

Discursive struggle in online media

Perspectives on organization–consumer
interaction

Ella Lillqvist

Main dissertation advisor

Senior Fellow Leena Louhiala-Salminen, Aalto University School of Business, Finland

Opponent

Professor Timothy Kuhn, University of Colorado at Boulder, USA

Aalto University publication series

DOCTORAL DISSERTATIONS 64/2016

© Ella Lillqvist

ISBN 978-952-60-6745-2 (printed)

ISBN 978-952-60-6746-9 (pdf)

ISSN-L 1799-4934

ISSN 1799-4934 (printed)

ISSN 1799-4942 (pdf)

<http://urn.fi/URN:ISBN:978-952-60-6746-9>

Unigrafia Oy

Helsinki 2016

Finland



Author

Ella Lillqvist

Name of the doctoral dissertation

Discursive struggle in online media: Perspectives on organization–consumer interaction

Publisher School of Business

Unit Department of Management Studies, Unit of Organizational Communication

Series Aalto University publication series DOCTORAL DISSERTATIONS 64/2016

Field of research Organizational communication

Date of the defence 13 May 2016

Monograph **Article dissertation** **Essay dissertation**

Abstract

While online media have been perceived to empower consumers to have more influence in relation to organizations, organizations also use these media in manipulative ways. In this dissertation, this dynamic is conceptualized as discursive struggle. The dissertation takes a critical and constructionist perspective and draws on a set of “dialogical”–interactional and contextual–theories of communication (such as Bakhtin’s dialogism and symbolic interactionism) to examine organization–consumer interaction in social media.

The aim of the dissertation is to understand the discursive processes and cultural and technological affordances involved in the discursive struggle on social media. These issues are examined in four essays. Essay 1 explores how organizations attempt to gain an advantage by discursively managing impressions of themselves and others in online communication. Essay 2 focuses on the presence of divergent voices and the control or silencing of those voices by organizations as a process in the discursive struggle. Essay 3 focuses on how organizations and their promotional communication are (de)legitimated by social media users; attention is therefore shifted to the discursive power that consumers have over organizations. Finally, essay 4 takes a different perspective to both organizations and discursive struggle and illustrates how uniform and insider-oriented groups can be formed through discursive means, which can lead to a suspension of discursive struggle.

The main method used is detailed (micro-level) discourse analysis. Textual data were collected from corporate Facebook pages (essays 1 and 2), Reddit (essay 3) and YouTube (essay 4). In addition, netnography (a form of online ethnography) and semi-structured interviews were used to provide contextualizing data.

The findings of this dissertation elucidate, on the one hand, manipulative communicative processes employed by organizations; these include preventing or removing unwanted consumer contributions (coercion), diverting attention from uncomfortable topics (diversion), and convincing people to stop voicing criticism (persuasion). Manipulative processes also include concealing either the purpose or the author of promotional communication (misrepresentation) and construction of like-minded “fan” groups (interpellation). On the other hand, consumers use resistant communicative processes such as creative stretching or circumventing unequal affordances of the media, carnivalization and critical evaluation. Within organizational communication, this dissertation contributes to a better understanding, first, of organizations’ involvement in discursive struggles as enabled by the current social media environment, and second, of the role of organizational outsiders, such as consumers, in organizational communication.

Keywords organizational communication, discourse, interaction, dialogue, social media, online media

ISBN (printed) 978-952-60-6745-2	ISBN (pdf) 978-952-60-6746-9	
ISSN-L 1799-4934	ISSN (printed) 1799-4934	ISSN (pdf) 1799-4942
Location of publisher Helsinki	Location of printing Helsinki	Year 2016
Pages 160	urn http://urn.fi/URN:ISBN:978-952-60-6746-9	

Tekijä

Ella Lillqvist

Väitöskirjan nimi

Diskurssikamppailua verkossa: Näkökulmia organisaatioiden ja kuluttajien väliseen vuorovaikutukseen

Julkaisija Kauppakorkeakoulu**Yksikkö** Johtamisen laitos, Organisaatioviestinnän yksikkö**Sarja** Aalto University publication series DOCTORAL DISSERTATIONS 64/2016**Tutkimusala** Organisaatioviestintä**Väitöspäivä** 13.05.2016 **Monografia** **Artikkeliväitöskirja** **Esseeväitöskirja****Tiivistelmä**

Sosiaalisen median voi nähdä lisäävän kuluttajien vaikuttamismahdollisuuksia suhteessa yrityksiin. Toisaalta myös organisaatiot käyttävät nykyään näitä kanavia manipulatiiviseen viestintään. Tässä väitöskirjassa tämä vuorovaikutus käsitteellistetään diskurssikamppailuna. Työn näkökulma on kriittinen ja konstruktivistinen, ja siinä hyödynnetään organisaatioiden ja yksilöiden verkkovuorovaikutuksen tutkimukseen teorioita, joita voidaan kutsua dialogisiksi (esimerkiksi Bahtinin dialogismi ja symbolinen interaktionismi).

Väitöskirjan tavoitteena on ymmärtää millaiset diskursiiviset prosessit ja millaiset kulttuuriset ja teknologiset käyttömahdollisuudet vaikuttavat viestintään sosiaalisissa medioissa. Näitä kysymyksiä tutkitaan neljässä empiirisessä esseessä. Ensimmäisessä esseessä paneudutaan siihen, kuinka yritykset pyrkivät edistämään omaa asemaansa hallitsemalla diskursiivisesti mielikuvia itsestään ja muista. Toisessa esseessä keskitytään erilaisten äänten olemassaolon mahdollisuuksiin ja niiden hallitsemiseen tai hiljentämiseen diskurssikamppailun osana. Kolmannessa osoitetaan, kuinka sosiaalisen median käyttäjät voivat (de)legitimoida organisaatioita ja niiden promotionaalista viestintää – näin ollen siinä vaihdetaan näkökulma kuluttajien käyttämään diskursiiviseen valtaan. Lopulta, neljännessä esseessä, näkökulma sekä organisaatioihin että diskurssikamppailuun on erilainen: siinä tarkastellaan esimerkkitapauksen kautta, kuinka diskursiivisten prosessien seurauksena voi syntyä yhdenmukaisia ja sisäänpäin kääntyneitä ryhmiä, joissa ei diskurssikamppailua juuri tapahdu.

Väitöskirjan pääasiallinen tutkimusmenetelmä on mikrotason diskurssianalyysi. Tekstiaineistoa kerättiin yritysten Facebook-sivuilta (essee 1 ja 2), Redditistä (essee 3) ja YouTubesta (essee 4). Lisäksi kontekstualisoivaa aineistoa kerättiin netnografian (verkkotnografian) ja teemahaastatteluiden avulla.

