Identification of influence within the social media

W.B.Vollenbroek, S.A. de Vries and E. Constantinides
University of Twente, The Netherlands

Abstract: Social media is expected to have a growing impact on the corporate reputation of organizations. Various social media actors referred to as social media influencers can have a particular impact on corporate reputation. It is important for organizations to identify these actors and understand how to interact with them in order to safeguard the organizational reputation. In this study, based on extensive literature review and a Delphi study, we constructed a model for the identification of the social media influencers; the 'social media corporate reputation influencers model'. The Delphi study shows that the model is suitable for the identification of social media influencers by identifying the main indicators for determining and predicting the influence within the social media. Based on the Delphi study amongst social media marketing professionals, we conclude that social media has an impact on corporate reputations.

Keywords: social media, interaction patterns, corporate reputation, social influencers, delphi-study.

Introduction

THE growth and success of social media is enormous. Millions of users daily view Facebook profiles, send tweets, write or react to blogs or watch YouTube videos. There are indicators that the value of social media applications has raised to many trillions of dollars (Trusov et al, 2010). The important role of the social media for the life of many people is one of the main reasons for organizations to pay attention to this relatively new phenomenon (Haenlein & Kaplan, 2010). Marketing practitioners try to understand the roles and possibilities of the social media as marketing instruments and integrate them into their marketing programs. They test different social plat-

forms and make considerations on what types of social media fit best within the policies and strategies of the company (Waters et al, 2009).

Given the growth of social media, influence of one individual on the corporate reputation can be substantial (Kiousis et al, 2007). That is the reason why more and more companies recognize the importance of social media monitoring to 'listen' to interactions on social media (Pang & Lee, 2008). A negative voice within the social media can be a bit to make sure that a chain of negative publicity is made. On the other side, positive voices can improve the corporate reputation. Therefore, the combination of monitoring and engagement became a necessary part of the reputation management.

However, multinationals like Shell or Microsoft cannot react to each social media voice. For that reason it is important to identify the most influential people in the social media. It is important for organizations to not only follow closely what is said about their organization, but also identify the sources of people's voice and the way this is disseminated. The central aim of this study was to identify the indicators that make an actor influential within the social media. Besides that we also wanted to investigate the impact of an individual actor within the social media on the corporate reputation.

This study is valuable for contemporary organizations with ambitions in social media marketing and communication strategies. The scientific value of this research is the identification of the indicators for the influence of actors, but also to investigate the sources that make an actor influential; like interactions and the network. Influence is not only determined by the characteristics of an individual. Factors associated with the interactions and the network of an individual are also of great importance in such 'influence processes'. That is the main reason we made a distinction between the three categories of influence: actors, interactions and networks.

Theoretical framework

There is a growing interest in the value of social media for different marketing and communication purposes. But many marketing and communication professionals often face difficulties in defining the core of social media. The term 'social media' was introduced around 2003, the moment that social networks became more popular. For that reason social networks and social media are

often confused. To see this distinction, it is important to see social media as an umbrella term for social networks, where social media is defined as "a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological multifaceted and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content" (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010, p.61). A social network is one of the Internet-based applications of this definition. Other applications are: blogs (Blogger, WordPress), joint projects (Wikipedia), content communities (YouTube, Flickr), virtual social worlds (Second Life), and virtual game worlds (World of Warcraft) (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010), online forums, bulletin boards and review sites (Quora, Epinions, TripAdvisor, Personal Democracy forum Europe) or content aggregators (paper.li, InnoCentive, iGoogle) (Constantinides and Fountain, 2008, Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010).

Within the social media we can identify different interactions. Analysis of these interactions leads to recognition of certain patterns: social media interaction patterns. This indicates that individuals within the social media communicate with each other according to a specific pattern. The categories which are listed for determining influence in social media interaction patterns are of great importance, the so-called actors, interactions and networks (Golder et al, 2006). Within these categories we distinguish different indicators that determine and predict influence within the social media.

