin it.”<sup>34</sup> Arguably then, the most valued asset of an organization is its reputation.<sup>35</sup> Reputations are fragile and difficult to form, develop, and maintain. Companies develop their reputation through the information that stakeholders gather about a particular company through media, press releases, website, online resources, and/or word of mouth.<sup>36</sup> The most important of these is the media, more specifically social media, which help shape

or distort a company reputation through total or partial information and news. As reputations are evaluative, stakeholders compare the existing information with other companies based on a standard that is culturally, socially, or cognitively accepted. Expectations are built around this information and inability to meet the same creates an expectation gap that is often difficult to address.<sup>37</sup>

Companies are at reputational risk if their processes and procedures for handling social media conversations and managing expectations are not well planned or their engagement with wider communities is not strategized. They often face the danger of increased scrutiny from consumers who can collectively create perceptions of corporate irresponsibility.<sup>38</sup> Proactive measures adopted by companies as presentation of various corporate initiatives as CSR, annual reports, and empowerment of employees to take on advocacy roles, etc., can help protect image but only to a certain extent. Success in managing online reputation resides in converting stakeholders to allies and addressing them in a collaborative and participative manner.

Undoubtedly, not all companies have been successful in managing their reputational assets through social media. Gartner pegs the failure for social business initiatives at 70.3 per cent.<sup>39</sup> Although many of these failures can be attributed to the inability to launch and integrate a social media initiative, the major cause can be attributed to the inability to secure understanding and support of the senior management. The companies that have gained maximum mileage out of social media initiatives are the largest (with more than 100,000 employees) and smallest organizations (those with less than 1,000 employees). They have been appreciative of social media initiatives and have been able to implement the tools effectively. The same cannot be said of mid-sized organizations. Gerald Kane, an assistant professor at Boston, ascribes the size of the organization to be a decisive factor and contends that small companies do not have sufficient resources for large-scale marketing campaigns. Social media provide them reach and volume. Large-sized companies do not stand to lose much by experimenting and using

<sup>34</sup> The 16 best things Warren Buffet has ever said. (2013, August 30). *Huffington Post*. Retrieved 30 August, 2015, from [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/08/30/warren-buffett-quotes\\_n\\_3842509.html?ir=India&adsSiteOverride=in](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/08/30/warren-buffett-quotes_n_3842509.html?ir=India&adsSiteOverride=in)

<sup>35</sup> Winkleman, M. (1999). The right stuff: Survey on corporate reputation. *Chief Executive*, 143 (April), 80–81.

<sup>36</sup> Fombrun, C.J., & van Riel, C.B.M (2004). *Fame & fortune: How successful companies build winning reputations*. New York: Prentice-Hall.

<sup>37</sup> Reichart, J. (2003). A theoretical exploration of expectational gaps in the corporate issue construct. *Corporate Reputation Review*, 6(1), 58–69. doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1057/palgrave.crr.1540190>

<sup>38</sup> Jones, B., Bowd, R., & Tench, R. (2009). Corporate irresponsibility and corporate social responsibility: Competing realities. *Social Responsibility Journal*, 5(3), 300–310.

<sup>39</sup> Op. cit., Kiron et al. (2012).

technologies that create a perception of being caring, nurturing, and closer to the stakeholders.

Companies have begun to adopt surveillance measures and tools for monitoring, shaping, framing, and communicating messages. Constant engagement with stakeholders, communication on the same territory, advocacy, relationship building, and trailing consumer-relevant sites are some other techniques being adopted. With a strategic intent, right mix of online media tools, and appropriate tactical measure, companies can surge ahead and actively manage their online CR. For instance, eBay's online rating system for the users has built credibility and trust for the company, and suggests honesty and transparency in the system and transactions.

### ABOUT THIS COLLOQUIUM

The eight contributions address interrelated issues, all with implications for CR. Given the emergent nature of research, practice, and forms of organizing around social media, these pieces offer a meaningful entry point to begin the conversation.

Contextualizing the changes in the corporate communication and public relations (PR) landscape, Dilip Cherian's article highlights the blurring of boundaries between PR and marketing and emphasizes the benefits of new-age PR that has acquired speed and breadth and learned a new method of connecting with influencers.

Notwithstanding the benefits of social media, crisis communication and management have been among the most prolific areas of research and practice, for social media are presenting new challenges and testing conventional approaches. Karen Freberg and Smeeta Mishra underscore the centrality of crisis messaging and response in determining the reputational impact of a crisis. They present emerging trends in social media

crisis communication and review the use of crisis management techniques in resurrecting image.

Rajeev Kumar and Jason Pridmore remind us to take an inward look towards employee and organizational values as the anchors in a dynamic and volatile business environment. Drawing on his experience at TATA, Rajeev Kumar outlines a values-driven approach to corporate leadership while Jason Pridmore offers a much-needed critical reflection on the ubiquity of employee engagement and empowerment in the digital age. He contends that in the coming years, surveillance that accords visibility to some aspects of social media monitoring will create significant impact on CR.

For Sun Young Lee, the increased demand (and perhaps expectation) for transparency in CSR practices, advocated through social media, is critical, as it highlights company identity, mission, and values. Namrata Rana and Utkarsh Majmudar advance CSR scholarship and reaffirm the beginning of a transformative journey when companies and social media come together around larger causes.

Craig E Carroll rounds off the thought leadership series by offering theoretically grounded ways in which organizations can leverage social media for reputation building. He offers a robust analysis on the five dimensions of social media salience and argues that organizations can design better reputational strategies if there is a match of the right dimension of reputation with media content.

Taken together, these contributions validate the importance of social media and provide an exciting and interesting research and practitioner perspective. At the same time, these contributions also remind us of the array of questions still unanswered. This colloquium is but the first step in the maze of social media from which there is no escape in the years to come.

# How Social Media is Changing the PR Landscape

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Social media has emerged as the unfettered voice of citizens. There were more than 354 million Internet users in India in June 2015;<sup>40</sup> out of these, 143 million are on social media platforms<sup>41</sup> such as Facebook (125 million users),<sup>42</sup> YouTube (60 million users),<sup>43</sup> LinkedIn (30 million),<sup>44</sup> and Twitter (22.2 million users).<sup>45</sup> Many of these users are young urban dwellers. These numbers would have only grown since April 2015 when these figures were compiled. In recent times, events such as the happenings in Tahrir Square or the anti-corruption movement of Anna Hazare closer home show that those with an eye out for the future have embraced change. Public activism pursued through social media is no longer spasmodic, even for an epochal event. Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube are the main protagonists that have transformed the way our entire society functions and revolutionized the ways in which we interact with our colleagues, friends, and family. Today, social media is an inextricable force-for-change in nearly everything, political and commercial, and therefore, PR must be included in its sweep.

PR, defined as building relationships and managing reputations by communicating and maintaining levels of goodwill between an organization and its publics,

is already impacted substantially. I recall a time in the early 1990s when I co-founded Perfect Relations, when PR traditionally consisted of a largely one-way flow of information in the form of press releases outwards. It was seen almost as a black art, distinct and separate from marketing and advertising. Although PR, both for the company and the industry, has continued to evolve, the advent of social media marked a paradigm shift in what we do daily. Social media has spelt the beginning of the end of information hoarders and intermediaries, breaking down barriers and allowing for dissemination of information without a single dominant narrative or narrator. By making both communication and connection with others easier and faster than before, it has emerged as an engine for change in the world and also in our own PR industry.

I always say that being connected is a 'fundamental right' now. Even the so-called down-to-earth politicians have realized this. Last year, we witnessed a truly defining general election, one of many we have worked on, in which social platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and blogs proved to be the front-running game changers. When Shri Narendra Modi actually declared victory, it was in the form of a Twitter message to his more than 4 million followers on the micro blogging platform. The tweet was re-tweeted over 69,000 times as evidence of Modi's popularity among an electorate that included 150 million first-time youth voters. It also saw for the first time in India that more than 150 politicians jumped aboard the Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube bandwagons to disseminate information about policies, rallies, and voter statistics. Election 2014 showed that political parties also have realized that online campaigning is a game changer. It influences people and sets trends and is merciless to those who do not engage.

But even where it seems that traditional media dominates, it is increasingly influenced and even led by social media. As elsewhere in the world, in India too, most social media users appear to follow newspapers, TV stations, or journalists for breaking news on Twitter. Standing at a little over 22.2 million, India is already the second largest user base for Twitter in the Asia-Pacific

<sup>40</sup> *The Economic Times* (2015, September 3). Retrieved 15 October, 2015 from <http://economictimes.indiatimes.com/tech/internet/indias-internet-user-base-354-million-registers-17-growth-in-first-6-months-of-2015-iamai-report/articleshow/48780291.cms>

<sup>41</sup> *The Economic Times*. (2015, June 17). Retrieved 15 October, 2015 from [http://articles.economictimes.indiatimes.com/2015-06-17/news/63540701\\_1\\_social-media-users-urban-india-social-networking-sites](http://articles.economictimes.indiatimes.com/2015-06-17/news/63540701_1_social-media-users-urban-india-social-networking-sites)

<sup>42</sup> *Firstpost* (2015). Retrieved 15 October, 2015 from <http://tech.firstpost.com/news-analysis/facebook-user-base-has-now-climbed-to-125-million-users-in-india-272186.html>

<sup>43</sup> Retrieved 15 October, 2015 from <http://forbesindia.com/article/recliner/sticking-to-the-basics-always-helps-on-youtube/39723/1>

<sup>44</sup> Retrieved 15 October, 2015 from <http://indianexpress.com/article/technology/social/linkedin-sees-50-per-cent-growth-in-india-crosses-30-mn-user-mark/>

<sup>45</sup> *Huffington Post*. Retrieved 15 October, 2015 from [http://www.huffingtonpost.in/2015/01/28/twitter-india-userbase-report\\_n\\_6562950.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.in/2015/01/28/twitter-india-userbase-report_n_6562950.html)

region.<sup>46</sup> The use of Twitter during natural calamities, as witnessed recently in Nepal in the aftermath of the earthquake, now routinely involves frequent updates enabled by Twitter. Understanding these behavioural patterns is now critical for PR professionals when strategizing any campaign. Our team responsible for social media engineering is now arguably the largest in the domestic PR sector.

I recall we had a client, one of India's premier cricket league teams. Being owned by an old-fashioned company, they were not able to take proper advantage of their market presence. By devising an entirely new social media strategy, we were able to completely transform their online presence. Their Facebook fan page became the most accessed in India and the fifth most popular in the entire world. With no paid advertisements, it averaged a half million new fans every single week. Our social media strategy increased its brand value across the country, turning the team into the Indian Premier League's most highly valued team.

With these changes, brands also need to become cognizant of the challenges of communicating core brand values across different social networks/platforms. The role of PR has now got sharply defined into being able to convert core brand values into multiple expressions suitable for specific social media vehicles. This is technically difficult and often creates tricky situations between the client and the agency.

The reason for this is of course that custodians of brand values within corporates are often quite rigid. They recognize that maintaining brand perimeters is crucial for ensuring that dilution does not become a routine. If unsupervised, very often such changes in brand values could, over a period of time, dilute the very offer that the brand stands for. However, able practitioners of the arcane art of PR will insist that while the custodians must be respected, what needs to be respected even more is the nature of customer engagement and its nuanced changes between platforms. There is also a bigger fundamental issue. The customers themselves are very often different on the social platforms, and extending customer reach is,

after all, the fundamental duty of the PR practitioner (and the brand custodian!).

In doing this, the PR industry is also evolving from single message, multiple media to multiple media, single values—a transition that currently defines the emerging practice of PR as far as customer brands are concerned vis-à-vis the new emerging forms of social media.

This also makes PR an even more fast-paced business than its 24×7 avatar. We are now 60×24×7, that is, a quick response to a consumer must go in a minute simply because its impact is greatest before the law of diminishing returns kicks in. Quick and constant engagement is the new mantra. Just recall the recent Maggi noodle controversy. Not accounting for the crucial role of understanding the nature of social media in crisis management, grievous market and shareholder-value harm to the brand happened quickly. Quite likely, the severity of the crisis could have been alleviated early, had the company responded with greater alacrity.

When it comes to visuals of course, there is a whole brave new world opening up and the changes that are happening there are still being documented, whether it is customer experience with the product, or ways of digitally enhancing a product in the market, or creating visual impact using as it were staid corporate-endorsed visuals but in interesting contexts. Old-age influencer mapping is today more rapidly researched and instantly deployed. We recently created a national campaign against tobacco that involved creating an online petition targeting youth as well as influencers across sectors, including members of parliament and government officials, celebrities, journalists, and social advocates. This provided enhanced visibility among the stakeholders and government officials. The media finally picked up these conversations on social media and it created a vibrant public debate on the issue.

As social media continues to become more important in the world of communication, what does the future look like? No crystal-ball gazing, but I firmly believe that while Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, etc., will continue to be important on some level. Niche, industry-specific new style networks will be of greater value in the future. It is the next step in the evolution of communications. Social media will certainly not be a one-size-fits-all solution.

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<sup>46</sup> David, N. (2015, August 18). *Twitter news: A subtle experiment that helps keep you informed!*  
Retrieved 1 October, 2015 from <http://m.tech.firstpost.com/news-analysis/twitter-news-a-subtle-experiment-that-helps-keep-you-informed-278144.html>



# Social Media as an Evolving Crisis Messaging Channel for Reputation Management

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Whenever you scan through the news feed or chat with your fellow community members on social media, there would always appear a discussion highlighting a crisis situation. Terror attacks around the world, food safety recalls, or even uprisings due to organizations not addressing the emerging issues or trends invariably get transformed into crisis situations. A cyber attack on a large global brand that heightens the fear of privacy and identity theft also questions how the brand engages, responds, and acts in such situations.

The evolution of social media has brought forth new challenges, issues, and risks that crisis communication professionals have to address. Crisis communicators face many obstacles while engaging with impacted audiences during a crisis. While certain elements keep changing due to the emerging technologies and platforms, there are some universal practices and challenges that the communication and business professionals will always have to bear in mind. Communicators must determine how and where to disseminate effective crisis messages. To develop persuasive and effective messages that resonate with audiences' interests and expectations, the crisis communicator must have concrete information about how a crisis situation is perceived by the audience.

In this piece, I will address the following three questions:

- How social media acts as an integrated crisis messaging channel and a platform for crisis communication professionals?
- What are the emerging challenges and issues pertaining to social media and crisis communication?
- How to move forward in addressing the emerging trends in crisis communication through research and practice in social media?