Tutkimuksen tulokset valottavat toisaalta organisaatioiden käyttämiä manipulatiivisia viestintäprosesseja, joihin kuuluu kuluttajien epätoivottujen puheenvuorojen estäminen ja poistaminen, huomion siirtäminen pois kiusallisista aiheista, ja ihmisten vakuuttaminen siten, että he lopettavat kritiikin esiin tuomisen. Lisäksi näihin prosesseihin kuuluvat markkinoivan viestinnän tarkoituksen tai tekijän piilottaminen sekä samanmielisten ”faniryhmien” luominen. Toisaalta kuluttajat hyödyntävät sosiaalisten medioiden tarjoamien käyttömahdollisuuksien luovaa venyttämistä tai kiertämistä, karnevalisointia ja kriittistä arviointia. Väitöskirja lisää ymmärrystä organisaatioiden osallistumisesta diskurssikamppailuihin sosiaalisen median mahdollisuuksia hyödyntäen sekä organisaation ulkopuolisten henkilöiden, kuten kuluttajien, roolista organisaatioviestinnässä.

Avainsanat organisaatioviestintä, diskurssi, vuorovaikutus, dialogi, sosiaalinen media**ISBN (painettu)** 978-952-60-6745-2**ISBN (pdf)** 978-952-60-6746-9**ISSN-L** 1799-4934**ISSN (painettu)** 1799-4934**ISSN (pdf)** 1799-4942**Julkaisupaikka** Helsinki**Painopaikka** Helsinki**Vuosi** 2016**Sivumäärä** 160**urn** <http://urn.fi/URN:ISBN:978-952-60-6746-9>

Acknowledgements

As this book has finally taken shape, it is time to thank all those who have made it possible. First, I wish to express my deep gratitude to my dissertation advisor Leena Louhiala-Salminen for all her help and encouragement. She has always had an unwavering faith in my project even when I myself had doubts. Leena has also been a coauthor in my two papers so far published. Second, I thank my other two co-authors Anne Kankaanranta and Johanna Moisander. In addition to their tangible part in the preparation of this dissertation, they too have been mentors and friends and offered important support in the ups and downs of my dissertation journey.

I am profoundly thankful to the Unit of Organizational Communication (formerly Department of Communication) at Aalto University School of Business for the employment, working space and community it has offered. All my colleagues there have offered valuable feedback in a number of internal research seminars where I have presented my work and, importantly, they have created a friendly and inspiring atmosphere where it has been a joy to come to work every day.

I would like to especially thank my dear friends and fellow doctoral students. Annamari Huovinen, Marketta Majapuro and Minna Logemann set a good example when they defended their dissertations in 2013. Merja Porttikivi took the last steps in sync with me and finally had her public defense a few weeks before me. Anu Harju and I have travelled to many wonderful places together and had countless important discussions about life and research—without her this dissertation would not be the same. The peer support I have got from Merja and Anu as well as Tiina Räisä, Tiina Nevanperä and Kirsti Iivonen in the final struggles of the doctoral process has been invaluable. Mia Leppälä, Mark Badham, Visa Penttilä and Ari Kuismin, who will soon follow in our footsteps, also deserve thanks. I truly appreciate the friendship and the help and support you have all given me and I will always remember the fun times we have shared in Helsinki and on conference and course trips around the world.

This work has been partly financed by grants from the HSE Foundation, the Foundation for Economic Education, the C. V. Åkerlund Foundation and the Jenny and Antti Wihuri Foundation, for which I wish to express my sincerest gratitude.

I thank Professor Timothy Kuhn, University of Colorado at Boulder, and Professor Mikko Villi, University of Jyväskylä, who agreed to act as pre-examiners for this dissertation and took time from their busy schedules to read and in-

sightfully comment on it. Of course, I take full responsibility for all remaining shortcomings. It is an honor that Professor Kuhn also agreed to act as my opponent, traveling a great distance to Helsinki for this purpose.

Finally, I thank my mother who has always believed in me and encouraged me and who helped me through some very difficult times, and all my friends who reminded me that there is, at least sometimes, more to life than just research. I dedicate this book to the memory of my father.

Helsinki, March 2016

Ella Lillqvist

Contents

Acknowledgements.....	1
List of essays.....	5
1. Introduction.....	7
1.1 Context of contribution.....	7
1.2 Perspective.....	9
1.3 Organization–consumer struggles in social media.....	10
1.4 Purpose, aims and methods.....	11
1.5 Structure of dissertation.....	12
2. Organizational discourse.....	15
2.1 Communication and social construction.....	15
2.2 Defining discourse.....	17
2.3 Discourse as interaction.....	18
2.4 Discourse as struggle.....	19
2.4.1 Power and resistance.....	20
2.4.2 Ideology.....	21
2.4.3 Voices and silencing.....	22
3. Organizations and consumers in online contexts.....	25
3.1 Social media, participation and connectivity.....	25
3.2 Social media as technological forms and cultural practice.....	26
3.3 Consumer groups, online participation and resistance.....	28
4. Conceptual framework.....	31
5. Methodology.....	35
5.1 Data.....	36
5.2 Netnography.....	38
5.3 Discourse analysis.....	39
5.3.1 Essay 1.....	39
5.3.2 Essay 2.....	41
5.3.3 Essay 3.....	41
5.3.4 Essay 4.....	42

5.4	Quality of the study	42
6.	Summary of findings.....	45
6.1	Essay 1.....	45
6.2	Essay 2	46
6.3	Essay 3	47
6.4	Essay 4	48
7.	Conclusion.....	51
7.1	Discussion.....	51
7.2	Limitations, future research and implications	55
7.3	Contributions	56
	References	57
	Essays	65

List of essays

This doctoral dissertation consists of an introduction and of the following essays, which are referred to in the text by their number:

- 1.** Lillqvist, Ella & Louhiala-Salminen, Leena (2014). Facing Facebook: Impression management strategies in company–consumer interactions. *Journal of Business and Technical Communication*, 28, 3–30. DOI: 10.1177/1050651913502359
- 2.** Lillqvist, Ella; Louhiala-Salminen, Leena & Kankaanranta, Anne (2015, online). Power relations in social media discourse: Dialogization and monologization on corporate Facebook pages. *Discourse, Context & Media*. DOI: 10.1016/j.dcm.2015.11.001
- 3.** Lillqvist, Ella & Moisander, Johanna. Constructing organizational legitimacy on social media: Reddit users as legitimacy evaluators. Unpublished manuscript.
- 4.** Lillqvist, Ella. Interpellative communicative constitution: Organizing through ideology and identification. Unpublished manuscript.

1. Introduction

Future research on the democratic potential of social media needs to consider the ways in which this potential is challenged by profit-driven interests as companies try to contain or silence critics, and owners of social media platforms try to steer clear of controversial issues so as to cater for the interests of advertisers.
(Uldam, 2014)

Some of the greatest recent changes to organizational communication have been brought by social media. One significant change is the possibility for consumers and other stakeholders to widely participate in communication with and about organizations in these media. This increasing and increasingly public participation arguably enables consumers to have more power and influence over organizations. However, organizations are far from helpless when faced with consumers online; indeed, as the above quote suggests, there is growing need for critical attention to the relations of power played out in online contexts. It can be argued that organizations, consumers and (owners of) social media platforms are often involved in a struggle over power, ideology and legitimacy, as they aim to advance their own interests and points of view. In this dissertation, which contributes primarily to the field of organizational communication, specifically organizational discourse studies (e.g. Alvesson & Kärreman, 2011; Grant, Hardy, Osrick, & Putnam, 2004; Jian, Schmisser, & Fairhurst, 2008), I look at online communication between organizations and consumers through the concept of “discursive struggle” between organizations and consumers in social media contexts.