Corporate Communication

The core of corporate communication is to influence stakeholders. However, corporate communication is a broad term. Within the corporate communication three streams can be distinguished: management communication (Jo & Shim, 2005), marketing communication (Zeithalm et al, 1988) and organizational communication (Eisenberg, 1984). Management and communication consists of the internal communication within an organization, a form of communication that is not a good solution for the open social media. The marketing communication consists of (corporate) advertising, public relations and direct marketing (Naik & Piersma, 2002; Kotler & Pfoertsch, 2006), while the organizational communication consists of recruitment (Taylor & Bergmann, 1987), crisis communication (Ulmer & Sellnow, 2000) and webcare (Van Noord & Willemsen, 2011).

According to Oomens & Van den Bosch (1999) and Ihator (2001) it is

possible to distinguish two main streams of strategic communication types: proactive communication and reactive communication. The goal of proactive communication is actively seeking contact with consumers, while the goal of reactive communications is reacting to a message of a consumer. Within the six domains of corporate communication: crisis communication, public relations, direct marketing, webcare, corporate advertising and recruitment; these two types of communication are addressed. Crisis communication is both reactive and proactive, citizens asked questions about a certain situation, for instance an explosion, and the organization gave an answer to these questions. However, it is also possible to give updates about the explosion. What does it mean for the citizens and what actions should they take, a proactive way of communication.

The main purpose of marketing and communications relating to the two main streams of strategic communications is to improve the reputation of organizations. For years the corporate reputation received little attention by organizations (Barnett et al, 2006). However, the rise of social media has completely changed this attitude. Since every social media user can share his thoughts about an organization and so can affect the corporate reputation within the social media, makes people to reckon with. Corporate reputation is defined as: "a stakeholder's overall evaluation of a company over time. This evaluation is based on the stakeholder's direct experiences with the company, any other form of communication and symbolism that provides information about the firm's actions and/or a comparison with the actions of other leading rivals" (Gotsi and Wilson, 2001, p.29). Every social media user has some degree of social influence on other users. As van Riel (2004) stated, the reputation of an organization is determined by concerned citizens. However, this social influence of one individual varies per individual.

Social Influence

According to the literature, social influence is: "Consciously or subconsciously persuading others from your thoughts, beliefs or actions" (Kahan, 1997). Influencing another person depends on several different factors. One can be for example influential because of his authority, because of his social status or because of his large network. Based on these different reasons of influence there are three categories in defining social influence: actors (Lazarsfeld &

Katz, 1955; Cosmas & Sheth, 1980; Keys & Case, 1990; Weimann; 1994), interactions (Dholakia, 1978; Hass, 1981) and networks (Cosmas & Sheth, 1980; Gordijn et al, 2002).

According to the actor network theory (Callon, 1982) the three categories in social influence are interwoven with each other. The actor (a human or non-human entity) uses an interaction to affect others in a network: their thoughts, beliefs or actions (Figure 1). These three categories have also the capability of independently exercising influence. We have influential actors, influential interactions and influential networks, each one independently from the rest.
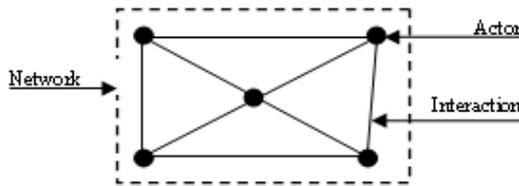

Figure 1: Actor Network Theory (Callon, 1982)

Influential actors

The emergence of word-of-mouth communication (WOM, or word-of-mouth advertising) via social media has a major impact on business. It is difficult for organizations to have influence on this form of communication that the reputation of a brand, product or service can impair or enhance. Examination of Kiss and Bichler (2008) recognizes the importance of WOM and points to the influence of specific individuals in this form of communication, the 'influencers'. In the marketing world 58 percent of the marketers deem the role of online influencers to be large to very large. 55 percent of marketers indicated that they have no or limited understanding of the identification of the online influencers (PR Lewis, 2011). Research by Gillin (2007) showed already that the concept of influencers has made a new twist, causing gain in the normal citizen influence in various processes. The influential people in the conventional world are not necessarily the most influential people in the digital world (Citera, 1998; Keller & Berry, 2003; Gillin, 2007). The study of

Citera shows that people who were quite introverted in everyday life, on the Internet turned out to be very extravert. They dare to give their opinion and take the lead in online conversations. Therefore, this section is attempted to identify the influencers within the social media.