## CRISIS MESSAGING

Traditionally, most of the crisis communications' research has focused on the most effective message strategies in a crisis situation<sup>47</sup> and their impact on the relationship between an organization and its audiences.<sup>48</sup> Having a strong relationship with the key audiences in a crisis situation is fundamental for the longevity of a brand and individual's reputation for successful crisis recovery. Strong communicators are essential and, as Reynolds and Seeger stated, there is a "need for skilled communicators to strategically defend and explain the organization's position in the face of crisis-induced criticism, threat, and uncertainty".<sup>49</sup> In many cases, the crisis communication professional acts as the liaison—a reputation manager in the crisis—someone who represents the brand while strategizing messages and tactics to help the corporation overcome the crisis and protect the organization's overall corporate image and reputation.

Researchers have explored the impact of message strategies in crisis by focusing on the intention to comply to message strategies based on source.<sup>50</sup> However, age cohorts have also been found to play an important role in understanding which source, situation, and message credibility should be considered while communicating

<sup>47</sup> Coombs, W.T., & Holladay, S.J. (2008). Comparing apology to equivalent crisis response strategies: Clarifying apology's role and value in crisis communication. *Public Relations Review*, 34(3), 252–257.

<sup>48</sup> Coombs, W.T., & Holladay, S.J. (in press). Public relations' 'relationship identity' in research: Enlightenment or illusion. *Public Relations Review*. Advance online publication. doi:10.1016/j.pubrev.2013.12.008

<sup>49</sup> Reynolds, B., & Seeger, M.W. (2005). Crisis and emergency risk communication as an integrative model. *Journal of Health Communication*, 10(1), 43–55, p. 46.

<sup>50</sup> Freberg, K. (2012). Intention to comply with crisis messages communicated via social media. *Public Relations Review*, 38(3), 416–421.

during a crisis.<sup>51,52</sup> In fact, credibility acts as a key component when trying to persuade others in a crisis situation. Heath considered it to be “the character of the organization” that essentially evolved when the organization was transparent and honest about its position over a period of time.<sup>53</sup> These factors influence how crisis communication professionals integrate the different elements into their practices for evaluating not only the situation, but also the source of the message in a crisis situation.

Another area of focus related to the understanding of the psychological influences and impact on communication message strategies and situations involves the social media. Researchers have explored and discussed various challenges and opportunities that the crisis communication professionals need to adapt to and embrace for enhancing the theoretical understanding of the phenomenon.<sup>54</sup> These include addressing current practical issues pertaining to message strategies,<sup>55</sup> identifying the risk of having false parody accounts,<sup>56</sup> understanding the perception of crisis recovery,<sup>57</sup> using specific tools or platforms, and addressing engagement and reputation challenges.<sup>58</sup>

As stated, there have been a growing presence and line of research being built in this area of focus. While most of the research has predominately concentrated on certain methods, new approaches like big data analytics, predictive analytics, and even some behavioural and neuroscience techniques are making their way into the body of literature growing in social media and crisis communication from other fields and in practice. In order to be able to face the growing

obstacles, challenges, and threats online, we have to evolve our own practices and approaches to message strategies and application of research.

## EMERGING ISSUES AND CHALLENGES INVOLVED IN CRISIS AND SOCIAL MEDIA PRACTICES

As mentioned above, the research area within crisis communication and social media has grown substantially over the years. However, there are some emerging issues and challenges that social media brings to the table for businesses, organizations, and individuals that need to be addressed and integrated into current crisis communication practices.

Crises do not always occur suddenly; in fact, in most cases, they can be anticipated or even forecasted. A ‘swift’ decision-making during a crisis event necessitates advance preparation. The key is for people to recognize the warning signs and act proactively on them. In many cases, organizations experience crises because they are not proactive in their business and PR strategies. Then, there are cases in which certain risks are not addressed in time, leading to significant reputation, financial, and emotional distress among the parties impacted.

While social media can be used in handling traditional crisis situations arising out of natural calamities (e.g., weather disasters) or man-made disasters (e.g., workplace violence and terrorist attacks), there are some new crisis situations that can escalate rapidly on social media to a viral scale, breaking down the traditional barriers of time, location, and gatekeepers of information.

One example involves the rise of false information and rumours, which are becoming more of a preventive issue for crisis communicators. Wan et al.<sup>59</sup> highlighted how the parody accounts assumed the “official voice” of the organization in question during a crisis, raising the concern for credibility and trustworthiness of the source. Sung and Hwang<sup>60</sup> explored how social media has become an alternative source of information for those looking for crisis messages, and therefore stressed on the growing need for integrated social media and traditional media channels for organizations, businesses, and professionals.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Freberg, K., Saling, K., & Freberg, L. (2013). Using a situational q-sort to assess perceptions of a food recall message as a function of delivery via social, organizational or traditional media. *Journal of Contingencies and Crisis Management*, 21(4), 225–230.

<sup>53</sup> Heath, R.L. (2006). Best practices in crisis communication evolution of practice through research. *Journal of Applied Communication Research*, 34(3), 245–248, p. 246.

<sup>54</sup> Liu, B.F., & Fraustino, J.D. (2014). Beyond image repair: Suggestions for crisis communication theory development. *Public Relations Review*, 40(3), 543–546.

<sup>55</sup> Freberg (2012).

<sup>56</sup> Wan, S., Koh, R., Ong, A., & Pang, A. (2015). Parody social media accounts: Influence and impact on organizations during crisis. *Public Relations Review*, 41(3), 381–385.

<sup>57</sup> Austin, L.L., Liu, B.F., & Jin, Y. (2014). Examining signs of recovery: How senior crisis communicators define organizational crisis recovery. *Public Relations Review*, 40(5), 844–846.

<sup>58</sup> Ott, L., & Theunissen, P. (2015). Reputations at risk: Engagement during social media crises. *Public Relations Review*, 41(1), 97–102.

<sup>59</sup> Op. cit., Wan et al. (2015).

<sup>60</sup> Sung, M., & Hwang, J. S. (2014). Who drives a crisis? The diffusion of an issue through social networks. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 36, 246–257.

Now that fake information and rumours have become an integral part of social media, crisis communication professionals have to evaluate the message content and determine the source, the level of credibility attributed to the source, and the network analysis of the community to see who is sharing this content. Parody accounts that are viewed as a trustworthy source can do substantial and long-lasting damage towards reputation if they are not addressed in a timely manner. An example of this is BP's Gulf Oil Spill crisis in 2010 in which BP had to deal with a fake PR Twitter account, spreading information by impersonating the company.<sup>61</sup> Also, a hoax such as a fake cyberattack, while causing emotional distress, community uncertainty, and concern initially, can actually reduce trust with the brand for real future crisis situations. For example, Chipotle<sup>62</sup> 'faked' its Twitter hack in 2013 and raised some concerns among experts, media, and social media professionals about what would be the consequences and trust among key audiences if the situation did actually happen in the future.

There is still a gap in perception of what makes a crisis a crisis versus when an organization is actually recovering from a crisis. Austin et al.<sup>63</sup> explored how crisis communication professionals defined organizational recovery and came up with their definition based on the 20 interviews conducted with crisis communications professionals. These researchers defined crisis recovery as a process that "begins when crises end, which can be determined by public perception and repair of symbolic and physical damage."<sup>64</sup>

In addition, there is a growing level of discussion pertaining to whether certain messages should be used only in particular situations and if the overall design and strategy of these messages should consider the impact of first impression. While most of the social media and crisis research focus on using surveys, content analysis, network analysis, or interviews to explore certain questions, a new line of research has emerged in the social media and crisis communication arena that uses a new psychology research method in

measuring first impressions. Funder et al.<sup>65</sup> developed the Riverside Situational Q-sort, or otherwise known as the RSQ, which is a research method used to quantify subjective impressions of any situation. In addition, RSQ is a tool that can help inform researchers about the impact of certain messages based on the situation involved<sup>66</sup> and enable practitioners to use this as a method to test messages to be included in their strategic communication plans. For using this tool for a reputation purpose, researchers and practitioners can test to determine whether or not the source (corporation, individual, or group) has a presence or impact on the given situation or channel.

## FUTURE STEPS

Crisis messaging and social media research need to bridge the gap between the underlying theoretical components of behaviour, perception, and attitude change and how these insights can be applied to strategic messages and action steps to be taken by individuals and organizations. There are several steps that practitioners can take while implementing their crisis communication practices.

First, there is a need for tailoring the crisis messages to fit not only the situation, but the audience and the platform as well. Practitioners and researchers could examine and test messages in different situations across different age cohorts, sub-groups and cultures, and explore differences and similarities based on gender, age, source or channel of information, or ethnicity to identify whether the message reverberates the same way.

Second, there is a growing need for crisis communication professionals to have a better understanding that not all messages resonate with each audience; and as more companies, professionals, and researchers embrace a global society, this becomes more important to note and integrate into current practice. Most of the practices and research in this area have focused on one industry or one location, but as we move towards becoming a global society, having a global perspective on social media and crisis communication becomes crucial.

<sup>61</sup> Harlow, W.F., Brantley, B.C., & Harlow, R.M. (2011). BP initial image repair strategies after the Deepwater Horizons spill. *Public Relations Review*, 37(1), 80–83.

<sup>62</sup> Fiegerman, S. (2013, July 25). Chipotle faked its twitter hack. Retrieved 15 October, 2015 from <http://mashable.com/2013/07/24/chipotle-faked-twitter-hack/#mNUGgQ2N5skj>

<sup>63</sup> Op. cit., Austin et al. (2014).

<sup>64</sup> Op. cit., Austin et al. (2014, p. 846).

<sup>65</sup> Funder, D.C., Guillaume, E., Kumagai, S., Kawamoto, S., & Sato, T. (2012). The person-situation debate and the assessment of situations. *Japanese Journal of Personality*, 21(1), 1–11.

<sup>66</sup> Op. cit., Freberg et al. (2013).

# Saying 'Sorry': The Role of Apology in Online Crisis Communication in India

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Indian Corporate history shows that brands rarely say 'sorry'. But social media is bringing a change in the attitude of Indian brands towards their customers. Today, apology e-mails from founders and chief executive officers (CEOs) are beginning to show up in our inboxes. Apology tweets and blog posts are also becoming more frequent. In the social media era, it can be highly damaging for a brand to refuse to take responsibility when there is clear evidence against it. Even as new norms are being set in this field, several questions emerge: When should a brand apologize? How should it go about saying sorry? On which platform should it apologize? Who should sign the apology letter? Is an apology really effective in quelling belligerent consumer behaviour online? The following sections analyse several corporate apology cases in the Indian context and attempt to find answers to some of these questions.

## APOLOGIZING FOR BLUNDERS DURING 'MEGA SALES': REPEATED APOLOGIES FOR RECURRING PROBLEMS

Flipkart, India's largest e-retailer, sent an elaborate apology from its co-founders, Sachin and Binny Bansal, when its Big Billion Day Sale ran into trouble. The highly publicized sale marked a celebration of Flipkart's journey since it was set up in the year 2007. It was held on 6 October 2014—a time when people shop for gifts for Diwali. However, things did not go as planned on the day of the sale. Consumers complained that prices of a few products were raised to maximum retail price to give the impression of deep discounts and that some products were declared 'out of stock' moments after the sale started.<sup>67</sup> Technical issues on the website further compounded problems for consumers. Soon enough, Flipkart faced a barrage of criticism on social and mainstream media both for the glitches in

the sale and for creating hype about the sale without adequate preparedness.

The next day, every Flipkart user received a 642-word apology e-mail signed by the co-founders. Flipkart also tweeted the apology the same day.<sup>68</sup> The Bansals not only used the word 'sorry' twice in the letter but also shared the 'lessons' they had learnt from the problems faced during the sale. They promised to work "doubly hard to address all the issues that cropped up during the sale".<sup>69</sup> The apology from the co-founders caught the attention of the Indian consumer, who is rarely used to receiving apologies from top executives.

Flipkart appeared to set the trend in apologies for brands, especially e-commerce players. The company acquired Myntra in May 2014 and a year later, the latter shut down its website and turned into a mobile-only app. On 30–31 May 2015, Myntra held the much-hyped "Appreciate Yourself" sale during which many consumers were unable to load the app properly. Customers took to social media to complain about the app and share their frustrations with the sale. Thereafter, Myntra e-mailed an apology note to its registered users. Here's an excerpt from the apology:

We failed to live up to your expectations due to technical glitches that affected the experience on the App for some consumers. We are sincerely sorry if it affected your shopping experience with us, as giving you anything less than an awesome fashion shopping experience is simply not okay with us. We would like to tell you that all the technical issues have been fixed.<sup>70</sup>

<sup>67</sup> Mishra, S., & Bhalla, B. (2015). *Flipkart says sorry*. Case with product number 914-037-1 listed with European Case Clearing House.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> Saxena, A. (2014, October 7). Flipkart apologizes to customers for mega sale glitches. *The Times of India*. Retrieved 11 September, 2015 from <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/tech/tech-news/Flipkart-apologizes-to-customers-for-mega-sale-glitches/article-show/44623463.cms>

<sup>70</sup> Singh, A. (2015, June 4). Myntra does a Flipkart, apologises for tech glitch during mega-sale. Retrieved 10 September, 2015 from [http://www.exchange4media.com/digital/myntra-does-a-flipkart-apologises-over-tech-glitch-during-mega-sale\\_60277.html](http://www.exchange4media.com/digital/myntra-does-a-flipkart-apologises-over-tech-glitch-during-mega-sale_60277.html)

Myntra had to apologize yet again when its two-day 'end of season' sale held in July 2015, which included offers with massive discounts, was marked by technical glitches. When Myntra fixed the technical glitches on day 1 of the sale, several consumers praised it on social media. However, negative messages soon followed when consumers faced technical errors after the company launched a special 90 per cent off sale at 1:00 pm on day 2 of the mega sale.<sup>71</sup> When customers vented their disappointment on Twitter, Myntra apologized with the following tweet: "Sorry Tweeps, we've run out of 95% & 90% deals but we have loads of amazing products with 70% off on 15,000 + styles. Stay tuned for more!"<sup>72</sup> The apology tweet did not mention the technical glitches faced by the customers the second time around.