1.1 Context of contribution

Communication is today increasingly seen as “the ongoing, dynamic, interactive process of manipulating symbols toward the creation, maintenance, destruction, and/or transformation of meanings, which are axial—not peripheral—to organizational existence and organizing phenomena” (Ashcraft, Kuhn, & Cooren, 2009). In other words, communication is a crucial process through which both selves and settings are constructed (Ashcraft & Mumby, 2004). A discursive perspective, based on social constructionist ontology, is a suitable starting point in the study of organizational communication because it places

focus on meaning drawn from social systems; language and discourses are seen to play a central role in the process of constructing social reality (Allen, 2005). A meaning-centered view of communication is then preferred over so-called transmission models (e.g., Shannon & Weaver, 1949). Together with the “transmission model” of communication, also the “container” view that implies that organizational communication is something that happens inside an organization, has been challenged. Communication is now widely understood as “the *stuff* of organizing”, not merely another organizational phenomenon, but constitutive of organizations (Putnam & Mumby, 2014, pp. 3-4); this also means that it is not useful to think of organizations merely as pre-existing “containers” where communication takes place.

The container view implied a stark difference between “internal” and “external” communication environments, and common topics within organizational communication have, indeed, traditionally included topics that focus on the internal, for example organizational culture, power, leadership, and socialization (Putnam & Mumby, 2014). In the last 15 years, however, scholars have slowly begun to examine also relationships between organizations and broader societal structures, where a central question is the increasing fluidity of organizational boundaries (Putnam & Mumby, 2014). However, the role of non-members in organizational communication is still an underexplored topic both in general and in social media contexts in particular (Albu & Etter, 2015). Although, indicatively of a change, the “organization–society relationship” was accorded its own section in the latest edition of the *Sage Handbook of Organizational Communication* (Putnam & Mumby, 2014), there is still relatively little organizational communication research that has examined organization–stakeholder relations—these have been left mostly to the concern of fields such as marketing or public relations. As precursors of this new topic area, Cheney and Christensen (2001) examined organizational identity and linked internal and external communication in that context. They argued that since a “container” view of the organization and a “transmission” view of communication are increasingly seen as obsolete, it is not anymore justifiable to exclude communication aimed at “external” audiences from the field of organizational communication.

Currently, scholars in organizational communication are, then, starting to acknowledge that organizations are not solely constituted by communicative interactions among organizational members but coproduced by non-organizational members (Albu & Etter, 2015; Schoeneborn & Scherer, 2012). This is particularly relevant in social media contexts where “outside” stakeholders regularly coproduce, reproduce, undermine, or contest organizational actors (Albu & Etter, 2015), changing organization–consumer relationships and leading to further blurring of boundaries between the “inside” and “outside” of organizations.

1.2 Perspective

In this study, I will look at organization–consumer interaction in social media contexts from a discursive perspective, drawing from discourse theories and other theories that focus on the micro-level of interaction. I thus subscribe to a kind of a “dialogic perspective” to organizational communication (Deetz, 2001). In a similar vein, Linell (2009) proposes the umbrella term “dialogical theories” for various interactional and contextual theories of human sense-making that all assume that sense-making is not a monologue, an activity involving autonomous individuals, but instead stress the role of the *other* in communication, as well as *interaction* and *contextualization* (Linell, 2009). These dialogical theories comprise the work of Mikhail Bakhtin and the Bakhtin circle (associated with a more limited concept of dialogism), and also other interactionally oriented scholars such as Lev Vygotsky, George Herbert Mead, William James, and Erving Goffman (Linell, 2009). In this category, Linell also includes empirical work in areas such as conversation analysis, ethnomethodology, ethnographic and context-based discourse analysis (DA), critical discourse studies (CDS), symbolic interactionism, discursive psychology, and socio-cultural semiotics. In the present study, the dialogical influences I draw from include Goffman (1959, 1981) and Potter’s discursive psychology (Potter, 1996; Potter & Wetherell, 1987) in essay 1, Bakhtin’s more narrow dialogism (1981; 1984a, 1984b; 1986) and CDS in essay 2, as well as symbolic interactionism, particularly Blumer (1969) and Goffman (1959) in essay 3. I also aim to contextualize the discourse analysis conducted in this study. In essays 3 and 4 this is done through the use of online ethnography, “netnography”, while in essay 2, interviews with discourse participants are conducted for this purpose.

A dialogical perspective recognizes that various discourses and voices always coexist, and not only that, but are involved in “an overt or covert struggle for discursive dominance” (Grant, Keenoy, & Oswick, 1998, p. 8). In various studies, this has been termed “dialogical struggle”, “discursive struggle”, or just struggle (Erkama & Vaara, 2010; Hardy & Phillips, 1999; Harley & Hardy, 2004; Real & Putnam, 2005). In these studies, organizations’ legitimacy, i.e. the generalized social acceptance of their actions and existence (Deephouse & Suchman, 2008; Suchman, 1995; Weber, 1978) is often focused on as the ultimate aim and gain of the discursive struggle, even though the specific objects of struggle differ (e.g. Barros, 2014; Erkama & Vaara, 2010; Joutsenvirta & Vaara, 2015; Livesey, 2001). It could be argued that previous studies have usually taken a “macro” perspective to discursive struggle in the sense of studying cases of big controversy where the very essence of an organization is abruptly questioned (such as radical organizational restructurings; Erkama & Vaara, 2010). However, discursive struggle is a wider concept that can also be examined from other perspectives such as the impact that those struggles have on people’s subjectivities (Laine & Vaara, 2007) and power and resistance in the actors’ relations (Real & Putnam, 2005). I take a “micro” perspective where struggle is an ongoing process, sometimes implicit, and present in many forms and in many discursive details. Smaller struggles can also aggregate to important consequences.

Many previous studies have also focused on the role of traditional media in discursive struggles concerning organizations (Joutsenvirta & Vaara, 2015; Vaara, Tienari, & Laurila, 2006). Barros (2014) discusses social media, but mainly from the point of view of organizational use of social media to oppose discourses in traditional media. When organization–consumer struggles in social media have been examined, it has been in the context of other academic discussions (e.g. media studies and consumer studies). Therefore I argue that it is called for to examine discursive struggle in social media between organizations and consumers from an organizational communication perspective.