An influential actor is not always a person, it could also be a company for instance. However, in this study we mainly focus on influential individuals, the influencers. Lazarsfeld and Katz (1955), pioneers of research in the field of influence, define influencers as people who influence others in their immediate vicinity. Their status of 'influencer' gave them the power to speed-up the information distribution (Kitsak et al, 2010). According to Huang et al (2011), it is in any case important to make a distinction between different kinds of influencers, to identify influence within the social media. For example, not only the stereotypical famous people like Barack Obama, but also the people who are closer to you such as your friends or acquaintances, could be influential. According to Gladwell (2001), there is a distinction between three types of influential people: (1) connectors, (2) salesmen and (3) mavens. A connector is characterized as a person with many connections, a salesman is able to sell everything that is within reach and the maven is characterized by his expertise in a particular field. But since influencers occur in many different capacities, it is insufficient to handle only three different types of influencers. Different characteristics of influencers also form different types of influencers.

The literature points to several different indicators for identifying influential actors. Keller and Berry (2003) point to indicators related to influencing characteristics of individuals: active minds, trendsetters, social presence and impact. Other indicators of influencing capacity which both are qualitative and quantitative are: social activity (Bales et al, 1951; Bottger, 1984; Littlepage et al, 1995), charisma (Bass, 1997; Shamir, 1999), expertise (Cosmas & Sheth, 1980), communication (Keys & Case, 1990), power (Kadushin, 1980), authority (Cialdini, 2009), shared interests (Cha et al, 2010), uniqueness (Iyengar et al, 2009), creation of follow-up activities (Keller & Berry, 2003), innovativeness (Agarwal et al, 2008), awareness (Gillin, 2008), personal messages (Cha et al, 2008) and amount of followers/friends (Cha et al, 2010, Kwak et al, 2010).

Influential interactions

Social interaction is one of the most common reasons for using the Internet. The introduction of social media strengthened this reason. Current research to influential processes in digital media is often focused on the analysis of social networks. But the value of interactions in influential processes is often underestimated. Within the social media the role of interactions in identifying social media influence is important. Social interactions through online applications differ from offline interactions due to the lesser importance of physical appearance and physical proximity of the sender (McKenna & Bargh, 2000). As a result, the introverted people and people who experience social anxiety and loneliness tended to use the social web to assuage their real-worlds isolation (Correa et al, 2010). But in case of Facebook for example, the extraverted people are better represented. Introverted people who want to talk in anonymity will not use networks where they should release their actual identity. However, in offline interactions the intrinsic properties of an actor are more important to influence another, than in the social media. In the social media, the accent lies more on the intrinsic characteristics of the interactions of these actors.

A sociological definition of an interaction is given by Jensen (1998, p.188) who describes an interaction as 'the relationship between two or more people who, in a given situation, mutually adapt their behavior and actions to each other'. Reports, messages and dialogues are terms which lie to a greater or lesser extent in relation to an interaction. According to Bales (1955), Dholakia (1978) and Hass (1981) the communicative power of a person largely depends on interactions. Blogs, Tweets or Wall posts, each of these communication forms have their own characteristics. The fact that you should express the core of your Tweet message in just 140 characters makes it a different interaction form than for example a blogpost in which the amount of characters is infinite.

The influence of an interaction can be measured with different indicators. Karpf (2007) studied the influence of interactions in the context of weblogs; he created the blogosphere authority index (BAI) and made in this index a distinction between four different criteria to test weblogs on influence: (1) network centrality score, (2) hyperlink authority score, (3) site traffic score and (4) community activity score. The network centrality score is used to measure the reputation of an individual. Is he a central person in a network

or just someone with some contacts? The hyperlink authority score takes the amount of links to a blog as a criterion for influence. The amount of website visitors is measured in the third criterion: 'site traffic score'. The fourth community activity score is a score that is connected to the number of interactions that evokes from a blog. Other indicators for the influence of social interactions are context (Maheswaran & Meyers-Levy, 1990), argumentation (Hunter, 2004), emotional situation (Forgas, 2007), agenda setting (McQuail & Windahl, 1993), framing (Esser & Spanier, 2005) and timing (Kovoor-Misra & Nathan, 2000).