Here, the pertinent question is: What happens when a company or its constituents repeat the same mistakes? Repeated apologies for recurring problems do not help brand equity. Instead, they leave scars on the brand. Here is a tweet from a consumer who appeared frustrated with recurring issues characterizing sales organized by Myntra: "@cr\_charan: Dont know why do you guys always announcing [sic] such a BIG sale day and keep failing. #myntra." This tweet was posted minutes after the sale was launched on day 1 of the mega sale event organized by Myntra in July 2015.<sup>73</sup>

Furthermore, when a brand repeatedly apologizes for its mistakes, the apology carries little meaning for consumers. One needs to keep in mind that consumers do not expect the brand to stop at saying sorry. Instead, they expect the brand to repair the damage, take corrective action, compensate, or at least undo the damage. They also expect the brand to stop committing the same mistake over and over again. The following section analyses cases where an apology from a brand may be perceived as inadequate in reducing the damage done by an insensitive act.

### Apologizing for Cashing in on the April 2015 Nepal Earthquake: Not All is Forgiven

An apology may not be enough to repair the damage done by a promotional stunt that is outrageously

insensitive. Take the case of Indian eyewear portal Lenskart's advertisement following the earthquake in Nepal at 11:56 am on 25 April 2015 that killed and injured thousands of people. Lenskart sent the following short message service (SMS) the same day: "DZ-LNSKRT: Shake it off like this Earthquake: Get any Vincent Chase Sunglasses upto R3,000 for FLAT R500 by sending invites to 50 friends @www.lenskart.com/refer-sun."<sup>74</sup>

When a screen shot of the SMS was shared on Twitter, it caused a major backlash.<sup>75</sup> News media also reported on the Lenskart advertisement and angry tweets that followed. For example, a response tweet stated: "StupidOfToday: @Lenskart\_com. They can send you a discount voucher to you [sic] on your funeral to celebrate it."<sup>76</sup> Even as people on Twitter did not mince words while criticizing Lenskart for its brazen insensitivity, Lenskart apologized within two hours of posting the advertisement, both through SMS and on social media: "@Lenskart\_com: We regret the wrong choice of words. We deeply apologize for unintentionally hurting any sentiments."<sup>77</sup>

While the online shopping portal tweeted the same apology several times, it did not help to immediately mitigate the shock and anger people felt at the company for being so opportunistic at the time of a terrible natural disaster. For instance, a former social media consultant tweeted: "@twilightfairy: Looks like @Lenskart\_com has chosen a bot to apologize in typical school teacher punishment fashion! #earthquake."<sup>78</sup> This twitter handle has more than 23,000 followers, implying that such angry tweets against the company's actions reached thousands of people.

Around 8:00 pm the same day, Lenskart followed up with a more elaborate apology from its co-founders, Peyush Bansal and Amit Chaudhary, which was

<sup>71</sup> Technical glitches during weekend sale, Myntra faces customers' ire (2015, July 19). *DNA*. Retrieved 4 September, 2015 from <http://www.dnaindia.com/money/report-technical-glitches-during-weekend-sale-myntra-faces-customers-ire-2106007>

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> Retrieved 15 September, 2015 from <http://indianexpress.com/article/blogs/blog-lenskart-offers-discount-to-shake-it-off-like-the-nepal-earthquake/>

<sup>75</sup> Sharma, S. (2015, April 25). Lenskart's apology to its earthquake SMS campaign isn't currying any favour. *Huffington Post*. Retrieved 1 September, 2015 from [http://www.huffingtonpost.in/2015/04/25/lenskart-sms-earthquake\\_n\\_7142038.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.in/2015/04/25/lenskart-sms-earthquake_n_7142038.html)

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> Mishra, R. (2015, April 25). #Lenskart apologizes over Nepal earthquake message about Twitterati slam marketing opportunist! *India.com*. Retrieved 4 September, 2015 from <http://www.india.com/whatever/lenskart-apologizes-over-nepal-earthquake-message-but-twitterati-slam-marketing-opportunist-364402/>

<sup>78</sup> Op. cit., Sharma (2015).

posted on its blog and e-mailed to registered users. The company also tweeted a link to the apology letter, which was titled, "We are Sorry!"<sup>79</sup> The letter was emotional in tone and written with a personal touch, unlike the apology SMS and tweets, which sounded more like template apologies. Here is an excerpt from the apology letter:

Today we sent out an sms offer which referred to the earthquake in poor taste. This is completely unacceptable to us and is against the standard that we have set for ourselves as a responsible member of society. We are really sorry that this has happened. We have already taken steps to put safeguards in place to ensure that is [sic] never ever repeated.<sup>80</sup>

Lenskart was not the only brand that tried to peg a product promotion to the massive earthquake. Troika Consulting, a well-known talent agency, came up with a message: "Earthquake shakes India 7.5 on Richter scale—If you were busy updating your status as you evacuated the building, we might have a job for you in our social media team."<sup>81</sup> Similarly, fashion label American Swan's ad read, "Whoaaaa! This is an Earth Shattering offer." Both companies soon apologized for their insensitivity.<sup>82</sup> Commenting on the insensitive marketing by these brands, Sen,<sup>83</sup> in his article published in *Ad Age India*, remarked "Now, being an opportunist is not so bad in today's world, but being opportunistic and insensitive is a crime."

*ScoopWhoop*, a viral content website, made a similar mistake when it published an article titled, "16 Thoughts That Went through Everyone's Mind When the Earthquake Happened" in the aftermath of the Nepal earthquake. On the same day, the company's Editor-in-Chief, Sriparna Tikekar, issued an apology taking responsibility for the blunder and promising to re-assess the way their team came up with content ideas. The apology note closed with the following statement: "As the Editor-in-Chief, I apologize to each one of you and I'll be donating a month's salary to

Prime Minister's National Relief Fund."<sup>84</sup> This note was followed by a request to the public to donate to the relief fund as well and carried a screen shot of the acknowledgement receipt from the PM's Relief Fund for Tikekar's own contribution.<sup>85</sup>

### Crafting a Genuine and Credible Apology

The brands discussed above apologized in myriad ways and received a variety of responses as well. It is in this context that Kellerman<sup>86</sup> points out that there is no such thing as a simple apology: "To acknowledge a transgression, seek forgiveness, and make things right is a complex act." Nick Smith, author of the book, *I Was Wrong: The Meaning of Apologies*, lists nine elements that mark a categorical apology. In a genuine apology, the offender must take responsibility for things he/she is accountable for, admit his/her wrongdoing, express regret, apologize in public, if necessary, and offer reparation to the affected party. However, we must remember that an apology is possible only when all parties agree on the course of events or on the facts, at least.<sup>87</sup>

In the context of apologizing online, especially on social media, several additional factors need to be taken into consideration. One of the first requirements of apologizing on social media is to act quickly. However, the need for speed has to be simultaneously balanced with adequate brainstorming regarding the goal of the apology, possible reactions from consumers, effectiveness of the apology, research on past cases and their outcomes, and the culture of that country. Emphasizing the role played by cultural values in apology communication, Maddux et al.,<sup>88</sup> in their article published in the *Harvard Business Review*, point out that it is important for executives to understand the

<sup>79</sup> Bansal, P. & Chaudhary, A. (2015). *We are sorry*. Retrieved 5 September, 2015 from <http://blog.lenskart.com/we-are-sorry>

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> Sen, S. (2015, April 27). Lenskart, American Swan, ScoopWhoop apologize for insensitive marketing around Nepal earthquake. *Ad Age India*. Retrieved 4 September, 2015 from <http://www.adageindia.in/marketing/news/lenskart-scoopwhoop-apologize-for-insensitive-marketing-around-nepal-earthquake/articleshow/47053015.cms>

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

<sup>84</sup> Tikekar, S. (2015, April 25). Sorry, we messed up. Scoopwhoop.com. Retrieved 3 September, 2015 from <http://www.scoopwhoop.com/inothernews/apology/>

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

<sup>86</sup> Kellerman, B. (2006, April). When should a leader apologize—and when not? *Harvard Business Review*. Retrieved 4 September, 2015 from <http://hbr.org/2006/04/when-should-a-leader-apologize-and-when-not>

<sup>87</sup> Weisul, K. (2011, March 17). So sorry! The art of the corporate (non-)apology. CBSNews.com. Retrieved 4 September, 2015 from <http://www.cbsnews.com/news/so-sorry-the-art-of-the-corporate-non-apology/>

<sup>88</sup> Maddux, W.W., Kim, P.H., Okumara, T., & Brett, J. (2012, June). Why 'I'm sorry' doesn't always translate. *Harvard Business Review*. Retrieved 7 September, 2015 from <http://hbr.org/2012/06/why-im-sorry-doesnt-always-translate>

meaning and implication of an apology in a particular country before actually delivering it.

Further, the social media platform on which the apology is posted also assumes tremendous importance in the case of online crisis communication. If the uproar against a brand is on Twitter, it needs to respond on Twitter first. A more elaborate apology may follow as an e-mail or a blog post. Most importantly, the apology needs to sound heartfelt and reader-friendly. The apology letter should not be written in a press release format.<sup>89</sup> Instead, it should follow a personal, narrative style, especially on social media. Actually using the word 'sorry' in the apology message helps to make it sound more genuine and heartfelt. In an article titled "The Art of the Corporate Apology," Lee<sup>90</sup> explains: "it all comes down to respect.... Our customers are people, just like us, and they want a straightforward and honest apology when we make a mistake that affects them."

To make one's apology credible, a brand must mention both what it is doing to resolve the problem and how it will ensure that such a situation does not arise again. Here, a brand needs to get specific, not saying it is 'doing everything' to address the issue. In case of the Myntra apology for the 'technical glitches' during its "Appreciate Yourself Sale," the company's promise of an "awesome fashion shopping experience" by merely saying that "all technical issues have been fixed" does not appear to cut much ice, especially since the same issues cropped up in the next sale.

In comparison, the apology from Flipkart's co-founders, e-mailed to users on 7 October 2014, offered details about how the company had prepared for the sale,

what went wrong in terms of technical glitches, and how the company was planning to take care of such issues in the future:

We had deployed nearly 5,000 servers and had prepared for 20 times the traffic growth—but the volume of traffic at different times of the day was much higher than this. We are continuing to significantly scale up all our back end systems so that we do a much, much better job next time.<sup>91</sup>

Such specific information is always better than vague assurances. What also made the Flipkart apology believable was that it came directly from the co-founders of the company. Lee et al.<sup>92</sup> point out that "due to the high authority that CEOs have in their organizations, CEO spokespersons may enhance the believability of the crisis messages they deliver, leading publics to believe the company will adequately handle the crisis situation." However, one must also keep in mind that an elaborate apology from top executives will not yield any results if the company repeats the same mistakes over and over again without taking any corrective action.

Corrective actions taken by the company add credence to an apology. For instance, the *Scoopwhoop* Editor-in-Chief donating a month's salary for those affected by the Nepal Earthquake was a move in the right direction. Attaching the acknowledgement of the payment receipt and inviting others to donate helped to drive home the sincerity of the message. What brands need to keep in mind is that even an apology offers an opportunity to engage with customers. It need not be a one-way communication.

<sup>89</sup> Lee, K.K. (2012). The art of the corporate apology. Forbes.com. Retrieved 3 September, 2015 from <http://www.forbes.com/sites/katelee/2012/10/04/the-art-of-the-corporate-apology/>

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

<sup>91</sup> Op. cit., Saxena (2014).

<sup>92</sup> Lee, J., Kim, S., & Wertz, E.K. (2014). How spokesperson rank and selected media channels impact perceptions in crisis communication. *Public Relations Journal*, 8(2). Retrieved 6 September, 2015 from <http://www.prsa.org/intelligence/prjournal/documents/2014leekimwertz.pdf>

# A Values-driven Response to Environmental Challenges to Reputation

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*Skilful pilots gain their reputation from storms and tempest  
—Epicurus*

Organizations have always coped with environmental challenges through a process of scanning, identifying risks, absorbing and adapting to external pressures. One way of successfully handling such situations is through the skilful use of communication.

Early warnings about developing risks to reputation prior to this digital age gave enough time for traditional response planning but now the risks are not of the creeping nature but those that can gather dark clouds suddenly and suck organizations and individual reputation in a deadly spiral. Even if the organizations are not clearly at fault, their image can be sullied and recovery can be slow, uphill, and challenging. A trained and well-experienced leadership is needed to sail through rocking storms. To be prepared, both organization and its leaders need to be skilled in crisis management and crisis communication.

### DEALING WITH ENVIRONMENTAL CHALLENGES AT TATA

Organizations adopt a process of environmental scanning and identifying risks by systematic mapping of vulnerabilities in the business and operational environments. At the Tata group, we are deeply conscious of the environment and we monitor all media including social media very closely. This helps us ascertain the pulse of the various stakeholders including our diverse range of customers. All feedback gained from all media, including social media, is systematically processed for the necessary action. Positive feedback is conveyed to the right quarters and negative feedback is taken up seriously for examination and action in accordance with the values of the Tata group. Where the negative feedback is proven to be based on true facts, corrective action is immediately

triggered. Our responses are without exception driven by our values and we are guided by the words of JRD Tata who said that no success or achievement in material terms is worthwhile unless it is achieved by fair and honest means.

Brands have personalities and character just as humans do and public expectations about organizational and individual behaviour arise out of an understanding of the organizational character. In all media including social media, honesty, transparency, and a quick response have always helped us arrest misinformation, rumours, complaints and allegations born out of ignorance that may have catapulted into the larger public domain without basis. Besides an established passive response mechanism, we proactively engage with all our stakeholders through a variety of media including social media.

The internal organizational climate cannot be ignored as origins of crisis could well lie within. Open cultures where upward reporting of issues is encouraged have better immunity to external onslaughts. Moreover, on social media, the boundaries between internal and external communication do not exist. With the smart phone, every individual is a journalist and there is never a fixed pattern of crisis emergence. Constant online monitoring through both quantitative and qualitative measurement techniques is an absolute necessity. While the monitoring aspect can be sourced by organizations, the analysis of all media is best undertaken internally.

### Organizational Response to Reputational Crises

Threats to reputation can arise in novel ways. A recent case in India was that of a parody rap being used as a form of protest. Indian activist Sofia Ashraf's 'parody rap video' against consumer goods giant Hindustan Unilever garnered 1,765,210 views in 6 days on YouTube. The video titled "Kodaikanal Won't" called out the company for allegedly dumping toxic mercury waste in the soil and water in Kodaikanal, a city in



South India. Social media brought the 14-year-old issue into international focus and as the video grew in popularity, Paul Polman, the global CEO of Unilever, was forced to respond. He said on Twitter that the multinational company was “working actively” to find a solution to the ecology contamination and had sought the support of other stakeholders. Activists responded with cynicism. Even if the negative social media campaign has a shelf life, it leaves an indelible mark on the company’s image.