Adopting the dialogical perspective and the concept of discursive struggle, I also strive to integrate a critical view by focusing on the relations between power, language, social practices and the inclusion of various interests in the interaction (Deetz, 2005). From the critical perspective, it is in fact understood that “texts are often sites of struggle in that they show traces of differing discourses and ideologies contending and struggling for dominance” (Wodak & Meyer, 2015, p. 12). Even though in this dissertation only essay 2 (which takes a CDS perspective) is explicitly critical in orientation, I choose to take on a critical lens (understood in a broad sense; see Deetz, 2005; Fournier & Grey, 2000) in this introductory essay to comment on the whole that the essays form. A critical perspective involves unmasking power relations and exposing the “un-naturalness” of reality (Fournier & Grey, 2000). The critical perspective is highly topical in view of the ever extending “corporate colonization” (Deetz, 1992) and “marketization” of society in general (Fairclough, 1993; Sandel, 2012) and online media in particular (Fuchs, 2008, 2014).

1.3 Organization–consumer struggles in social media

Over the last 15 years, interactive online environments known as “social” (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010) or “participatory” media (Howard, 2008; Rheingold, 2008) have provided consumers with an array of new digital technologies and opportunities for engaging with business organizations, and allowed them to voice their opinions and ideas about companies’ activities. It has been argued, then, that the new digital media empower consumers to take more active roles on the market (Denegri-Knott, 2006; Labrecque, vor dem Esche, Mathwick, Novak, & Hofacker, 2013) by engaging in what has been seen for example as participation (Cova & Pace, 2006; Lutz, Hoffmann, & Meckel, 2014; Villi, 2012), anti-corporate activity (Juris, 2005) or co-creation (Füller, Mühlbacher, Matzler, & Jawecki, 2009; Kelleher, Whalley, & Helkkula, 2011; Malmelin & Villi, 2015).

Lately, some researchers have begun to question the “consumer empowerment” view by pointing out new forms of corporate exploitation, as people engage in “immaterial labor” (Arvidsson, 2008; Lazzarato, 1996; Moisander, Könkkölä, & Laine, 2013) as “consumer workers” (Cova & Dalli, 2009a; Zwick, Bonsu, & Darmody, 2008) or “prosumers” (Cova & Cova, 2012; Ritzer & Jurgenson, 2010) who do non-remunerated work (e.g. creating content) for companies. The social media context itself also continually evokes important

questions of power use related to, e.g., data mining, privacy, and equality of access and voice which have been approached lately for example through a Marxist perspective (e.g., Fuchs, 2014).

In fact, studies on power struggles between organizations and consumers enabled by online contexts seem to be polarized, either focusing on consumer empowerment or their exploitation and manipulation by organizations. In the present study, I attempt to avoid dichotomous thinking and set out to work toward a more nuanced theoretical perspective on the interactional dynamics between consumers and organizations in online environments.

I speak here of “consumers”, but I acknowledge that there are other terms I could have chosen to employ and that defining individuals as consumers is in some ways problematic. It could be argued that labelling people as consumers participates in marketization (e.g., Fairclough, 1993) which involves defining things and people in terms of their economic value and their relation to economic processes and entities. As argued by Shankar, Cherrier, and Canniford (2006, p. 1017), “the identities of people as consumers have been substantially defined by the neo-liberal project and the discursive practices of marketing”. Nevertheless, “consumer” refers to a common real-world subject position, not one exclusively constructed through academic discourse. In particular, this subject position is relevant in the empirical cases of this dissertation as most of them are companies involved in consumer markets.

1.4 Purpose, aims and methods

In this study, I examine interaction between corporate representatives and consumers in social media environments, the focus being on struggles where both sides employ (intentionally or not) certain discursive processes to gain an advantage and influence each other. The dissertation takes a constructionist perspective which emphasizes the power of language and communication to construct the social world in general (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Searle, 1995) and organizational phenomena in particular (Ashcraft et al., 2009; Cooren, Kuhn, Cornelissen, & Clark, 2011). The study contributes to the discussion on organizational involvement in discursive struggle (e.g. Barros, 2014; Erkama & Vaara, 2010; Hardy & Phillips, 1999; Joutsenvirta & Vaara, 2015; Real & Putnam, 2005), and also to the emerging academic interest in the role of organizational outsiders in organizational communication (Albu & Etter, 2015; Schoeneborn & Scherer, 2012). More specifically, this doctoral dissertation contributes to the understanding of dialogical relations and discursive struggle between organizations and consumers in social media.

Therefore the purpose of this dissertation is to bring together theoretical elements and empirical findings to develop a dialogical perspective that involves a micro-level examination of discursive struggles between organizations and consumers. Particularly, the aim is to understand *discursive processes* and *cultural and technological affordances* involved in the discursive struggle in social media contexts.

Essay 1 explores how companies attempt to gain an advantage in the discursive struggle by managing impressions of themselves and others in an online context. Essay 2 focuses on the presence of divergent voices and control or silencing of those voices as a process in the discursive struggle. In essay 3, attention is shifted to the discursive power that consumers have over companies, as we focus on how promotional communication is (de)legitimated by the evaluations of social media users. Finally, in essay 4, I focus on a case that illustrates a specific kind of relation between an organization and consumers, essentially enabled by the online context. There, I argue that organizational control over discourse is achieved through the process of interpellating consumer-insiders who, from the start, share a similar ideology, leading to what I call ideological coherence in an insider-oriented organization. This is essentially a suspension of discursive struggle. This essay is a thought experiment that allows taking a different perspective on both organizations and discursive struggle. Understanding how uniform and insider-oriented groups can form online may reveal important implications for discursive struggles and dialogue.

More specifically, the research questions of the individual essays are the following:

Essay 1:

- What are the central impression management strategies used on corporate Facebook pages, particularly in the context of responding to critical feedback?
- What are the specific features of impression management in the online environment?

Essay 2:

- How, through what kinds of discursive features, are divergent voices promoted or silenced on corporate Facebook pages?

Essay 3:

- How are situations with promotional content defined on Reddit?
- How are organizations and their actions evaluated in interaction?

Essay 4:

- What discursive resources can be identified in the process interpellative constitution of an online organization?
- What features does the resulting organization have?

The main method used to answer these questions is detailed, i.e. micro-level, discourse analysis (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2000; Fairclough, 2003; Gee, 1999; Potter, 1996; Wodak & Meyer, 2015). In addition, netnography (Kozinets, 1997, 2002, 2010) and semi-structured interviews are used to provide contextualization for the analysis.

1.5 Structure of dissertation

This dissertation consists of four essays and this introductory part. The introduction includes two chapters on previous research, one on organizational

discourse and communication and one on social media contexts. Subsequently, the overall conceptual framework of the dissertation is summarized, followed by an overview of the methodology and data. Short summaries of the findings in the four essays will then be provided, and to close the introductory part, conclusions and contributions of the entire project will be presented.

The individual studies encompassed in this dissertation can be found in the second part of the dissertation. Table 1 provides an overview of the essays, including the perspective that each of them takes to discursive struggle between organizations and consumers, their theoretical inspiration, the method and data used, as well as key findings.