Influential networks

Network analysis of one individual is a complex task. An individual does not live in a vacuum with only a few clear and stable connections. An individual develops over a lifetime and creates a large network. The rise of social networking sites (SNS) boosts the creation of a large network. There are almost no barriers to connect with other people. One push on a button connects a new person to the network. Users of these social network sites have therefore the possibility to build a large network. A large network is often a form of status, so people are busy trying to boost the network with new connections (Cha et al, 2010). Many relatively unknown friends, the so-called weak ties of Granovetter (1973), clearly emerge. The weak ties offer individuals the opportunity to spread a message to a wide network. Nevertheless, there are just a few differences between the influence of a social network in the social media and a social network in the social psychology.

Van Dijk (1991, p.37) describes a network as follows: 'A network is a connection between at least three elements, points or units'. This definition applies to physical networks, social networks and media networks. The focus in this study is on the social networks within which individual actors can influence others. These networks consist of individuals and relations as described in the paper of Chrystakis and Fowler (2009). The degree of influence of individuals derives mainly from the network in which they live. A characteristic situation where the influence of an individual is clearly visible is within viral marketing. In this marketing technique a message is spread as an epidemic (Subramani & Rajagopalan, 2003). The network in which the influencer is currently located and the characteristics of the influencer itself have an

important role in the spread of information. Indicators which in different studies were associated with influential social networks are: the social distance between two actors (Granovetter, 1973), reciprocity (Tichy et al, 1979), multiplexity (Tichy et al, 1979), size of the network (Perkins & Syrquin, 1989), density (Tichy et al, 1979, Scott, 1988), connectivity (Lindelauf, 2011), centrality (Lindelauf, 2011), emotional value (Ellison et al, 2007), group cohesion (Aviv et al, 2003) and clustering (Mislove et al, 2007).

The indicators described were based on an extended literature study; the indicators mentioned by different studies are validated by a Delphi study amongst an online expert panel. The indicators are pointed to the three different categories within social influence: actors, interactions and networks. In the Delphi study these categories will be fulfilled with different indicators that predict or determine the influence within those categories and then within the social media.

Research questions

The work above leads us to introduce two research questions that guide the remainder of this paper.

1. How could influence within the social media be identified?

2. What is the impact of dealing with social media in corporate communications on the reputation of organizations?

Methodology

Answering the two research questions, which belongs to explorative research, an online expert panel in the form of a Delphi study has been used (Dalkey & Helmer, 1963), whereby the participants should come to consensus about the topic of influence within the social media. Compared to other research methods, the online Delphi study has clear advantages for this study. First of all, it is less time consuming for the participants and the researchers; because the participants can all at the same time answer the in-depth questions. Another advantage of the Delphi study is the fact that the data is readily available

online; processing the data takes less time than in offline depth interviews, transcribing issues will therefore expire.

Organizations have a strong interest in the identification of social media influencers. These 'special persons' can be valuable in the persuasion of other social media users and so affect the corporate reputation of the organization. So, in this study we identify these social media influencers based on an online Delphi study and investigate which role these social media influencers play in influencing the corporate reputation.

This will be conducted with the objective to find consensus in the number of indicators predicting influence within the social media. In essence an online Delphi Study is an expert study in two or more rounds; the first round gives input for the second round and the second round gives the participating experts the chance to give a reaction on the answers in the first round. In a third round it is possible to generate an anonymous discussion between the participants. In this research we use the two-rounded Delphi Study of Dean et al (2000).

The reason why a Delphi study is used is the fact that this study prevents a tunnel vision (Kvale, 1996); every participant can give input in the concept of social media influence, without the interruption of others. The fact that influence can be seen from different perspectives makes it logical that more insights in more contexts arise. The second round ensures that these different insights result in a global view of social media influence, without the different insights.