Often, it is the initial response to the crisis that sets the tone and tenor of organizational response and consequent public perception about the organization and the issue. At the Tata group, we believe, the initial response is a great opportunity to reinforce what the organization stands for and act in accordance with one’s values. A common mistake that organizations can make is to look at themselves as the victims and not care about the real victims in the case. Organizations must look beyond purely reputation issues and first do what is right and proper even when there is a legal and financial risk of liability. Organizational trust takes years to build and must be carefully nurtured. Our guiding motto in deciding our response at the Tata group has always been Leadership with Trust.

Any organizational response must maintain an organization’s character and values, and ensure responsible behaviour in accordance with its intrinsic culture. The response must reflect the cultural elements of structures, processes, collective behaviour, and ways of working and thinking within that organization. The response to any reputational threat or crisis carries the message of its character and is a distinctive determinant of future organizational image.

The case of Uber comes across as a recent example of reacting in accordance with qualities that did not generate goodwill. When a crazy gunman took hostages in a Sydney café and the public was in panic and evacuating from that area, Uber declared its pricing that was four times the normal fare. When it faced a backlash, the company weakly claimed that it wanted

to motivate drivers to show up during the crisis. Later, the company started giving away the free rides it should have offered in the first place. They were seen as having tried to profit from tragedy and as having done the right thing only after being pressured by the public and media. People will always remember the quadrupled fares and the insight into the Company psyche that the response offered rather than the corrected action later.

### A Few Lessons

While it is true that media is an important stakeholder, it should not be allowed to grab the organizational resources and attention at the cost of other important and perhaps silent stakeholders whose support is crucial in managing the crisis. In any case, swift responses are critical for arresting the escalation of controllable risks.

While dealing with environmental challenges to organizational reputation on social media or any other medium, organizations should remember a few points:

- Prevent escalation of issues into crises by constantly scanning for potential issues emerging on the horizon.
- Identify and analyse the stakeholders and prioritize them in the current context. Social media will increase the number of stakeholders, so analyse stakeholder’s expectations and pressures well.
- Understand the issue; acknowledge and accept responsibility where due and take charge, and be assertive.
- Act in accordance with organizational values and character. Actions will speak louder than words. There will always be conflicting agendas and accept that they will not always please everyone. As a brand, remain true to yourself.
- Remain worthy of continuing trust of all stakeholders in all your communications and actions.
- Train and rehearse for worst case scenarios through simulations.

# Employee Social Media Monitoring: Corporate Reputation and New Workplace Surveillance Practices

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In December 2013, the PR Manager of InterActiveCorp (IAC), Justine Sacco, tweeted a short 12-word comment<sup>93</sup> about her trip to Africa before boarding her flight. Although she had relatively few followers, her racist tweet was picked up by a technology blogger and spread across the Internet in a matter of moments. Outrage and backlash followed quickly, all while Ms Sacco was still on her flight. The hashtag #hasjustinelandedyet became one of the top trending tweets and upon her arrival in Capetown, South Africa, she was summarily fired from her position for the tweet that she later described as an unfortunately worded joke. IAC, which is the parent company for some of the top media brands on the Internet such as Vimeo, Tinder, Dictionary.com, OKCupid, and College Humor, immediately made it clear that the “outrageous, offensive comment does not reflect the views and values of IAC”<sup>94</sup> and sought to repair the damage done within these circumstances.

That employees of a company are representative of the values of a given brand has historically been made evident, and when these two do not align, as in the case of this tweet and IAC, there are consequences. Countless other examples can be found—from the ousting of CEOs to reprimands of line-level employees who have acted outside of brand expectations. The importance and value of representing the company—putting the values of the brand into action—have always been important, particularly for industries such as hospitality and retail.<sup>95</sup> However, the idea that employees should embody

corporate values and live up to the expectations of their employer outside the workplace has largely become important in the past few decades and all the more so with the advent of social media. Personal practices and CRs have begun to significantly overlap and this is increasingly becoming a problem, something that corporations have begun to monitor. Employees are not only encouraged to be representatives for their brand, but also increasingly asked to “live the brand.”<sup>96</sup> According to Gotsi and Wilson, this “living of the brand” is about internalizing brand values and aligning them with internal communications and human resources, with the overall focus on encouraging and assessing employees for their “on brand behaviour.”<sup>97</sup> Invariably, this living of the brand flows beyond the boundaries of paid work time.

Significantly, expectations and discussions about employees as being brand ‘advocates,’ ‘ambassadors,’ or ‘champions’ largely predate the rise and ubiquity of social media, in which public and private lives (of employees) are increasingly blurred.<sup>98</sup> Currently, there are numerous and often unstated expectations about promoting or at least reflecting positively on the employer on a range of social media. Corporations are encouraged to protect their brand and this includes ‘managing employees’ as brand representatives.<sup>99</sup> As such, a continued and sustained focus on the social media practices of employees creates what can be seen as a new form of workplace surveillance. By looking at these practices as forms of surveillance, new questions are raised about the relationship between brand reputation management and the employees that sustain these brands. The surveillance

<sup>93</sup> The Tweet read: “Going to Africa. Hope I don’t get AIDS. Just kidding. I’m white!” See Ronson, J. (12 February, 2015). How one stupid tweet blew up Justine Sacco’s life. *New York Times*. Retrieved 1 September, 2015 from <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/02/15/magazine/how-one-stupid-tweet-ruined-justine-saccos-life.html>

<sup>94</sup> Gandelman, J. (2013). Consequences, shmonsequences in action. Retrieved 1 September, 2015 from <http://www.cagle.com/2013/12/consequences-shmonsequences-in-action/>

<sup>95</sup> Saxton, M.K. (1998). Where do reputations come from? *Corporate Reputation Review*, 1(4), 393–399.

<sup>96</sup> Gotsi, M., & Wilson, A. (2001). Corporate reputation management: ‘Living the brand’. *Management Decision*, 39(2), 99–104.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid., p. 103.

<sup>98</sup> Murthy, D. (2012). Towards a sociological understanding of social media: Theorizing Twitter. *Sociology*, 46(6), 1059–1073.

<sup>99</sup> Rokka, J., Karlsson, K., & Tienari, J. (2014). Balancing acts: Managing employees and reputation in social media. *Journal of Marketing Management*, 30(7–8), 802–827.

of employee social media use can significantly modify and expand the relationship between employers and employees in ways that can be both positive and detrimental.

## EMPLOYEE SOCIAL MEDIA MONITORING AS SURVEILLANCE

The presence of brands on social media has been an evolutionary process. A few years ago, Susan Fournier and Jill Avery suggested that brands and those representing those brands were not ‘invited’ to social media and their presence was often viewed as an intrusion within these spaces.<sup>100</sup> However, currently, brands are not only expected to be on social media, there are growing expectations that they should actively participate in these channels as well. This participation is largely focused on providing content and service, but beyond marketing and customer service tasks, the role of other employees participating in social media in relation to the corporation remains unclear. Perhaps, in part, because of and in response to this ambiguity, the participation of employees on social media is increasingly subject to monitoring.

This monitoring can be described in a number of different ways for different purposes. While this can be seen as reputation management through risk analysis, it is also about efficiency, productivity, workflow, and morale amongst others. The focus in this article is on conceptualizing the monitoring of employees as a form of surveillance, that is, as a “focused systematic and routine attention to personal details for purposes of influence, management, protection or direction.”<sup>101</sup> While much has been written regarding forms of workplace surveillance<sup>102,103</sup> and forms of social media surveillance,<sup>104,105</sup> the combination of the two—an ongoing monitoring and control of employees’ social

media practices—as a form of surveillance is limited. Drawing on surveillance studies provides a different perspective to understand and evaluate social media monitoring as a new form of workplace surveillance.

It is important to note that there are two faces of surveillance—one of care and the other of control.<sup>106</sup> Most often, surveillance can be seen as a set of practices that limits both risky practices through control mechanisms and/or ongoing observations. This is often articulated in negative terms; however, these practices can also be seen as more positive forms of care. Within the workplace, the monitoring of the routine behaviour is certainly intended to control employee actions, for instance, through recording and reviewing of customer service calls. However, these same practices can be seen to care for or safeguard employees in these circumstances, protecting them from abusive customers or mismanagement by their superiors. Further, this is also about ‘care’ for the organization, protecting the brand from potentially detrimental acts by employees. In the case of social media monitoring, although the formal and informal monitoring of employees may be intended to control practices, routine use also includes the acknowledgement of birthdays, special events, personal circumstances, and more importantly, contributing to personal well-being and promoting positive social relationships within the workplace.

## WORKPLACE SOCIAL MEDIA SURVEILLANCE IMPLICATIONS

Workplace surveillance can be multifaceted, drawing together various routines and practices. A surveillance perspective allows us to evaluate these practices in a number of ways; however, this article focuses on three interrelated and interwoven concerns the surveillance brings to the foreground:

- Power and Transparency—empowerment of employees and the capacities of corporate cultures
- Normalization—standardization of implicit work routines
- Function creep—the movement of certain practices beyond original intentions

<sup>100</sup> Fournier, S., & Avery, J. (2011). The uninvited brand. *Business Horizons*, 54(3), 193–207.

<sup>101</sup> Lyon, D. (2007). *Surveillance studies: An overview*. Cambridge: Polity, p. 14.

<sup>102</sup> Ball, K. (2010). Workplace surveillance: An overview. *Labor History*, 51(1), 87–106.

<sup>103</sup> Sewell, G. (2012). Organization, employees and surveillance. In D. Lyon, K. Ball, & K.D. Haggerty (Eds), *Routledge handbook of surveillance studies* (pp. 303–312). Abingdon, UK: Routledge.

<sup>104</sup> Trottier, D. (2012). *Social media as surveillance: Rethinking visibility in a converging world*. Surrey, England: Ashgate Publishing Ltd.

<sup>105</sup> Albrechtslund, A. (2008). Online social networking as participatory surveillance. *First Monday*, 13(3). Retrieved 9 September, 2015 from <http://firstmonday.org/htbin/cgiwrap/bin/ojs/index.php/fm/article/view/2142/1949>

<sup>106</sup> Lyon, D. (2001). *Surveillance society: Monitoring everyday life*. UK: McGraw-Hill Education.

## Power and Transparency

For employees, social media can be seen as a new mechanism for empowerment: Social media provides a new outlet in which employees can engage with their employer and share publicly the successes and experiences of and within their workplace. Employees “expect that their opinions are being heard and appreciated,” often using social media to express themselves.<sup>107</sup> Through this, corporate culture has also become “increasingly transparent online as employees’ social media activities make an organization’s values, behaviours, beliefs, and overall organizational character visible to stakeholders.”<sup>108</sup> The possibility that frustrations and discontent with employers might be made public through social media channels is ever present. Further, corporate secrets and fiscal conditions may be released purposely or inadvertently through social media use that may expose the organization to legal liabilities.<sup>109</sup> More importantly perhaps, social media use may also reveal concerns about the well-being of individual employees that may have a bearing on on-the-job performance.<sup>110</sup> In all of these contexts, both employer and employee become increasingly transparent in the process.

In order to limit and/or resolve these negative potentials and potentially capitalize on the positive, a number of corporations have developed formal social media policies intended to ensure ‘appropriate use’ of social media that reflects their brand values.<sup>111</sup> Many of these policies outline expected employee behaviours both while ‘on- and off-the-job’, provided this latter participation relates to the brand itself or their employment. Yet, the development and enforcement of such policies, if unreasonable, can lead to limits on creativity by instilling a sense of continual oversight. This monitoring is about the power and control of the brand to limit employee actions, but as with any form of power,

it is always subject to resistance.<sup>112,113</sup> By seeing social media monitoring as a form of surveillance, the significant asymmetry of power allocated to the employer in terms of controlling and setting the parameters around what is permissible become visible. The concerns around this power further increase with the recognition that social media use significantly blurs the boundaries between public and private lives, indicating an extension of this power asymmetry into people’s ‘non-working’ time. The challenge then is to find the balance between empowerment of employees and their transparency and a holistic approach to effective (and transparent) reputation management practices.<sup>114</sup>

## Normalization

While social media policies may outline permissible activities for employees in relation to a brand on social media, expectations for social media participation are more ambiguous. In recognizing that employees play a vital role in brand impressions,<sup>115</sup> active social media participation may be seen as implicitly required for positive employment evaluations, even though this is not explicitly outlined. Rokka et al.<sup>116</sup> note in their investigation of three different organizations that all of them “expect positive communication from their employees in social media. This is despite the fact that openness, truthfulness, and authenticity are emphasized as important brand values.” From a surveillance perspective, this example is indicative of how external expectations become internalized. While corporate rhetoric around social media tends to be about honesty and authenticity, it is anticipated that employees’ social media use in relation to work will be positive.

Of course, the objectives of many management personnel are to create a positive and welcoming environment. To accomplish this, social media may be used as in some cases where Facebook is part of their corporate culture. In these contexts, it is difficult for an

<sup>107</sup> Dreher, S. (2014). Social media and the world of work: A strategic approach to employees’ participation in social media. *Corporate Communications: An International Journal*, 19(4), 344–356.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid., p. 345.

<sup>109</sup> DLA Piper (2011). Knowing your tweet from your trend—Keeping pace with social media in the workplace. In Report 4: *Shifting Landscapes—The Online Challenge to Traditional Business Models*. Retrieved 5 October, 2015 from [http://www.dlapipershifting-landscapes.com/export/sites/shifting-landscapes/downloads/Shifting\\_Landscapes\\_-\\_Social\\_Media.pdf](http://www.dlapipershifting-landscapes.com/export/sites/shifting-landscapes/downloads/Shifting_Landscapes_-_Social_Media.pdf)

<sup>110</sup> Sánchez Abril, P., Levin, A., & Del Riego, A. (2012). Blurred boundaries: Social media privacy and the twenty-first-century employee. *American Business Law Journal*, 49(1), 63–124.

<sup>111</sup> Op. cit., Dreher (2013).

<sup>112</sup> Foucault, M. (1979). *The history of sexuality*. London: Allen Lane.

<sup>113</sup> Xiong, L., King, C., & Piehler, R. (2013). ‘That’s not my job’: Exploring the employee perspective in the development of brand ambassadors. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 35, 348–359.

<sup>114</sup> Op. cit., Rokka et al. (2014).

<sup>115</sup> Morhart, F.M., Herzog, W., & Tomczak, T. (2009). Brand-specific leadership: Turning employees into brand champions. *Journal of Marketing*, 73(5), 122–142.