Essay 1 titled “Facing Facebook: Impression management strategies in company–consumer interactions”, co-authored by Leena Louhiala-Salminen, focuses on corporate Facebook pages as a context of discursive struggle with critical consumers. We distinguish six discursive strategies that organizations in our data use as part of their impression management (IM) (e.g., Goffman, 1959; Leary & Kowalski, 1990) for upholding their acceptability and promoting their credibility, thus allowing them to discursively defend themselves and possibly gain an advantage in the struggle. In addition, we discuss a personalization tendency in organizational communication taking place in interactive online contexts which leads to a need to align representatives’ individual IM with that of the organization.

Essay 2 by myself, Leena Louhiala-Salminen and Anne Kankaanranta titled “Power relations in social media discourse: Dialogization and monologization on corporate Facebook pages” takes a critical perspective and examines dialogical relations and discursive struggles between consumers and organizations on Facebook pages, paying particular attention to the hallmarks of dialogue in the Bakhtinian sense (e.g., 1984a). We demonstrate that there are some elements of dialogue and carnivalistic moments where traditional power relations are to a degree suspended, allowing individuals to get their voice heard in the online setting of our data set. However, the findings shed light on a prevalent monologizing tendency which silences differing voices while providing a mere illusion of dialogue. The study elaborates on specific strategies and contextual features contributing to dialogization and monologization.

Essay 3, “Constructing organizational legitimacy on social media: Reddit users as legitimacy evaluators” by myself and Johanna Moisander, draws on research on legitimacy and symbolic interactionism to shed light on how the legitimacy of organizations and their promotional communication is constructed through evaluative communication in an online context not controlled by them. We argue that organizations and social media users have differing interpretive frames and they define communication situations differently, which can lead to negative evaluations that hurt legitimacy. Drawing from symbolic interactionism to elaborate on the communicative viewpoint, we identify commonly used grounds for evaluations of legitimacy and develop a process model that illustrates how legitimacy is constructed in interaction among consumers and between organizations and consumers.

In essay 4, “Interpellative communicative constitution: Organizing through ideology and identification”, I analyze Nerdfighteria, a fan community formed around the YouTube channel *Vlogbrothers*, as a communicatively constituted, “partial” online organization. Drawing on Althusser’s (2008) concept of interpellation, I show how ideological discourse creates a subject position that certain individuals recognize and identify with. I analyze the discursive resources used in the process and argue interpellative constitution creates a unique way of relating to consumers where they are in a sense inside the organization. This process and the relation it creates is to a significant degree made possible by the interactive online context, and constitutes a strong pre-emptive move in the discursive struggle, as it builds ideological coherence that wards off differing opinions.

Table 1. Summary of essays.

Essay	Perspective to discursive struggle	Dialogical theory	Method & data	Key findings	Status
1	Attempted organizational control in the discursive struggle through managing consumer impressions	Goffman: impression management	DA; interaction on corporate Facebook pages	The study presents six discursive strategies that the case organizations use as part of their impression management for upholding their acceptability and promoting their credibility in the context of criticism from consumers.	Published
1	Attempted organizational control in the discursive struggle through monologization; consumer empowerment through polyphony and carnivalization	Bakhtin: dialogism	CDS, interaction on corporate Facebook pages, interviews with corporate representatives	The study sheds light on contextual and discursive features which operate to either promote or silence various voices.	Published
3	Discursive struggle as (de)legitimation by consumers in interaction, based on their definitions and evaluations	Symbolic interactionism	DA & netnography; interaction on Reddit, online documents, netnographic data	Consumers' evaluations of organizational legitimacy are analyzed and nine categories (mapped onto three dimensions) are distinguished. A process model of legitimation in social media is developed.	Unpublished
4	Avoiding discursive struggle or resistance through interpellative member selection (ideological coherence)	Althusser: interpellation	DA & netnography; interaction on YouTube, online documents	The interpellation process, including various discursive resources used, is analyzed and further theorized. Implications for discursive struggle and organization–consumer relations are discussed.	Unpublished

2. Organizational discourse

In this chapter, I situate organizational discourse within the broader field of organizational communication and the social constructionist perspective, before approaching discourse more specifically through the dialogical perspective, as both interaction and struggle.

2.1 Communication and social construction

Developed hand in hand with the so called linguistic (and cultural, visual and argumentative) turn(s) in the second half of the 20th century, a “discursive turn” has led to the proliferation of discourse-oriented studies in various fields of social sciences and humanities (e.g., Angermuller, Maingueneau, & Wodak, 2014). The discursive perspective is therefore not necessarily connected to any specific field; it can be seen as its own transdisciplinary research effort (“discourse studies”) or connected with a wide variety of research areas, as well as a number of theoretical and methodological traditions. In this dissertation, however, the perspective is connected particularly with the field of organizational communication.

The common denominator of the diverse area of discourse studies is the view that meanings are usually considered as a product of social practices (Angermuller et al., 2014). Since the 1980’s, in the field of organizational communication, a meaning-centered view of communication has largely replaced the earlier “transmission models” of communication (e.g. Shannon & Weaver, 1949) which saw communication as messages, encoded by a sender and sent through some medium to a receiver for decoding (Putnam & Mumby, 2014). In a meaning-centered view, meaning is understood as a fragile, contested construction of the discourse participants in a specific context (Angermuller et al., 2014) that is “produced, reproduced, negotiated, and maintained in social interaction” instead of being a mere expression or representation of internal thoughts (Jian et al., 2008).

Meaning-centered and discursive research perspectives subscribe to a broad social constructionist ontological position (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Gergen, 2001; Searle, 1995). Social constructionism rejects essentialism, i.e. that some things are natural and self-evident (Allen, 2005), and operates instead under the assumption that social realities (such as money, social positions, or organizations) are created through communication (Searle, 1995). The social world is formed by declaring some institutional fact into being, and reproduced each

time the institution is accepted as a fact in discourse (Searle, 2009). In fact, then, we can in many cases create social reality simply by linguistically representing that reality as already existing (Searle, 1995).

This means that there is nothing simple, straightforward or neutral about communication, as is assumed in the transmission views of communication where any disagreement about the meaning of the message implies a “misunderstanding”, an error in the decoding perhaps due to problems in the medium. In the constitutive view of communication, in contrast, meanings are jointly produced in communication through interpretation and negotiation which reproduce and alter various social realities (Ashcraft et al., 2009). For example, within organizational communication, the research stream known as “communication constitutes organizing” (CCO) focuses particularly on the constructionist view, as it sees communication as vital to the ongoing, interactive achievement of *organizing* that exceeds any single agency and brings the organization into being (Ashcraft et al., 2009). The view, which is based on the assumption that “communication generates, not merely expresses, key organizational realities”, has become increasingly widespread (Ashcraft et al., 2009, p. 2; see also e.g. Cooren et al., 2011; Putnam & Nicotera, 2009; James R. Taylor & Robichaud, 2004). More than just an example of a social constructionist view, though, CCO is a perspective that encompasses various theories on precisely *how* organizations are constituted in discourse (e.g. Putnam & Nicotera, 2010).