The Delphi Study is carried out to twelve marketing and communication professionals in the first round and eighteen professionals in the second round. These professionals have more than 10 years experience in their field of work. The participants first got a whitepaper with global information about the research, but without detailed information. The different goals of the research were not told to them, in order to prevent that the participants were affected in advance. The first round was an open questioned round, the professionals could give their insights in their own words and give the participants the chance to think about a good answer. These answers were analyzed by the researcher and tallied on the number of the same indicators. The most mentioned indicators were used in the second round. Besides identifying the indicators we also asked them to give their insight in the role of social media influence on the corporate communication and reputation.

In steps the Delphi study was conducted as follows:

1. The selection of the expert panel.

2. The preparation and distribution of the first open-ended questionnaire.

3. Completed and received questionnaires were analyzed and the results were categorized.

4. The preparation and distribution of the second closed questionnaire.

5. Compare and categorize the suggestions and process results, in order to achieve consensus.

6. Writing a detailed summary for the participants.

First round

Questions which were asked are: 'what makes one influential in social media?', 'what makes the message influential?' and 'what makes the social network influential?' The professionals gave several characteristics which were related to the three categories: 'actor', 'interaction' and 'network'. These characteristics, indicators in the rest of this study, could be divided into two groups: (1) intrinsic characteristics and (2) extrinsic characteristics. The intrinsic characteristics such as being a trendsetter are difficult to measure, the extrinsic characteristic such as the number of friends are better to measure. The results of this first round were used for the second round with closed questions.

Second round

The first round resulted in open answers which were analyzed and categorized for the second round. In the second round the goal was to find consensus about the concept of social media influence, especially on the different indicators. The structure of the questions in the second round of questions was in the form of propositions and hypotheses that have been merged with the indicators from the literature. Every question started with a sentence, which should be complemented with possible indicators. The participant had to indicate (on a five points Likert-scale) to what extent they agreed with the accuracy of these indicators and if they think the indicators were measurable in the social media.

An example question: 'The message (data exchange) of an online influencer has more influence when. . . ' This statement was supplemented with different indicators like 'he has expertise in a certain area.' Beside that the participants should answer some questions about whether they expect actors to influence the corporate communication and reputation.

The mean and median are used to give value to the extent to which an indicator determines influence. As in the study of Hasson et al (2000) this form of analysis gives the most reliable analytical results in a Delphi study. The fact that an indicator has a lower mean proves that this indicator is insufficient in determining the influence of an actor within the social media.

Results

Most of the marketing and communication professionals looked at a different perspective to 'social media influence'. The focus of this study is not only on social networks, but more specific on social media. Forums, blogs, Twitter or Facebook, each form of social media was included in the study. Several new indicators are the result of this wide scope of research. The results of the Delphi-study are discussed below.

Results of the first question round

In the first round twelve of the twelve invited professionals participated. The open answers were interpreted and tallied, if an answer was called more than four times, it was included in the second round of questions. The primary objective of the first round was to pool the different views of the participants regarding influence within the social media. These bundled answers formed the basis for the second round of questions. The fact that social influence could be seen from several different perspectives provides a distinction between the characteristics, on the one hand, there are the intrinsic characteristics of participants and on the other hand the extrinsic characteristics (how to measure the influence).

The experts all introduced at least three characteristics of influential actors, interactions and networks. A striking result is that the twelve participants all look in a different way to the online influencers. One finds the intrinsic

characteristics important, while the other believes the size of the network determines the influence. In order to prevent that a result is send in one direction has been chosen to make the questions in the first round as broadly interpretable as possible. In the second round these different perceptions should lead to joint consensus on the indicators.

Results of the second round

The participants have been confronted with the answers they gave in the first round. These answers were evaluated for consensus. The higher the consensus, the more the participants could identify with the indicators in the three categories: actors, interactions and networks. The questionnaire was send among the twelve participants in the first round; ten of them fully participated in the second round. Two participants have answered the questions regarding the influential actors. In addition, six professionals who were not able to participate in the first round took part in the second round. The total number of participants in the second round was therefore sixteen, plus the two participants who completed the first part. The questionnaire was divided into four parts. The first part consisted of questions regarding the influential actors, the second part of influential interactions, the third part of influential networks and the last part of questions regarding the role that social media plays in influencing the corporate reputation.