<sup>116</sup> Op. cit., Rokka et al. (2014, p. 817).

employee to resist friend requests from their boss.<sup>117</sup> In surveillance terms, all of these practices can be seen as modes of normalization—defining implicitly and sometimes explicitly—the expected behaviour of the surveillance subject. Despite positive intentions, the transition to unspoken social media evaluations can lead to limitations in opportunities and promotional chances for less prolific and engaged personnel.

### Function Creep

Finally, and related to both concerns about power and normalization, a surveillance perspective on social media monitoring highlights the potential for shifting uses and intentions. That is, although surveillance may be quite focused on mitigating a particular set of issues, there is the strong potential that these practices—particularly technology intensive ones—can shift from its original focus to other issues.<sup>118</sup> For example, social media monitoring articulated as protecting brand assets may become about personal performance; or social media engagement may be part of creating a positive corporate culture and congeniality amongst colleagues but becomes about leveraging brand promotion amongst friends or followers. Even when all of these practices are articulated in a social media policy or outlined in a corporate memorandum, this does not preclude the potential for the social media monitoring to move beyond the identified and intended frame of

<sup>117</sup> Peluchette, J.V.E, Karl, K., & Fertig, J. (2013). A Facebook 'friend' request from the boss: Too close for comfort? *Business Horizons*, 56(3), 291–300.

<sup>118</sup> Op. cit., Ball (2010).

practice as has occurred in many other surveillance cases. Seeing social media monitoring as a form of surveillance draws attention not just to the specified issues articulated by corporate practices, but also to the possibilities that are inherent in these practices.

### CONCLUSION

With an increased focus on both expanding social media presence and synchronizing corporate messages, the use of social media by employees will be crucial focal points for CR management in the coming years. It is evident that employee use of social media serves to increase a brand's visibility and reach, particularly as employees share their messages with significant social media networks of relevance to the brand.<sup>119</sup> However, seeing the monitoring of social media use as a new form of workplace surveillance makes visible certain tensions inherent in these practices. By using the lens of surveillance, issues of power and transparency, normalization of work practices, and the potential for shifts in original intention become concerns that are less often raised by approaches focusing on more financial, reputational, and legal liabilities. There is of course significant potential here as well, as this form of workplace surveillance—appropriately done—may allow for better and more positive work environments. A surveillance perspective renders visible some aspects of social media monitoring that undoubtedly will be significant in directions for CR management in the coming years.

<sup>119</sup> Op. cit., Dreher (2014).

## Can Companies Gain CSR Reputation via Social Media?

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Corporate social responsibility (CSR) reputation reflects the public's evaluation of a company's social performance over time. Due to increasing global recognition of the value of CSR and the competitive benefits it provides with regard to long-term success as well as stakeholders' higher expectations for corporate behaviour and the growing incidence of social activism, companies have been expanding their investment in activities that may earn them a good reputation

for social performance. A 2013 survey by the Committee Encouraging Corporate Philanthropy (CECP) found that the philanthropic contributions of 261 of the world's leading companies totalled more than \$25 billion in 2013, an increase of 64 per cent over 2010 levels.<sup>120</sup>

<sup>120</sup> CECP (2014). *Giving in numbers*. Retrieved 1 October, 2015 from <http://cecp.co/measurement/benchmarking-reports/giving-in-numbers.html>

CSR communication is one of the primary efforts that companies make to manage their CSR reputation. Just as corporate communication contributes to forming reputation,<sup>121,122,123</sup> so, a company's communication about its CSR practices can affect its CSR reputation.<sup>124,125</sup> Communication bridges the gap between a company's actual CSR practices and the public's knowledge of them, which is the basis for their assessment of the company.

Companies can communicate their CSR efforts through various channels, such as reaching the public indirectly via the media and directly via official communication channels—for instance, company websites, social media, and CSR reports. Scholarly literature has emphasized the role of the news media in forming CR,<sup>126,127</sup> but in the Web 2.0 era, with the growing number of social media users and the paradigm shift of CSR communication from one-way to two-way (also known as co-creation), direct communication channels deserve more attention.

The present article focuses on CSR communication through social media, which offer unique opportunities for gaining CSR reputation. First, social media are significant platforms for increasing a company's visibility, and second, a company can build relationships by forming shared goals with the public through ongoing conversation about CSR. These two prospects, in conjunction with the unique features of social media, open up opportunities for a company to gain CSR reputation.

## HOW SOCIAL MEDIA WORK

First, communicating CSR via social network sites (SNSs) can generate greater visibility for a company, which is crucial to forming a CSR reputation. Impression management theory<sup>128,129</sup> suggests reasons why people are motivated to respond to CSR messages on SNSs through such actions as sharing, liking, commenting, following, or tweeting. Impression management is "the process by which individuals attempt to control the impressions others form of them,"<sup>130</sup> and people can manage the impression others have of them on SNSs by showing others their support for good causes through actions such as following a company's CSR page or account or sharing content from them. For example, having CSR as a topic on a Facebook page can increase the probability that the public will share or like that page.<sup>131</sup> Once someone shares a post or likes a page on Facebook, it will appear on the Facebook newsfeed of that person's friends, which will increase that person's visibility and make him or her appear altruistic or conscientious while simultaneously increasing the visibility of the company involved. If a company becomes more visibly associated with a CSR story on social media, that may, in turn, affect the public's evaluation of the company's CSR performance.

Second, companies can build relationships with the public by engaging them in CSR activities. Previous studies have suggested that frequent interactions between a company and its stakeholders can generate higher stakeholder engagement with a company's SNS pages or accounts, and thus greater company-consumer identification.<sup>132,133,134</sup> Organizational identification theory

<sup>121</sup> Einwiller, S. (2013). Corporate attributes and associations. In C. E. Carroll (Ed.), *The handbook of communication and corporate reputation* (pp. 293–305). West Sussex, United Kingdom: Wiley.

<sup>122</sup> van Riel, C.B. (1997). Research in corporate communication: An overview of an emerging field. *Management Communication Quarterly*, 11(2), 288–309.

<sup>123</sup> van Riel, C.B., & Fombrun, C.J. (2007). *Essentials of corporate communication: Implementing practices for effective reputation management*. New York, NY: Routledge.

<sup>124</sup> Kim, S. (2011). Transferring effects of CSR strategy on consumer responses: The synergistic model of corporate communication strategy. *Journal of Public Relations Research*, 23(2), 218–241.

<sup>125</sup> Sen, S., & Bhattacharya, C.B. (2001). Does doing good always lead to doing better? Consumer reactions to corporate social responsibility. *Journal of Marketing Research*, 38(2), 225–243.

<sup>126</sup> Deephouse, D.L. (2000). Media reputation as a strategic resource: An integration of mass communication and resource-based theories. *Journal of Management*, 26(6), 1091–1112.

<sup>127</sup> Carroll, C.E., & McCombs, M. (2003). Agenda-setting effects of business news on the public's images and opinions about major corporations. *Corporate Reputation Review*, 6(1), 36–46.

<sup>128</sup> Goffman, E. (1959). *The presentation of self in everyday life*. New York, NY: Doubleday.

<sup>129</sup> Leary, M.R., & Kowalski, R.M. (1990). Impression management: A literature review and two-component model. *Psychological Bulletin*, 107(1), 34–47.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid., p. 34.

<sup>131</sup> Jeong, H.J., Paek, H.J., & Lee, M. (2013). Corporate social responsibility effects on social network sites. *Journal of Business Research*, 66(10), 1889–1895.

<sup>132</sup> Cho, M., Schweickart, T., & Haase, A. (2014). Public engagement with nonprofit organizations on Facebook. *Public Relations Review*, 40(3), 565–567.

<sup>133</sup> Eberle, D., Berens, G., & Li, T. (2013). The impact of interactive corporate social responsibility communication on corporate reputation. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 118(4), 731–746.

<sup>134</sup> Hall-Phillips, A., Park, J., Chung, T., Anaza, N.A., & Rathod, S.R. (in press). I (heart) social ventures: Identification and social media engagement. *Journal of Business Research*. Retrieved 1 October, 2015 from <http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0148296315001940>

explains how, when individuals have a stronger identification with an organization, they become psychologically attached to and care more deeply about the organization. Those attachments lead to a greater commitment to achieve the organization's goals and more voluntary efforts on its behalf.<sup>135,136</sup> Organizational identification—also known as consumer–company identification—can strengthen relationships between a person and an organization,<sup>137,138</sup> and strong relationships can lead to a more positive reputation for the organization.<sup>139</sup>

Indeed, many CSR activities require stakeholder's engagement to implement them or make them more effective, and, due to their interactive nature, social media can be an effective communication tool for engaging the public with CSR activities. A common strategy in CSR is crowdsourcing—recruiting ideas and resources from the public as a way to elicit their engagement with an activity. For example, Starbucks allows the public to vote on which causes the company should support, and also recruits volunteers from the public. Similarly, Unilever solicits the public for ideas to accomplish their mission of fighting children's hunger in the United States.

## CSR COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES ON SOCIAL MEDIA

A company has to make decisions on how to communicate about CSR using SNSs—through its general corporate SNS accounts or through a CSR-dedicated SNS account. Most companies these days set up corporate Facebook, Twitter, Google+, or Instagram accounts, and their CSR activities may be a topic of their posts. Several pioneering companies have set up CSR-dedicated SNS accounts where the central theme of the conversation

is the company's CSR activities or various topics/issues that the company supports. By separating its CSR-dedicated SNS accounts from its general SNS accounts, a company can have a more focused conversation about CSR topics, place a greater weight on CSR than if it only incorporated these topics into its general SNS accounts, and provide a platform for joint efforts by sharing knowledge and resources to create value. Examples of such dedicated CSR accounts are Toshiba's "Toshiba for Good" page on Facebook, Microsoft's "Microsoft Citizenship" account on Twitter, PepsiCo's "PepsiCo Environmental Sustainability" page on Pinterest, and Google's "Google.org" on Google+.

As seen in these examples, a company can also choose specific social media platforms on which to set up its accounts. The features of various social media platforms differ; for example, Facebook content has a longer lifespan and is based on social friendships, whereas the lifespan of Twitter posts is much shorter—often only an hour or two—so Twitter focuses more on the present and allows users to follow topics, people, and conversations that interest them and relies less on users' social connections or network. As a 'microblogging' site, Twitter also has a limitation of 140 characters.

## THE EFFECTS OF SOCIAL MEDIA STRATEGIES ON CSR REPUTATION

To examine the relationships between companies' use of different kinds of social media strategies to communicate CSR and the effects of these strategies on their CSR reputations, the author looked for the presence of CSR messages on the general Facebook pages and Twitter accounts of 101 leading companies and on their CSR-dedicated Facebook pages and Twitter accounts. This resulted in four categories of platforms for communicating CSR messages: companies' general Facebook pages; companies' CSR-dedicated Facebook pages; companies' general Twitter accounts; and companies' CSR-dedicated Twitter accounts. Each category was coded as 1 (presence) or 0 (absence). The study companies were the top 100 global companies on the 2014 Global CSR RepTrak<sup>®</sup> 100 (101 companies were included due to a tied score).<sup>140</sup> On the assumption that these CSR reputation scores were the outcome of the companies' CSR communication efforts in the period preceding the survey, the timeframe for the companies'

<sup>135</sup> Bergami, M., & Bagozzi, R.P. (2000). Self-categorization, affective commitment and group self-esteem as distinct aspects of social identity in the organization. *British Journal of Social Psychology*, 39(4), 555–577.

<sup>136</sup> Dutton, J.E., Dukerich, J.M., & Harquail, C.V. (1994). Organizational images and member identification. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 39(2), 239–263.

<sup>137</sup> Bhattacharya, C.B., & Sen, S. (2003). Consumer–company identification: A framework for understanding consumers' relationships with companies. *Journal of Marketing*, 67(2), 76–88.

<sup>138</sup> Du, S., Bhattacharya, C.B., & Sen, S. (2007). Reaping relational rewards from corporate social responsibility: The role of competitive positioning. *International Journal of Research in Marketing* 24(3), 224–241.

<sup>139</sup> Yang, S.U. (2007). An integrated model for organization–public relational outcomes, organizational reputation, and their antecedents. *Journal of Public Relations Research*, 19(2), 91–121.

<sup>140</sup> The 2014 Global CSR RepTrak<sup>®</sup> 100 rankings were based on a survey of 59,921 respondents conducted by the Reputation Institute in January and February of 2014.

CSR communication on social media examined in the present study was from 1 January 2013 to 31 December 2013 (i.e., the year before the survey).

Among the 101 companies, 68 companies communicated CSR messages via their general Twitter accounts; 54 companies conveyed on general Facebook pages; and 32 did so on CSR-dedicated Facebook pages; however, only 19 companies had CSR-dedicated Twitter accounts. As to the effects of these social media strategies, companies that communicated their CSR messages on general corporate Facebook pages had significantly higher CSR reputation scores than those that did not do so ( $\beta = 1.13$ ,  $p = 0.02$ ). Interestingly, companies that communicated CSR messages through CSR-dedicated Facebook pages had significantly lower CSR reputation rankings than those that did not have such pages ( $\beta = -1.00$ ,  $p = 0.04$ ). In the case of Twitter, however, companies that communicated CSR messages through CSR-dedicated Twitter accounts had higher CSR reputation scores than those that did not have such accounts ( $\beta = 1.61$ ,  $p = 0.01$ ). Reputation rankings did not differ between the companies that communicated CSR messages on their general corporate Twitter accounts and those that did not have CSR messages on their general corporate Twitter accounts ( $\beta = 0.05$ ,  $p = 0.92$ ).

## CONCLUSIONS

This study highlighted opportunities for companies to use social media in managing their CSR reputations and showed that the effects can vary depending on the nature (general vs. CSR-dedicated) and type of SNSs employed. In the case of Facebook, presenting CSR messages on a company's general Facebook page seemed to be a more effective communication strategy, whereas with Twitter, communicating CSR messages

via a company's CSR-dedicated Twitter account seemed to be more effective. Perhaps the public thinks of CSR-dedicated Facebook pages largely as a promotional tool, whereas they view a CSR-dedicated Twitter account as a platform to engage in dialogue about CSR issues. As mentioned above, Twitter is often used for dialogue on a topic and is less dependent on existing social relationships; people retweet a message or follow a Twitter account due to common interests. In contrast, the public may see Facebook as a platform for projecting a company's identity, making it more effective when a company includes CSR messages alongside other messages and projects CSR as a component of the company's identity, mission, and values.