As this study subscribes to a constructionist position, the focus is on language, not in itself (as a system, as seen by structuralists, e.g., Saussure, 1967), but as a crucial, constructive part of social life. This power to construct reality comes from the fact that language use influences the way people think and act. On the one hand, we have the possibility to always negotiate meanings in interaction, and on the other hand, meanings are deeply rooted in our minds by previous ways of thinking.

Lately it has been pointed out that a focus on communication and social construction should not mean disregarding material aspects of organizing (e.g., Ashcraft et al., 2009; Ashcraft & Mumby, 2004). Ashcraft et al. (2009, p. 2) emphasize that constitutive models have so far “stressed symbolic over material aspects of organization”. However, “organizations exist not only when people invoke them in communication, but also in tangible architecture, artifacts, and technologies; the conduct of tasks by actual bodies and machines; and so forth” (Ashcraft et al., 2009, p. 23). The lack of attention to material aspects is not entirely surprising, as earlier scholars have specifically aimed at underlining the importance and role of discourse and communication. I focus mainly on discourse aspects, but I also consider the material constraints and possibilities (affordances) brought by the various contexts of online interaction.

2.2 Defining discourse

The relation between communication and discourse is somewhat contested, but Jian et al. (2008, p. 314), for example, argue that “organizational actors operate in communication and through discourse”, implying that discourse is more of a micro-level phenomenon, namely the specific type of language that is used for some communicative purpose. Generally speaking, discourse itself does not have a single definition, but instead two principal uses. On the one hand, there is a pragmatic, micro-sociological understanding of discourse as contextualized language-in-use or the situated production of speech acts (e.g., Brown & Yule, 1983), or on the other hand, a socio-historical understanding of discourse as an ensemble of verbal and non-verbal practices of large social communities (see discussion in Angermuller et al., 2014; Cooren, 2015; Fairclough, 1989, 1995; Foucault, 1989). These two views have also been referred to as “discourse with a small d”, on the one hand, and “Discourse with a capital D”, on the other (Alvesson & Karreman, 2000; Gee, 1999). As opposed to any language-in-use, Discourses with a D are typical formats, contents, styles, and contexts that we are able to recognize as something we have already heard before (Cooren, 2015, p. 5).

Corresponding roughly to the two different kinds of definitions of discourse, discourse studies traditionally involve two different perspectives, “discourse theory” takes a macro-sociological viewpoint, revolving around questions of power, knowledge and subjectivity, and “discourse analysis” focuses on micro-level analysis of language, practice and context (Angermuller et al., 2014). However, the two perspectives cannot be neatly differentiated, as discourse theorists may build on the foundations of DA (Angermuller et al., 2014) and cultural discourses underlie and shape the micro-level interaction and are used as resources in it (Kuhn, 2006, 2009). Fairclough (2003), for example, has attempted to transcend the division between the two types of discourse work, arguing that this should not be seen as an “either/or” question. Still, critical discourse studies, which Fairclough represents, is characterized by its focus on the big D discourse, since it aims to critique forms of power, control, dominance, inequality, or oppression that typical forms of language use reproduce in society (see e.g., Cooren, 2015; van Dijk, 2001).

Lately it has been argued that while the d/D distinction, as presented by Alvesson and Karreman (2000), may have been a useful clarification in earlier stages of organizational discourse research, it is not necessarily so anymore as it “serves to simplify, reify and divide; directing attention towards the insides of the boxes instead of problematizing the boundaries that separate them” (Hardy & Grant, 2012, p. 556). Undoubtedly this is true, but I have still chosen to refer to these terms because they are such an established way of categorizing different types of discourse *research*; I therefore find them to be a useful shorthand for explaining my methodological approaches. This choice does not imply that I want to make the ontological claim that *discourse* itself exists on these two different levels. In fact, I believe that both language-in-use (discourse) and generalized types of ideas (Discourse) are fundamentally similar social phenomena, processes that take place in the brains of people and in the

communication between people, while these individuals draw on and modify models that they have learned from others.

2.3 Discourse as interaction

The interactional perspective to discourse, taken by discourse scholars such as Gee (1999) and Potter (1996) (discursive psychology), incorporates influences from Anglo-American pragmatism, particularly symbolic interactionism (SI) (Angermuller et al., 2014). Within organizational communication, J. R. Taylor and Van Every (2011) also advocate for drawing from pragmatism (classics such as Peirce, Mead, Goffman). They argue that “[t]o study an organization from a pragmatist perspective obliges us to regard both micro and macro worlds of experience as products of communicating: both process and entity” (p. 235). Sharing this perspective, I draw particularly from SI—including Goffman who is often labeled as a symbolic interactionist, although it was not a term he used of himself.

SI, a label created by Blumer (1969), but drawing on earlier pragmatic influences such as Mead (1934), offers a fruitful perspective for exploring and analyzing many different forms of social relations, including domination and exploitation, cooperation and conflict (Blumer, 1969), and is therefore compatible with the idea of discursive struggle.

According to Blumer (1969), there are three fundamental premises that underlie SI. Firstly, humans act toward things based on the *meanings* that the things have for them. Secondly, meaning is derived from *interaction* with other people, taking place through symbolic means (language, in particular). Thirdly, meanings are modified by people through an *interpretive* process. In other words, meaning is created in interaction and through interpretation, using the means of symbolic communication (Blumer, 1969). In each situation, participants negotiate and agree as to whose claims concerning what issues will be temporarily honored (definition of the situation) (Goffman, 1959). These definitions of situations depend on shared interpretive *frames* which allow organizing experiences to make sense of the social world (Goffman, 1986 [1974]). This is particularly relevant for essay 3, where we analyze how situations with promotional content are defined, using what kinds of frames, and how promotional communication is interpreted by social media users.

Although some writers have criticized SI of an excessive focus on the micro-level, the interactionist perspective does not exclude simultaneously acknowledging the importance of the macro level (Dennis & Martin, 2005). Blumer (1969, p. 17), in fact, wrote of “recurrent patterns of joint action”, but claimed that the problem of mainstream sociologists of the time was “failing to recognize that the joint action of the collectivity is an interlinkage of the separate acts of the participants”. SI is, then, compatible with addressing issues such as pre-existing constellations of power. For example, teachers are in a position of power with regard to their students; they are able to get their definition of the situation accepted and impose identities on the students through the evaluation of their achievement and abilities (Dennis & Martin, 2005).

Crucial processes in creating meaning include assigning symbolic meaning not only to material and abstract objects but also to other people and their actions (i.e. social objects), and even ourselves and our own actions. Further, the capacity to put oneself in the place of another person, role-taking, is a mechanism of interpretation as it allows understanding others' reactions, and of negotiation, as it allows evaluating pre-emptively how others might react to one's words and actions (Blumer, 1969). This is closely related to Bakhtin's (1986) idea of responsivity, namely that speakers orient to other, past and future utterances, implicitly responding to them.