Indicators which were mentioned regarding the influential actors are: (1) being an active mind, (2) being credible, (3) has expertise, (4) has authority, (5) is a trendsetter and (6) has substantive influence in discussions and conversations. The influence of an interaction largely depends of (1) the amount of times a message has been shared, (2) the amount of reactions a message raises, (3) the amount of quotes a message raises, (4) the amount of personal reactions an interaction raises, (5) the click-through rate of a message, (6) the amount of readers/listeners which were reached, (7) the quality of interactions, (8) the relevance of a message for readers/listeners, (9) the message has throughput with traditional media, (10) the message evokes a large group of unique visitors and (11) the message provides an additional value. An actor has influence in a network if: (1) the message was shared outside the own network, (2) if content is used by others in the network, (3) if the actor has a large number of good contacts, (4) if the actor can activate others to read

a message, (5) if the actor actively communicates with others, (6) if the actor has a number of subtop-influencers in the network, (7) if a message is shared within the own network, (8) if the actor has many contacts, (9) if the actor shows great commitment and (10) if the speed at which a message is shared/used within a network is high. Figure 2 only mentioned the top 4 of indicators related to the three different categories, these could be seen in the first column, this is also the descriptive side of the model. However, the rest of the model is an effect model. The descriptive side of the model is related to the first research question that was related to the identification of influence within the social media. The overall model is an effect model and is related to the second research question. Influential actors, interactions and networks have a major impact on the corporate communication of an organization. According to the participants the conscious use of social media has a positive impact on managing the reputation of the organizations, which also has an important role for the online influencers. They offer organizations an additional opportunity to strengthen the corporate reputation.
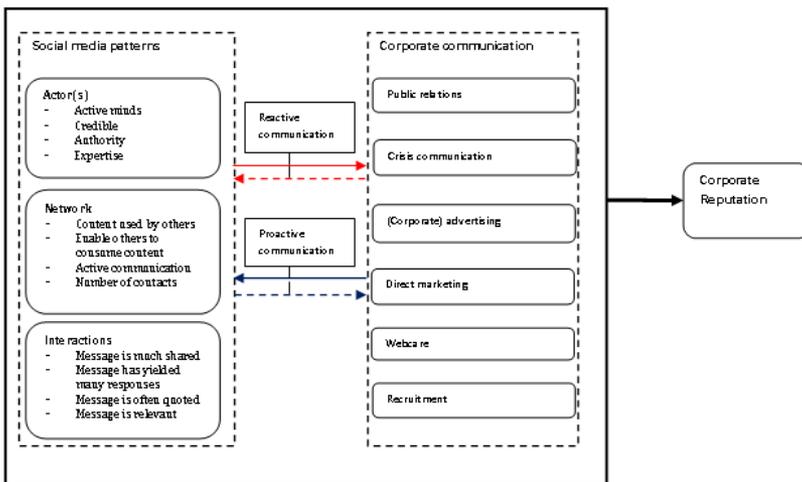

Figure 2: Social Media Corporate Reputation Influencers

Conclusion

In recent years, an increasing number of methods and tools have been developed to measure the influence of an individual within the social media, examples are: Klout, Kret.ly and Peer Index. Applications that especially use the engagement around an individual, for example by measuring the amount of reactions or the number of times a message is being shared. In this paper we started with an explorative analysis to the intrinsic and extrinsic qualities of social media influencers, by doing a literature review and a Delphi study. We found that actors, interactions and networks are the three recognizable categories in social media influence. Both qualitative and quantitative variables were associated with social media influencers. Based on the research results we can draw different conclusions concerning the different categories. First, we could see a clear distinction between the influence of a transmitter and the way the receiver responds to this influence. The transmitter (actor) performs such influence by demonstrating on a credible way his or her expertise, the receiver evaluates this message and executes an action for example by spreading the word among his or her network. That is one of the main reasons whythat we made a distinction between influential actors, influential interactions and influential networks. Within these three categories different indicators could be pointed.