The results of this study are based on exploratory research. Future studies can follow up by further analyzing the messages on companies' SNS accounts through which they communicate their CSR activities. For example, researchers could examine the number, topics, or tone of CSR messages. Future studies can also focus on discovering the most effective social media strategies for CSR communication in order to offer companies more concrete strategic advice. Although it will require sampling a larger number of companies, interaction effects particularly need to be examined—for example, the effects across categories, such as when a company communicates CSR messages both via its general Facebook page and via a CSR-dedicated Facebook page, or when a company utilizes multiple SNSs. Even at present, however, the rising concept of co-creation in CSR practices, the popularity of social media among the public, and empirical evidence of the power of social media in engaging stakeholders, all point to the importance of a company's devising CSR communication strategies for SNSs if it seeks to create or maintain a good CSR reputation.

## *The Need to Do More*

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**T**his is the era of social change enabled by platforms such as WhatsApp, Facebook, Twitter, and Change.org. It is driven by people congregating around digital activism, shared concerns, and ongoing conversations. Most companies use CSR initiatives to build reputation and have huge media budgets; yet social media forms a limited part of their communi-

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cation and engagement process around CSR. According to a recent survey,<sup>141</sup> while 34.6 per cent of the organi-

<sup>141</sup> Retrieved 30 September, 2015 from [http://www.ey.com/Publication/vwLUAssets/EY-social-media-marketing-india-trends-study-2014/\\$FILE/EY-social-media-marketing-india-trends-study-2014.pdf](http://www.ey.com/Publication/vwLUAssets/EY-social-media-marketing-india-trends-study-2014/$FILE/EY-social-media-marketing-india-trends-study-2014.pdf)



zations used social media for thought leadership, only 26.9 per cent used social media for CSR.

Social media should be an ideal fit for brands wanting to build momentum around shared values; then, why this dichotomy between apparent opportunity and paucity of spends? Could it be because business exists in a moral vacuum? Are companies not authentic about their CSR and sustainability goals?

Behind the glossy 100-page sustainability report<sup>142</sup> is the reality that while social responsibility initiatives are largely for communities near manufacturing plants and employees, the sustainability initiatives are largely about cost reduction and for a part of regulatory compliances. Large companies function in multiple countries—what matters in one region may have no relevance elsewhere. Balancing the needs of multi-level, multi-region stakeholders is a tough ask.

Social media is about transparency and authenticity and making connections and engaging with diverse stakeholders in meaningful ways. Unless a company is genuine about its social and sustainability goals, use of social media could actually be counterproductive.

And it is not as if brands have nothing to talk about. Internationally, (RED),<sup>143</sup> a cause platform, collaborated with several companies like Nike, GAP, DELL, Apple, and American Express to create specially branded retail offerings for raising money for AIDS research and treatment. Similarly, many Indian companies raised donations via their apps and websites for the Nepal earthquake. Huge CSR spends by top Indian firms are a regular feature in the news coverage of national newspapers.

Social media and CSR are perhaps the two most important triggers for change in the 21st century. Yet in the Indian and even the international context, one is seeing limited use. Social media is largely being used as a broadcast mechanism. For example, a brand recently put the following as an agency key result area (KRA)—5 Facebook updates, 10 Twitter updates per day. For a medium which is built around engagement and conversations, should such a brief even be considered?

<sup>142</sup> Ibid.

<sup>143</sup> Ponte, S., Richey, L.A., & Babb, M. (2009). Bono's product (RED) initiative: Corporate social responsibility that solves the problem of 'distant others.' *Third World Quarterly*, 30(2), 301–317.

India is undeniably an important future growth market of the world. It has the fourth largest gross domestic product (GDP) in the world in terms of purchasing power parity. It is young with 450 million people below the age of 21.<sup>144</sup> And, it is just beginning its consumption journey. Social media penetration in rural India has doubled in the past year, compared with urban areas, which witnessed around 35 per cent growth year-on-year. Of the 143 million social media users in the country (as of April 2015), 118 million are from urban areas, while 25 million are from hinterlands.<sup>145</sup>

These are impressive numbers which if used well could drive brands to build momentum around their causes and build engagement which is richer and more fulfilling. It is both an opportunity and a challenge. In our study of India's top companies for CSR, we found that corporate disclosure had the weakest number of just 38 per cent,<sup>146</sup> indicating that companies are not ready to talk about their CSR and sustainability initiatives.

Could this be because companies do not really want to look at the elephant in the room? Companies seldom talk about wasteful plastic in their packaging or about sustainable sourcing. Equally, an emphasis on renewable sources of energy, regeneration of soil and water, and protection of biodiversity is almost non-existent.

Take the case of fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG) companies—80 per cent of their products are claimed to be targeted towards women and children. Keeping that in mind, we asked the question: "How do FMCG companies look at their key constituents?" We looked at 32 companies in the FMCG sector—covering both marquee and smaller brands with large appeal. We studied their websites and sustainability reports to understand their approach towards women and children. Out of the sample of total 32 companies, we found that only 18 companies had initiatives focused on

<sup>144</sup> Mehta, A. (2012, August 22). The rise of India's consumer market. *Driving Singapore's External Economy*. Retrieved 1 September, 2015 from [http://www.iesingapore.gov.sg/~media/IE%20Singapore/Files/Events/iAdvisory%20Series/India/1Overview\\_of\\_Indias\\_consumer\\_market\\_IE\\_Singapore.pdf](http://www.iesingapore.gov.sg/~media/IE%20Singapore/Files/Events/iAdvisory%20Series/India/1Overview_of_Indias_consumer_market_IE_Singapore.pdf)

<sup>145</sup> Retrieved 27 October, 2015 from [http://www.business-standard.com/article/technology/social-media-penetration-in-rural-india-grows-faster-than-urban-115061701121\\_1.html](http://www.business-standard.com/article/technology/social-media-penetration-in-rural-india-grows-faster-than-urban-115061701121_1.html)

<sup>146</sup> India's best companies for CSR. (2014). Retrieved 15 September, 2015 from <http://iimu.ac.in/media-room/news/323-iim-udairpur-partners-with-economic-times-in-listing-indias-best-companies-for-csr.html>

women and children, implying that FMCG companies promoted products to the key influencers, but paid little attention to them beyond sales transactions. Without this link, companies will not be fully engaged, and would lack a credible relationship with women and children. Further, the efforts are piecemeal, rather than being integrated.

Let us now look at the e-waste initiatives of the top Indian companies as India is the fifth largest producer of e-waste in the world. Given the enormous information technology (IT) spends, it is easy to assume that significant quantities of e-waste would be produced by India's top companies. Yet, our study shows that only 20 per cent of the top Indian firms have e-waste recycling initiatives.

Unless CSR activities are strategic, talking about them via social media would only be counterproductive. This is one area, therefore, that no one wants to touch. Platforms are waiting to be created but who will bell the cat? A platform involves ongoing engagement, authenticity, public scrutiny, and being hyperlocal while being visible to a global audience. It requires knowing that a dichotomy of values in what is said and what is

done will instantly be picked up. For brands wanting to be social, it is then a double-edged sword. Social media allows us to say more. Yet to balance things, there is also the question of the *need to do more* vis-à-vis CSR, so that it is not seen as a communication exercise but as more of factual information delivery—information that can deliver connections and bonds around the causes that matter to you.

*The combined power of social media and companies coming together around bigger causes can indeed be transformative.* Road safety, health, waste, and a multitude of other things are waiting to be done. The key is that the messaging and communication around each digital/social platform should be personalized. Today's world demands one-to-one conversations, answering every question, and noting every development—constant engagement through real time information. Internal teams that resonate with the cause could then be best suited to build these platforms.

A combination of social media and CSR will redefine the way companies, customers, statutory bodies, and society interact with each other. Could everyone then come together to use social media for transformative impact?

## *Matching Dimensions of Reputation and Media Salience for Feedback, Alignment, and Organizational Self-awareness*

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This article deals with corporate reputation (CR) and how it can be examined through social media in ways that provide meaning and value for organizations. CR refers to what is generally said about an organization.<sup>147</sup> In particular, it concerns messages about what people need to know about an organization to feel that they know who an organization is (its identity) or what an organization is like (its images).

The difference is that identity-related messages allow people to feel that they *know* an organization, while image-related messages leave people feeling like they *know about* an organization. Reputational messages are important because they tell people whether and to what degree they wish to have a relationship with that organization.<sup>148</sup> Likewise, reputation provides organizations and their top managers with feedback on

<sup>147</sup> Carroll, C.E. (2013a). Corporate reputation and the multiple disciplinary perspectives of communication. In C.E. Carroll (Ed.), *The handbook of communication and corporate reputation* (pp. 1–10). Oxford, UK: Wiley-Blackwell.

<sup>148</sup> Carroll, C.E., Huang-Horowitz, N.C.L., & Lee, S.Y. (in progress). Corporate reputation matters in public relations research. In W.T. Coombs & S.J. Holladay (Eds), *Handbook of public relations theory and methods*. New York: Wiley-Blackwell.

who their stakeholders think they are.<sup>149,150</sup> Analysing social media, then, can help corporate communicators provide feedback to top management teams that help them develop their sense of organizational self-awareness and align themselves with the needs and expectations of their stakeholders.

Social media analysis can provide organizations with five types of feedback about their reputation. These five reputational dimensions are organizations' *prominence*, *public esteem*, *properties*, *plexes*, and *positioning*. The five dimensions of social media salience that organizations should examine constitute the VT4 framework of media salience: *volume*, *tone*, *topics*, *ties*, and *timing*.<sup>151</sup> Elsewhere, I have argued that matching the right dimension of reputation with the right dimension of media content has provided a clear picture of the effects that news media have on CR.<sup>152</sup> Here, I wish to extend these conceptual applications to social media content so that organizations can design better strategies for building the reputations they desire.

*Prominence* refers to organizations' top-of-mind awareness.<sup>153,154</sup> Before organizations can have reputations, people must first be aware of them.<sup>155</sup> An organization's prominence can be established by

examining the *volume* of social media posts—the number of tweets or the number of posts about an organization.

*Public esteem* refers to the trust, admiration, respect, and regard the public has for an organization.<sup>156</sup> This can be examined by analyzing the *tone* of social media posts. It can also be measured by the number of 'likes,' 'thumbs ups,' or 'thumbs downs' an organization receives in social media posts. Organizations with a greater number of thumbs ups are regarded more favourable than organizations with more thumbs downs. Tone is more than thinking in terms of positive or negative. Tone may indicate indifference, objectivity, impartiality through the absence of positive or negative content. Tone may also be about ambivalence—the presence of both positive and negative content. Likewise, higher public esteem can be tied to social media content that expresses praise or satisfaction, whereas lower levels of public esteem may be connected to negative content related to blame, hardship, fault-finding, or the denial of responsibility.

*Properties* are the attributes of companies that people talk about through social media. Other terms for properties include traits and/or attributes.<sup>157</sup> These may concern properties linked to an organization's DNA or identity, its performance, or simply perceptions of the organization. The organizational properties most commonly discussed are those related to an organization's leadership, employees, products or services, financial performance, and corporate social performance. Other properties of interest relate to perceptions of an organization's quality, dependability, reliability, innovation, or efficiency.<sup>158</sup>

*Plexes* are an organization's network connections to the larger reputational ecosystem. Plexes are similar to Einwiller's conceptual description of corporate associations.<sup>159</sup> They can be an organization's connections to the public issues of the day; its supply

<sup>149</sup> Carroll, C.E. (2012). The OTRI-I audit and the detection and expression of hidden and blind organizational identities: Implications for managing reputational intelligence, authenticity and alignment. *Corporate Reputation Review*, 15(3), 179–197. doi:10.1057/crr.2012.11

<sup>150</sup> Carroll, C.E., Greyser, S.A., & Schreiber, E. (2011). Building and maintaining reputation through communications. In C. Caywood (Ed.), *The international handbook of strategic public relations & integrated communications* (pp. 457–476). New York, NY: McGraw-Hill.

<sup>151</sup> Carroll, C.E., & Deephouse, D. (2014). The foundations of a theory explaining organizational news: The VT4 framework of organizational news content and five levels of content production. In J. Pallas, L. Strannegård, & S. Jonsson (Eds), *Organizing in new media landscape* (pp. 81–95). New York, NY: Routledge.

<sup>152</sup> Carroll, C.E. (2011). The role of the news media in corporate reputation management. In R.J. Burke, G. Martin, & C.L. Cooper (Eds), *Corporate reputation: Managing threats and opportunities* (pp. 199–216). Surrey, UK: Gower.

<sup>153</sup> Carroll, C.E. (2010a). *Corporate reputation and the news media: Agenda setting within business news in developed, emerging, and frontier markets*. New York: Routledge.

<sup>154</sup> Carroll, C.E. (2010b). Should firms circumvent or work through the news media? *Public Relations Review*, 36(3), 278–280. doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.pubrev.2010.05.005>

<sup>155</sup> Carroll, C.E., & McCombs, M.E. (2003). Agenda-setting effects of business news on the public's images and opinions about major corporations. *Corporate Reputation Review*, 6(1), 36–46. doi:10.1057/palgrave.crr.1540188

<sup>156</sup> Carroll, C.E. (2009). The relationship between media favorability and firms' public esteem. *Public Relations Journal*, 3(4), 1–32.

<sup>157</sup> Carroll, C.E. (2013b). The future of communication research in corporate reputation studies. In C.E. Carroll (Ed.), *The handbook of communication and corporate reputation* (pp. 590–596). Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishing Ltd.

<sup>158</sup> Carroll, C.E. (2013c). *Themes, variations, and future directions: A communication scholar's response*. Paper presented at the Oxford University's Centre for Reputation's 4th Annual Reputation Symposium, Corpus Christi College, University of Oxford, Oxford, England.

<sup>159</sup> Einwiller, S.A. (2013). Corporate attributes and associations. In C. E. Carroll (Ed.), *The handbook of communication and corporate reputation* (pp. 291–305). Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishing Ltd.

chain; its place in the industry (which is partially dependent upon how large the industry is); its connections to the media system (how much access it has to reporters, news organizations, bloggers, and so on), its connection to other public persons such as celebrities, thought leaders, or politicians; its stance on social, economic, and political issues; and also how well the organization treats (and is treated by) others. The focus for plexes is its linkages.<sup>160</sup>

*Positioning* refers to how all of these other elements connect together at a particular time or at the same time, in a particular sequence, and relates to being well-timed and on time. Thus, it refers to a sense of longitudinal perspective as to how organizations are portrayed over time on a particular topic in terms of how the other four elements (prominence, public esteem, properties, and plexes) change within a particular thread on social media within a given time frame, or how they change over time in terms of weeks, months, or years.

Each individual dimension of media salience does not directly affect an organization's overall or global CR.<sup>161</sup> Table 1 shows how researchers and communication evaluators can match dimensions of social media salience to dimensions of reputation.