In essay 1, we draw from Goffman's dramaturgical perspective to shed light on the construction of selves and others in discursive struggle. From this perspective, individuals are seen as actors performing on a stage, conscious of the presence of an audience and working to establish and uphold desired images of themselves; this is known as impression management (Goffman, 1959). These attempts to control the impressions that others form take place particularly in situations that happen "frontstage", as opposed to "backstage" where people can relax more. In essay 1, we also discuss the participation framework (Goffman, 1981) of our Facebook page data (see also section 5.3.1). This is another key concept of the interactional view of discourse. It refers to the various ways that people who are present at an interaction situation are positioned in relation to it, for example as addressed or non-addressed recipients. Related to this, a change in footing involves a change in such positions, i.e. the alignment we have to ourselves and others present in a situation, as expressed in the way we manage the production or reception of an utterance (Goffman, 1981, p. 128).

2.4 Discourse as struggle

On a basic level, a dialogical perspective to discourse involves acknowledging "a multiplicity of discourses which reflect the 'plurivocal' meanings brought to bear by the participants" (Grant et al., 1998, p. 7). In other words, various discourses and voices always coexist and can oppose each other in a struggle over discursive dominance (Grant et al., 1998). This opposition is what I call discursive struggle (see also Erkama & Vaara, 2010; Hardy & Phillips, 1999; Harley & Hardy, 2004; Real & Putnam, 2005).

Power, resistance (Real & Putnam, 2005) and ideology (Joutsenvirta & Vaara, 2015) are intimately linked to the concept of discursive struggle which therefore also relates to the "big D" view of discourse. The struggle perspective is also naturally connected to critical (discourse) studies which focus particularly on the power struggle involved in social construction (Deetz, 2005; Fournier & Grey, 2000; Mumby, 2004). The aim of CDS is, in fact, to explain how structures of power are discursively enacted and reproduced (van Dijk, 2001, 2014; Wodak & Meyer, 2015), and text and talk are understood as sites of struggle (Wodak & Meyer, 2015).

In previous studies of discursive struggles in the field of organizational discourse, legitimacy as the ultimate specific outcome or goal and the process of

discursive legitimation is often emphasized (Barros, 2014; Erkama & Vaara, 2010; Joutsenvirta & Vaara, 2015; Livesey, 2001; Vaara et al., 2006). Organizations' legitimacy, i.e. the generalized social acceptance of their actions and existence (Deephouse & Suchman, 2008; Suchman, 1995; Weber, 1978) and their warrant for acting in society (Weber, 1978), is, then, negotiated in discourse, using strategies that promote the appearance of acceptability. This is also the case in social media (Veil, Sellnow, & Petrun, 2012) which may transform actors into legitimate discourse producers (Barros, 2014). We also take up the discussion on legitimacy in essay 3, but overall, I focus more on the process of struggle itself: strategies of impression management (essay 1), power and resistance terms of getting voices heard or silenced (essay 2), processes of evaluation (essay 3), and the effects of ideology (essay 4). In the rest of this section, I will therefore discuss power and resistance, which are central to the notion of discursive struggle (see also Barros, 2014; Real & Putnam, 2005), ideology, as well as voices and silencing.

2.4.1 Power and resistance

An often seen “either-or” view of power (one either has power or not) is insufficient for explaining the complex dynamics of power and resistance—the various tensions, conflicts, and contradictions tend, in such conceptions, to get smoothed out—therefore, a dialectical approach to power and resistance is more appropriate (Ashcraft & Mumby, 2004; Mumby, 1997). In a dialectical approach, power and resistance appear as a complex, multileveled mixture—it is difficult to draw the line between them (Fleming, 2007). This mixture can be referred to as struggle (Fleming & Spicer, 2007). Dialectical analyses of discursive struggle “explore how social actors attempt to ‘fix’ meanings in ways that resist and/or reproduce extant relations of power” (Mumby, 2005, p. 24).

Central to the idea of discursive struggle is, in fact, a Foucauldian view that power works importantly through discourses and that power and resistance are integral and inseparable aspects in a perpetual process; with power always comes the possibility of resistance (Foucault, 1989; Shankar et al., 2006, p. 1026). Similarly, Mumby (1997) argues that “hegemony” in the Gramscian sense should be conceived dialectically, as referring to a dynamic process of discursive struggle as various groups compete to secure meanings in conflictual contexts. This kind of resistance and dynamic negotiation over meaning is exemplified in essay 3.

Several types of power can be distinguished. Often, in democratic societies, it is not coercive (force) or incentive (commands, sanctions), but persuasive and manipulative (van Dijk, 1996). It is, then, not only seen in obvious conflicts but also in subtle shaping of agendas and people's wants and preferences (Lukes, 1974). Manipulation involves for example the mobilization of bias and systematic exclusion of some topics from political discourse, while domination could be defined as shaping people's preferences in a way that is counter to their own interests (Fleming & Spicer, 2007). However, I adopt here van Dijk's (2006a) definition of manipulation which also covers domination: Manipulation is a

form of discursive power use through mind control, which serves the interests of the manipulator but is against the best interests of the recipients.

Manipulative social power can be seen to be based on a “preferential access” to media, public discourse and communication (van Dijk, 1996), which allows the producers of this discourse, for example journalists, to determine what is included and excluded, how events are represented, who is given a voice, and even the subject positions of audiences (Fairclough, 1989, p. 50; Vaara et al., 2006). For example, group membership affords such access and public discourse is a means for reproducing the power of these groups (van Dijk, 2006a). This access to public discourse perspective is important in the context of this study, as social media can help to provide wider access to public discourse (e.g. Gee, 2015, p. 10). As the division between producers and consumers of media discourse is blurring online (e.g. Comor, 2011; Deuze, 2007; Kozinets, Hemetsberger, & Schau, 2008), this development can provide possibilities for resistance (Kelsey & Bennett, 2014). However, as long as people who are critical or dissident, and therefore impervious to manipulation, do not dominate the mainstream means of communication, whichever they are, counter-discourses may not cause serious problems for manipulators (van Dijk, 2006a). It could be, then, that the discursive struggle enabled by social media is sometimes too insignificant to make a real difference. These kinds of questions surrounding access and manipulation are discussed in essay 2 and also touched upon in essay 1.

A further type of power discussed by Fleming and Spicer (2007), drawing on Foucault, is subjectification: producing voluntary compliance by deep moulding certain types of people. This view sees power as pervasive and fluid, not as top-down authority that is external to the subject, but as “‘capillary’, infusing all sorts of micropractices and entering into the deepest recesses of the individual” (Kuhn, 2010). Even subjectivities or identities are then a contingent effect of power/knowledge regimes (Kuhn, 2010; Shankar et al., 2006). This view is closely related to ideologies which I will discuss next.

2.4.2 Ideology

Ideology has been defined in two main ways: neutral (or “descriptive”) and critical. In the neutral sense, ideologies can be described as fundamental social beliefs of a rather general and abstract nature, systems of ideas that control and organize other socially shared beliefs (van Dijk, 2006c). Critical definitions, used in the Marxist tradition and also more widely, have approached ideology as a distortion, “false consciousness”—a view that has been widely criticized (Althusser, 2008; Hall, 1985; Thompson, 2013). From my point of view, it is particularly relevant that seeing ideology as distortion does not seem to leave much room for subversive ideas or for ideological struggle, as it assumes a determining relationship between economic structures and dominating (capitalist) ideology (Hall, 1986).