Coming back to the first research question, we can conclude that influence within the social media can be identified with 27 indicators, based on the consensus in the assessment on the Likert-scale, the participants have given in the Delphi study. However, we appoint the top-10 indicators that have the greatest value for the identification of influence within the social media. Influence in the social media increases – in order of importance – if: (1) a message is often shared, (2) a message evokes many responses, (3) a message is widely quoted, (4) a message is used by many others, (5) the actor is an active mind, (6) the message is credible, (7) the actor has great impact on others, (8) the actor is an authority, (9) the actor has expertise in a particular field and (10) a message evokes many personal responses. It should be taken into account that as soon as the value of an indicator increases or decreases, the influence of the actor also increases or decreases. It is important to form different indices to make the influence value more precise. An actor that has authority and much expertise, whose messages are often shared and who evokes many responses has

for example more influence than an actor who has no authority or expertise, whose messages never has been shared, but who has many contacts. An index of these different situations makes it possible to compare the actors with each other.

An answer on the second research question is that a correct and conscious treatment of social media influencers affects the corporate reputation in a positive way. The experts in the Delphi study confirm that social media influencers affect the corporate reputation. For that reason, we can conclude that infinitive use of social media influencers will only strengthen this corporate reputation, because they were believed by the followers. However, it is important not to use the influencers as glorified advertising columns. Twitter-followers or Facebook-friends of the social media influencers do not take them serious if they suddenly start to promote a certain product or service. But this largely depends on the type of corporate communication that is conducted; in crisis management for example the use of social media and social media influencers may have a greater effect on the corporate reputation than in direct marketing.

Discussion

In this paper, we came to a descriptive and effect model where influence within the social media was identified with several indicators and where this social media influence was related to the reputation of an organization.

The descriptive side of the model is in the first place important for social media monitoring tools, because they can create an algorithm that shows which actors, interactions or networks (or a combination of the categories) has the most influence in a certain corporate communication context. The construction of this algorithm is a unique selling point for any social media monitoring tool. Afterwards, marketing and communication professionals could use the score based on the algorithm in their choice for the communication with an influential actor, interaction or network. They could be used to play a key role in customer service, crisis management or maybe for example corporate advertising.

Future research should lead to an improvement of the 'social media corporate reputation influencers model'. An important issue for future research is a study to the construction of indices. Every indicator in this research has

an individual value in the determination and prediction of influence within the social media, but the value of coupled indicators (called an index) is much more valuable. In the future it is recommended to improve this model by constructing indices.

In the future, each type of corporate communication should consist of several different indices. If a supermarket has sold for example a product that contains glass shards, then the product should be recalled. To influence the customers of the seriousness of the situation, it is important to reach them with for example a social media influencer. The organization could then use an index with the indicators which they think fits the best with the influencer they want to reach. The influencer should be approached with the attention message of the organization and the influencer could persuade the specific audience who purchased the product to bring the product back to the supermarket. In another situation this could be different, for customer service it is maybe important to react to persons who has a large network and who has a sense of authority within a specific field. So in the future, it may be valuable to investigate the possible construction context-specific indices.

Another point for the future is the fact that this research is conducted with marketing and communication professionals, which created identification from one perspective. In the future it is recommended to identify social media influence from the perspective of the social media user. When are you affected by another social media user? This research would be from the perspective of the feeling of the social media user especially; this can be done with specific questions in which no prior knowledge is required.

A limitation of this study is the limited sample size of the Delphi study. This has led to two shortcomings. Firstly, only a dozen participants completed the first question round, which ensures that not all indicators that apply to social media influence, have emerged. Secondly, it is not possible with this limited sample size to do reliability analysis on the results of the second question round. The results from the first and second round of questions can only be interpreted by the researcher.

Finally, it is difficult to prove that there is a causal relation between the influence within the social media and the impact on the corporate reputation. The marketing and communication professionals suggest that there is a relation, but quantitative research could give a more reliable evidence of the relation to social media influence and for example a more negative corporate

reputation. But without research to this specific research subject, it is difficult to have a watertight proof of this relation.

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