- *Volume* is related to prominence. The amount of social media content about an organization should be related to the organization's level of public prominence.<sup>162,163</sup>
- *Tone* relates to public esteem. More favourable social media content should lead to more favourable public esteem. Similarly, more unfavourable social media content about an organization should lead to a decrease in its public esteem.<sup>164,165</sup>
- *Topics* relate to the properties of an organization—real internal characteristics of the organization, or those ascribed or attributed to an organization by

any of its stakeholders. More social media content about an organization on a particular topic should lead to the public attaching more importance to that topic in understanding the organization's reputation.<sup>166,167,168</sup>

- *Ties* relate to the co-occurrences of any person, place, or thing (including public issues, controversies, scandals, or current events), and the organization. The more co-occurrences between an organization with other actors, issues, objects, or key messages, the more the public should associate these entities with the organization.<sup>169</sup>
- *Timing* relates to how the different dimensions unfold over time.

**Table 1: Matching Reputation and Social Media Dimensions**

	Description	Volume	Tone	Topics	Ties	Timing
Prominence	Top-of-mind awareness	X				
Public Esteem	Trust, admiration, respect, and regard		X			
Properties	Attributes of an organization (leadership, employees, quality of products & services, CSR, financial performance)			X		
Plexes	Connections to public issues, other actors				X	
Positioning	Dynamic interplay					X

**Source:** Carroll (2011).

Topics and ties are often confused. The difference between *topics* and *ties* is that with topics, there is an

<sup>160</sup> Carroll, C.E. (in press). Mapping the contours of the third level of agenda setting: Uniplex, duplex, and multiplex associations. In L. Guo & M. E. McCombs (Eds), *The power of information networks: New directions for agenda setting*. New York: Taylor & Francis.

<sup>161</sup> Op. cit., Carroll (2011).

<sup>162</sup> Op. cit., Carroll (2010b).

<sup>163</sup> Ragas, M.W. (2013). Agenda-building and agenda-setting theory: Which companies we think about and how we think about them. In C.E. Carroll (Ed.), *The handbook of communication and corporate reputation* (pp. 151–165). Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishing Ltd.

<sup>164</sup> Op. cit., Carroll (2009a).

<sup>165</sup> Op. cit., Ragas (2013).

<sup>166</sup> Einwiller, S.A., Carroll, C.E., & Korn, K. (2010). Under what conditions do the news media influence corporate reputation? The roles of media systems dependency and need for orientation. *Corporate Reputation Review*, 12(4), 299–315. doi:10.1057/crr.2009.28

<sup>167</sup> Kim, J.Y., Kioussis, S., & Xiang, Z. (2015). Agenda building and agenda setting in business: Corporate reputation attributes. *Corporate Reputation Review*, 18(1), 25–36. doi:10.1057/crr.2014.18

<sup>168</sup> Op. cit., Ragas (2013).

<sup>169</sup> Op. cit., Carroll (2011).

asymmetrical relationship with the company name but with ties, there is a symmetrical relationship with the company name. An asymmetrical relationship occurs when a number of topics are evaluated in the context of one organization, and the organization is held constant; or the topic could refer to a social media issue, where a number of organizations are then evaluated in the context of that issue, and the issue is held constant.<sup>170</sup> For example, if one is concerned about the environment as a particular issue, one may evaluate any number of organizations by how often those organizations' social media content relates to environmental issues as compared to other organizations' social media content. Thus, for example, one could think about *Newsweek's* rankings for the world's greenest companies and look at the rankings for a host of companies. Or one could think about *Fortune Magazine's* world's most admired companies, and then look at the attribute scores of one particular company across the different attributes that *Fortune Magazine* rates.

In contrast, ties are concerned with symmetrical relationships between an organization and some other entity, whether it is another person, place, or object where the two (the organization and the other entity) receive co-equal treatment, meaning the two items occur at the same rate of occurrence.<sup>171</sup> Ties concern co-occurrences, connections, and linkages between organizations and other referents that they may or may not want to be associated with. Here, expressions such as "The apple never falls far from the tree," "Birds of a feather flock together," or "One bad apple spoils the barrel" concern reputation by association, which, in turn, includes guilt by association.

Ties suggest that organizations must be concerned about their supply chain, and the issues, scandals, and controversies that surround them. They must be concerned with their client base. Consider the controversy that Caterpillar came under in the United States when the equipment they sold in the Middle East was used for destruction of homes. Ties also allow organizations, their critics and fans, and bystanders to participate in the 'frame game' through social media. Organizations often find themselves in situations where they must distance themselves from

controversial topics,<sup>172</sup> but likewise, they may use ties to link themselves to others by appealing to shared values, national cultures, normative ideals, and so on shared by their stakeholders.<sup>173</sup>

Organizational communication evaluators must keep the following in mind:

1. It should not be simply presumed that more social media content will lead to a greater degree of prominence, although that is the theory and expectation presented above. At the end of the day, measuring the levels of social media content is not the end game. Reputational outcomes must always be considered in terms of changes in awareness, acceptance, and action, as measured by changes in other organizational outcomes.<sup>174</sup>
2. It should not be presumed that more social media attention is always what the organizations want or need. In fact, at times, organizations may want less media attention.<sup>175</sup> And they may even want to minimize, moderate, or break public's association between a particular issue and the organization.<sup>176</sup> They may have goals to minimize or eliminate certain types of attention to particular topics, attributes, or associations, such as ExxonMobil's association with the Valdez crisis or BP with the Gulf of Mexico oil spill.<sup>177</sup>

The challenge for communicators is to put these reputational aspects into perspectives so that those making organizational decisions can understand and appreciate. This often entails separating and distinguishing facts from opinion, personal opinion from group or public opinion, perceptions from

<sup>170</sup> Op. cit., Carroll (2013c).

<sup>171</sup> Op. cit., Carroll (in press).

<sup>172</sup> Roberson, K.M., & Connaughton, S.L. (2010). On the presidential campaign trail: Apologia of association. *Public Relations Review*, 36(2), 181–183. doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.pubrev.2009.12.001>

<sup>173</sup> Bostdorff, D.M., & Vibbert, S.L. (1994). Values advocacy: Enhancing organizational images, deflecting public criticism, and grounding future arguments. *Public Relations Review*, 20(2), 141–158. doi: [http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/0363-8111\(94\)90055-8](http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/0363-8111(94)90055-8)

<sup>174</sup> Carroll, C.E., Huang-Horowitz, N.C.L., McKeever, B.W., & Williams, N.L. (2014). Key messages and message integrity as concepts and metrics in communication evaluation. *Journal of Communication Management*, 18(4), 386–401. doi: [doi:10.1108/JCOM-06-2012-0052](http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/JCOM-06-2012-0052)

<sup>175</sup> Zyglidopoulos, S., Georgiadis, A., Carroll, C.E., & Siegel, D. (2012). Does media attention drive corporate social responsibility? *Journal of Business Research*, 65(11), 1622–1627. doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2011.10.021>

<sup>176</sup> Roberson and Connaughton (2010).

<sup>177</sup> Op. cit., Carroll et al. (2014).

reality, and current realities from desired realities. This is where the AC<sup>4</sup>ID framework of reputation comes into play. This framework helps draw attention to different nuances often attached to the concept of reputation, and, in particular, how organizations and their stakeholders have differing views, each of which is important (Table 2).<sup>178</sup>

**Table 2: The AC<sup>4</sup>ID Framework**

AC <sup>4</sup> ID	Description	View of Reality
Actual	Individual view	Current reality (individual)
Conceived	Sensemaking	Current reality (individual in conversation)
Covenanted	Experiential	Current reality based on stakeholders' personal experiences and expectations that have built up over time and/or based on what an organization says
Communicated	What the organization says about itself	A claimed reality that mixes perceptions and desires
Construed	What top management thinks other people think	Perceived current reality
Ideal	What industry data from the environment says is the best case scenario	Current reality based on facts and evidence
Desired	Top management's hopes and dreams	Aspirational view in spite of reality

**Source:** Carroll (2011).

1. *Actual reputation* concerns people's individual views. People form opinions based on their experiences of organizations. Organizations do not know what these are until they ask people for them. These personal or private beliefs and views constitute an organization's actual reputation.
2. *Conceived reputation* refers to the sensemaking that occurs when individuals talk to others about what an organization's reputation is. People often change or adapt their views as a result of thinking about

their audiences as they speak or write—whether these audiences are organizations asking for their opinion or other members of a community forum, discussion forum, or social media thread. Moreover, people do not always say what they think, and they do not always think what they say. Sometimes, they do not know what they think until they see or hear what they have to say. One thing is clear: people adapt or translate their views so that they are socially acceptable enough to be shared publicly with others.

Often, people express hostility, anger, irony, or even pettiness in social media.<sup>179,180</sup> There is a tipping point or threshold, however, at which people who identify themselves stop (or start) tempering their personal views so that their views are socially acceptable, ironic, or antagonizing. For some people, this threshold is very low. What makes some people more willing than others to share praise or complaints about organizations publicly is a question that remains to be understood—putting aside the fact that much of social media content allows many users to remain anonymous and unidentified.

3. *Communicated reputation* refers to organizations' own entry into the social media conversation. These can be organizations' attempts to frame their own understanding of who they are or how they are seen, or even to put forward and promote particular reputational viewpoints that further their own interests. For example, many organizations tout their awards, certifications, accreditations, or social evaluations when they do well, but we can also expect them to be silent when they do not. From a social media evaluation perspective, it is important for an organization to filter out and control its communicated reputation in the social media mix, or the feedback it gets from evaluating the environment will be nothing more than noise. Organizations risk drawing the wrong conclusions when they do not

<sup>178</sup> Op. cit., Carroll et al. (2011).

<sup>179</sup> Einwiller, S. A., & Steilen, S. (2015). Handling complaints on social network sites: An analysis of complaints and complaint responses on Facebook and Twitter pages of large US companies. *Public Relations Review*, 41(2), 195–204. doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.pubrev.2014.11.012>

<sup>180</sup> McCorkindale, T., & DiStaso, M.W. (2013). The power of social media and its influence on corporate reputation. In C. E. Carroll (Ed.), *The handbook of communication and corporate reputation* (pp. 497–512). Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishing Ltd.

distinguish their own contributions to the social media environment from that of their stakeholders.

4. *Covenanted reputation* refers to stakeholders' expectations of the brand promise based on their experience with the product or service or their belief in the organization's communications. Social media analyses provide great insights into organizations' covenanted reputations because this is what consumers often go online to research before they purchase a product or service, or to post about when they are exceptionally happy or dissatisfied with an organization.
5. *Construed reputation* refers to a top management team's belief about what other people think about what the organization is like. Social media analyses are often helpful to present to a top management team because they provide data points that may confirm or deny top management's views. Social media analyses help an organization to understand the degree of accuracy in top management's views and the degree to which organizational leaders have a good sense of organizational self-awareness. Social media analyses that compare and contrast an organization's communicated reputation against its conceived reputation help communicators who work with an organization to know whether it should temper its public views or statements about its progress and its contributions to the world, and to understand the degree of leeway that the organization's stakeholders are likely to give it.
6. *Ideal reputation* refers to the best case scenario for an organization, given the constraints placed upon an organization in light of the current environmental, social, or economic trends. An organization's ideal reputation says, given our current performance, the industry's performance or today's political realities, 'X' is the best we can be. Ideal reputation is based on data—specifically, on market research. Ideal reputations tell organizations who they can expect to be, given the maximum level of time, energy, and resources, they can commit to telling their story, engaging their audiences, or responding to stakeholders' demands. Ideal reputation relates to an organization's optimal positioning with the full allocation of its resources.
7. *Desired reputation* stands in contrast to ideal reputation. Desired reputation says that—in spite of the

evidence of the social media data that may be to the contrary—'this' is the way the top management team wants the organization or its reputation to be. Desired reputation is not based on data. It is based on vision—the vision of top management in spite of all available evidence. The challenge for an organization, then, is to manage the gap between the ideal reputation (which represents the best case scenario, given the organization's current market realities and resource allocations) and the desired reputation (which represents the aspirational reality).

Each of the five reputational messages that come out of social media (prominence, public esteem, properties, plexes, and positioning) relates to the six different types of reputation (actual, conceived, construed, covenanted, communicated, ideal, and desired) in different ways. The point is to relate the degrees of prominence, public esteem, and properties that people talk about or express in social media content with what organizations expect or desire. An organization can take the actual, construed, and covenanted reputations and compare them to the organization's own claims, the construed beliefs of others, market research (which provides an indicator of how it is doing against its competitors), and the beliefs and views of top management. Doing this provides an organization with feedback on and self-awareness of how well it is doing in terms of setting goals that are achievable, delivering on promises it makes or on stakeholders' expectations, and how well it is aligned with its environment, that is, its employees, investors, community, or others.

## CONCLUSIONS

First, in order to understand the relationship between CR and social media, organizations must match the right dimension of social media content with the right dimension of CR. Second, organizations must not lose sight of the fact that even though a change in social media attention is conceptually related to a change in reputation, media attention itself is not the only outcome that should be measured. The final outcomes that organizations must be concerned about include increased or decreased sales; increased or decreased levels of legislation; having employees who are healthy, happy, content, and flourishing; and having a leadership team that is in tune with its employees and their operating environment, and is aligned with the expectations and demands of its stakeholders.

# Playing for the Future: The 'Digital Roulette'!

Vidhi Chaudhri and Asha Kaul

If “change is the only constant”, as the Greek philosopher Heraclitus proclaimed, it becomes amply evident in the sentiment around social media and organizational communication. This change manifests in different ways, for instance, the dynamics of communication (speed, format, directionality, and media consumption), the expectation and demand for transparency, openness, and authenticity, corporate attitude and tone of voice, and stakeholder influence. Underlying these developments is a reluctant but growing recognition that organizations can no longer control what is being said about them, where those conversations are taking place, and who is driving the agenda for brand conversations. Many would argue that organizations never really had any control, this perception of control was an illusion, and the choice is now being a part of the brand conversation or removed from it.<sup>181</sup>

Our contributors are optimistic about the opportunities and learnings for brands and stakeholders alike. Three themes are especially discernible across the articles: (a) Social media have defined new norms for (building) relationships that hinge on conversation and connectedness with stakeholders. The ‘rules’ of the relationship sway in favour of stakeholders (although consumers have received the most attention), as brands need to be where the stakeholders are, and communicate with them in dialogic and engaging ways. (b) Social media have introduced new ways of working, challenging traditional paradigms and boundaries. (c) A grounded, sophisticated understanding of reputation(s) is imperative in the digital age. Each theme is unpacked below, although we should note that these are interrelated rather than distinct developments, and demand a holistic perspective on research and practice.

## BUILDING CONNECTS BETWEEN RESEARCH AND PRACTICE

First, the centrality of building and maintaining relations with organizational publics has been

the cornerstone of PR scholarship<sup>182</sup> and practice; however, stakeholder influence in the digital era puts organizations under the microscope and amplifies every problem. Customers have been an important change agent, forcing organizations to re-evaluate communication behaviour, become more humble, and learn from their mistakes. This shift underlies Smeeta Mishra’s argument about the growing incidence of apology by Indian organizations. Indeed, an apology is not to be taken lightly and its ‘success’ depends on several factors including timeliness, cultural values, and ability to anticipate stakeholder reactions. She notes that there can be lessons in a crisis, and humility and apology, if done right, can be the impetus for engagement.

One of the cases Mishra references is that of Flipkart (often referred to as ‘India’s Amazon’) and its apology following the 2014 mega sale. Ironically, at the time of this writing, Flipkart announced its mega sale, #TheBigBillionDays, from 13 October 2015 through 17 October 2015.<sup>183</sup> A cursory look at the initial conversations on Facebook—disappointments with service and product quality and allegations of price manipulation—was reminiscent of Mishra’s description of events that led to a formal apology in 2014. Although we cannot be sure that Flipkart has learned from its past mistakes to ‘get their house in order,’ the organization claims that there have been ‘fewer glitches’ this year.<sup>184</sup> Sentiment on social media seemed to change as Flipkart was seen as responsive to customer feedback on its Facebook page. As on 16 October, social media were positively buzzing with a picture of Flipkart CEO Sachin Bansal and other corporate executives personally making deliveries.<sup>185</sup>

<sup>181</sup> Solis, B. (2010, January 25). The myth of control in new media. Retrieved 9 October, 2015 from <http://www.briansolis.com/2010/01/the-myth-of-control-in-new-media/>

<sup>182</sup> Ledingham, J.A., & Bruning, S.D. (1998). Relationship management in public relations: Dimensions of an organization-public relationship. *Public Relations Review*, 24(1), 55–65.

<sup>183</sup> Retrieved 16 October, 2015 from [http://www.facebook.com/hashtag/thebigbilliondays?source=feed\\_text&story\\_id=10153599743273559](http://www.facebook.com/hashtag/thebigbilliondays?source=feed_text&story_id=10153599743273559)

<sup>184</sup> Jayadevan, P.K. (2015, October 16). Flipkart CEO, top executives turn ‘delivery boys’. *The Times of India*. Retrieved 16 October, 2015 from <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/tech/tech-news/Flipkarts-top-executives-turn-delivery-boys/article-show/49402831.cms>

<sup>185</sup> Ibid.



A tad early to deliver any verdict on Flipkart's performance this year, but the case affirms our contributors' recommendation that organizations be genuine and credible at all times, especially in a crisis, and demonstrate that corrective measures have been/will be taken, as needed.

In the digital era, consumers have been empowered to express their disappointment (and appreciation), leading some to argue that social media is "*customer service and a customer complaint line all in one...*,"<sup>186</sup> and it is no surprise, then, that social-mediated crises triggered by consumer discontent are becoming commonplace. While the option to 'do nothing' is becoming rarer, it is important to understand the problem in context, determine the source (credibility), and respond appropriately.<sup>187</sup> But what if the crisis is a hoax, prank, or rumour, as in the case of Dominos in 2009?<sup>188</sup> In her overview, Karen Freberg highlights the emergent challenges in the form of fake information and rumours that can escalate on social media, "breaking down the traditional barriers of time, location, and gatekeepers of information." She urges that scholars and professionals need to reflect the consequences of these risks on "trust among key audiences," as maintaining trust and reputation is core to crisis management efforts. Tailoring crisis message(s) for different target audiences and assessing the global-local dynamic in social media communication are as advanced as important considerations.

Just as social media accelerate relational change, they demand that organizations cement the very basis of these relationships. There is consensus that social media strategy has to be tightly coupled with business strategy, and that organizational action is aligned with values and beliefs. Rajeev Kumar notes that in a dynamic communication environment and turbulent situations, acting in accordance with organizational values and 'intrinsic culture' is "a great opportunity

to reinforce what the organization stands for." For instance, Royal Dutch Airlines KLM, often cited as a social media exemplar, places customer focus at the centre of its 'social media service' strategy.<sup>189</sup> Even as the organization seeks to enhance 'total customer experience,'<sup>190</sup> KLM is uncompromising on customer support, arguing that "you can do all sorts of cool stuff on social media—run campaigns, make great offers, post cool pictures and otherwise entertain and engage your audience—but if you don't offer customer support, you're bugged."<sup>191</sup> For KLM, then, social media strategy rests on three pillars—reputation (including brand awareness and engaging content), service (one-stop shop), and commerce (financial returns from social media).<sup>192</sup>

Another stakeholder group that is at the centre of these changes is employees. Organizational values are most visibly and strongly represented in employees, who then explain the enthusiasm to enlist them as brand advocates. Simultaneously, social media have emerged as informal, non-institutionalized space for employee dissent, earning the moniker of the "new water cooler,"<sup>193</sup> and prompting organizations to institute policies to guide (some would say 'discipline') employees. Thus, employees are placed in a double bind as brand 'ambassadors' and as stakeholders that must be 'managed' in the digital era. Jason Pridmore illuminates the tensions, looking at employee surveillance and monitoring through the lens of 'care' and 'control' as organizations attempt to simultaneously expand and synchronize social media efforts. He notes the possibility of unintended consequences and the asymmetrical shift of power to the employer as surveillance practices become normalized and routinized. More research is needed to understand organizational use of social media as it ties with issues of power and transparency and open organizational cultures.

<sup>186</sup> Al-Khoury, K. (2014, September 8). Tweepsters, hackers and trolls: How to handle a social media crisis—part 2. Retrieved 15 August, 2015 from <http://www.webershandwickseattle.com/2014/09/tweepsters-hackers-and-trolls-how-to-handle-a-social-media-crisis-part-2/>

<sup>187</sup> Grégoire, Y., Salle, A., & Tripp, T. M. (2015). Managing social media crises with your customers: The good, the bad, and the ugly. *Business Horizons*, 58(2), 173–182. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.bushor.2014.11.001>

<sup>188</sup> Veil, S.R., Sellnow, T.L., & Petrun, E.L. (2012). Hoaxes and the paradoxical challenges of restoring legitimacy: Dominos' response to its YouTube crisis. *Management Communication Quarterly*, 26(2), 322–345. doi:10.1177/0893318911426685

<sup>189</sup> What has KLM learned from 5 years of social media service? [Blog post]. Retrieved 25 July, 2015 from <http://blog.klm.com/what-has-klm-learned-from-5-years-of-social-media-service/>

<sup>190</sup> de Swaan Arons, M., van den Driest, F., & Weed, K. (2014). The ultimate marketing machine. *Harvard Business Review*, 92(7/8), 54–63.

<sup>191</sup> Ibid.

<sup>192</sup> KLM's social media strategy—Part 4 [Blog post]. Retrieved 25 July, 2015 from <http://blog.klm.com/klms-social-media-strategy-part-4/>

<sup>193</sup> Argenti, P.A., & Barnes, C.M. (2009). *Digital strategies for powerful corporate communications*. USA: Mc-Graw Hill.

Although we do not delve into the relationship between corporations and non-government organizations (NGOs) in the changing communication environment, the Internet, specifically social media, have been described as a “potential equalizer” for marginalized groups such as NGOs to influence corporate behaviour.<sup>194</sup> As a potentially vibrant research area, we expect that contextual, cultural, and institutional considerations in how NGOs (and other stakeholders at large) leverage social media to influence change will provide in-depth understanding of ground realities as also the basis for comparison across regions and countries.

Second, social media have also reinforced new ways of working and redefined traditional roles. In addition to the changing role of employees discussed above, boundaries across disciplines, organizations, and department functions are fading. Dilip Cheriaan alludes to diminishing boundaries between PR and marketing and the emergence of a 60x24x7 functionality as the speed of response can affect reputation outcomes and is critical to how crisis discourse is framed. PR practitioners in India reiterate that social/digital constitutes the biggest growth area, and that the digital shift demands a repositioning of the PR role to be one of advisor and counselor to brands.<sup>195</sup> From marketers’ perspective, it has become imperative for PR firms to deliver holistic research and data-driven communication strategies and digital/social solutions if they are to remain relevant in the long term.<sup>196</sup>

Also, the relationship between PR professionals and journalists has undergone a makeover as social media have drastically reduced dependency on PR professionals for information. ING’s study (Social Media Impact, #SMING15)<sup>197</sup> of journalists and PR professionals in the Netherlands, Germany, the United

Kingdom, and the United States confirms that despite a difference of opinion on reliability, social media have a decisive impact on the news and are instrumental for the declining relevance of traditional media and PR tools such as press releases. On the flip side, the study finds that, with some variation across countries, fact-checking is increasingly being marginalized in favour of getting the news out ‘fast’ and ‘first’.<sup>198</sup> Understanding the scholarly and practice implications of these developments opens up avenues for collaboration, knowledge acquisition, and exchange, and the colloquium is a step in that direction.

The blurring of organizational and internal–external boundaries has also been an underlying assumption in conversations about CSR. Claims about CSR and/or attempts to ‘greenwash’ are subject to stakeholder scrutiny and evaluation. Namrata Rana and Utkarsh Majmudar as well as Sun Young Lee are encouraged by the potential of social media to act as a catalyst for (reputational) leadership in sustainability and CSR. In order to realize the ‘transformative potential,’ organizations have to be serious and strategic about CSR and leverage social to facilitate multi-stakeholder engagement around relevant issues. For organizations to derive reputational benefit from CSR communication, they also need to assess the affordances, appropriateness, and effectiveness of different social networks (e.g., Twitter and Facebook).

Finally, the multidimensional developments noted above (and others that we have not addressed) have profound implications for creating and managing reputation, facilitated by the participatory culture of social media as well as the propensity to malign and spread negative word-of-mouth, and all the nuances in between. A 2014 study by Deloitte<sup>199</sup> confirms that the risk to reputation weighs supreme and is associated with loss in brand value, financial damage, and regulatory investigation. Not surprising, the report finds that organizations are most unprepared to handle risks that are beyond their immediate control such as issues of ethics/integrity, competitive attacks, and other hazards.<sup>200</sup> It may, then, be a reasonable assumption that social-mediated risks exemplify the

<sup>194</sup> Coombs, W.T., & Holladay, S.J. (2015). How activists shape CSR: Insights from internet contagion and contingency theories. In A. Adi, G. Grigore, & D. Crowther (Eds), *Corporate social responsibility in the digital age* (pp. 93–104). Bingley, UK: Emerald Publishing.

<sup>195</sup> Public relations in India: Inside the industry’s mind and the 2013 outlook. Retrieved 22 January, 2013 from <http://blog.mslgroup.com/the-rise-of-digital-pr/>

<sup>196</sup> India Strategic Communications Report 2015: Inside the CMO’s Mind. Retrieved 12 October, 2015 from <http://www.scribd.com/doc/252350670/India-Strategic-Communications-Report-2015-Inside-the-CMO-s-Mind>

<sup>197</sup> Social media has a growing impact on the news #SMING15. (2015, October 8). Retrieved 10 October, 2015 from <http://www.ing.com/Newsroom/All-news/Social-media-has-a-growing-impact-on-the-news-SMING15.htm>

<sup>198</sup> Ibid.

<sup>199</sup> Deloitte survey. (October 2014). Reputation@Risk. 2014 Global Survey on Reputation Risk. Retrieved 12 May 2015, from [http://www2.deloitte.com/content/dam/Deloitte/global/Documents/Governance-Risk-Compliance/gx\\_grc\\_Reputation@Risk%20survey%20report\\_FINAL.pdf](http://www2.deloitte.com/content/dam/Deloitte/global/Documents/Governance-Risk-Compliance/gx_grc_Reputation@Risk%20survey%20report_FINAL.pdf)

<sup>200</sup> Ibid.

threat that organizations perceive as being beyond their control. The European Communication Monitor 2015 confirms that “coping with the digital evolution and the social web”<sup>201</sup> is the second biggest challenge for communication professionals across Europe.

Although many organizations proactively monitor social media for consumer feedback, often they are unsure about how to turn those insights into actionable knowledge; further, they do not know what to do with negative feedback, choosing to censor such criticism.<sup>202</sup> The emergent challenges also open up opportunities to employ big data and analytics to generate customer insight, capture social sentiment, assess effectiveness of organizations’ social media messages, and deliver data-driven communication strategies.

Undoubtedly, reputation management requires a shift in mindset and approach. It needs to be an organization-wide effort as large legacy organizations are trying to break down silos and organize in ways that allow them to leverage the possibilities of social media and to act with agility and precision. They also affirm, with more force, the need to adopt a ‘built-in’ approach to

reputation<sup>203</sup> that treats social media as an integral part of business strategy. Of course, the ‘how’ and ‘what’ of accomplishing this goal is a work in progress.

Crucially, there is a need for more robust theorizing as a basis for reputation building via social media. Craig Carroll elucidates the links between dimensions of reputation and social media salience, illuminating several key points that require pause and reflection: reputation is a nuanced construct; social media attention may not always be desirable; social media content will not ‘automatically’ lead to higher recall (prominence); and that media attention is not the only reputation outcome that needs to be considered. As organizations seek to derive reputational benefits from social media, Carroll’s comprehensive framework can enable informed decisions about aligning the right dimensions of social media and CR.

As we round off this colloquium, we thank the contributors and the editorial team at *Vikalpa* for the opportunity to deliberate on an important topic—the implications of social media for reputation management and organizational communication, more generally. The response from our contributors has been especially encouraging and confirms our belief that this colloquium is just the beginning of a fruitful dialogue. We invite practitioners and scholars to continue the conversation.

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<sup>201</sup> European Communication Monitor. (2015). Retrieved 15 October, 2015 from <http://www.zerfass.de/ECM-WEBSITE/media/ECM2015-Results-ChartVersion.pdf>

<sup>202</sup> Dekay, S.H. (2012). How large companies react to negative Facebook comments. *Corporate Communications: An International Journal*, 17(3), 289–299. doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/13563281211253539>

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<sup>203</sup> Dowling, G., & Moran, P. (2012). Corporate reputations: Built in or bolted on? *California Management Review*, 54(2), 25–42.

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