Stemming from the Marxist tradition, however, many authors still draw attention to the relationship between ideology and power, saying, for example, that ideologies are “meaning in the service of power” (Thompson, 2013).

Scholars within CDS, particularly Fairclough (1989, 1995, 2003), also emphasize the effects of ideologies in (re)producing relations of power and inequality—although without claiming that there is an objective truth being distorted, that there is a straightforward relationship between economic structures and ideology, or that ideologies always are wrong or harmful. They are simply representations of the world which may contribute to introducing, sustaining or modifying social relations of power, domination and exploitation (Fairclough, 2003). Ideology often contributes to introducing and sustaining power relations by naturalizing cultural and social factors, making them seem as self-evident facts (Althusser, 2008; Fairclough, 2003; Hall, 1986).

Althusser's revisions to the Marxist understanding of ideology started an important move away from the "distorted ideas" approach, opening the gate to a more linguistic or discursive conception of ideology (Hall, 1986). In fact, discourse is currently widely understood as a crucial way in which ideologies are acquired, expressed, and reproduced (Eagleton, 1991; Hall, 1986), and the ideological effects of texts have been of major concern for CDS (Fairclough, 2003; van Dijk, 1998). Rejecting the idea of false consciousness does not mean, however, that there is no manipulation using or involving ideologies (van Dijk, 2006a).

Althusser (2008, p. 36) defines ideology as the "imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence". According to Althusser (2008), ideological discourse "hails" individuals who then recognize and react to the call. A discourse thus "recruits" individuals, simultaneously "transforming" them into subjects. This is what Althusser calls interpellation; people are drawn to subject positions which somehow resonate with them.

Ideologies are often thought to be unifying; they lend coherence to the groups which hold them, "welding them into a unitary, if internally differentiated, identity, and perhaps thereby allowing them to impose a certain unity upon society as a whole" (Eagleton, 1991). Because of the foundational nature of ideological beliefs, ideologies are, in fact, also closely related to the collective identity of groups; the ideology of a group defines the basis for the group's identity by organizing its membership criteria, actions, aims, norms and values, and resources as well as its relations to other social groups (van Dijk, 1998, p. 118; 2006c). This is the connection between ideology and group formation that I discuss in essay 4. Ideological coherence is a concept that is also more widely relevant for discursive struggle, or the lack of it.

2.4.3 Voices and silencing

As we argue in essay 2, discursive struggle can be approached from the perspective of the existence of dialogue on the one hand, and silencing voices on the other. This is a way of looking at power as access to public discourse, and as manipulation through, for example, excluding some topics from discourse (Fleming & Spicer, 2007); the latter has been referred to as discursive closure, namely the suppression of potential conflicts in discourse (Deetz, 1992).

Dialogue can be seen as discourse which embraces fragmentation and ambiguity, and allows for differences (Putnam & Fairhurst, 2001). It, then, is placed

at the far end of a spectrum “ranging from the total integration of worldviews to situations in which there is widespread resistance and a plurality of voices competing for pre-eminence” (Mumby, 1997).

These notions stem from Bakhtin who argued that a plurality of voices (*polyphony*) can be aided by *carnivalization*. The medieval carnival tradition discussed by Bakhtin (1984a, 1984b) is a striking demonstration that when people suddenly start to behave as if the existing power relations were reversed, kings indeed become fools and fools become kings—be it, in the case of the carnival, only for a limited period. Carnivalization is described among other things by eccentricity, profanity (obscenities, blasphemies and parodies), familiar contacts between people as hierarchies are suspended, and also familiarity between distant things and ideas; high and low, sacred and profane, wise and stupid (Bakhtin, 1984a).

At the opposite end of the spectrum, domination can take the form of active suppression of divergent voices. Drawing again from Bakhtin (1984a), in essay 2, we refer to this as *monologization*. It aims at coherence through marginalizing (B. C. Taylor, 2005), for example through censorship or narrative closure which restricts possible meanings and interpretations and misrepresents the interests of particular groups—a narrative often presents (organizational) reality as “natural”, not as socially constructed and up for negotiation (Mumby, 1987). This fixing of meanings is, in fact, what Bakhtin (1984a) criticized in the traditional novel (as opposed to the polyphonic one), calling it *finalization*. This idea is also closely related to Deetz’s (1992) discussion of several processes leading to discursive closure. Naturalization is indeed one of these processes, and other examples include topical avoidance, disqualification of participants and pacification, which means that “conflictual discourse is diverted or subverted through an apparently reasonable attempt to engage in it” (Deetz, 1992, p. 196).

In this chapter, I have explained what I mean by discourse and the ontological claim that discourse is socially constructive. I have referred to the well-known division between discourses with a “d” and “D”, while arguing that these cannot truly be separated. In fact, my aim has been to combine both viewpoints in my understanding of discursive struggle. Therefore I have discussed discourse as both interaction and as struggle, including power and resistance, ideology, as well as voices and silencing.

3. Organizations and consumers in online contexts

In the first two decades of the 21st century, “social” media have been entrenched in our lives and they have been discussed in both highly optimistic and highly pessimistic terms. These online media, the context of this study, can be seen as arenas for discursive struggle, which on the one hand allow consumers to get their voices heard, but on the other, also enable new ways of manipulation and exploitation.

3.1 Social media, participation and connectivity

Interactive online media such as discussion boards and chatrooms have been around from the early days of the internet, but since approximately the year 2000, new forms have sprung up. These are often referred to as “social media”, which have been defined as a group of internet-based applications that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content, and share some technological and ideological foundations (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Although it is practically impossible to exhaustively categorize the different services comprised under the term, some of the most often mentioned types include the following (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Kietzmann, Hermkens, McCarthy, & Silvestre, 2011; van Dijck, 2013):

- Social network sites (Facebook, LinkedIn), where users set up networks of connections and communicate within them
- Sites for sharing user-generated content (blogs, YouTube, Instagram, Periscope)
- Sites for collaboratively creating content (wikis)
- Social news and social bookmarking sites (Reddit, Slashdot, Delicious) where users link to, rank and discuss content made by others
- Microblogging (Twitter), where users send short messages to their followers
- Multiplayer online games and virtual worlds (World of Warcraft, Second Life).

Another widely used concept is that of “participatory media” (Howard, 2008; Rheingold, 2008) or “participatory culture” (Jenkins, 2006b). Participatory media is usually connected to an idea of political, democratic participation (Carpentier, 2011) and the concept is not limited to online media, as it is rea-

sonable to ask whether there ever really was such a thing as a passive audience (Ekström, Jülich, Lundgren, & Wisselgren, 2012). However, the word “participation” can also be used to refer to online interaction in general—creating and sharing content, discussing and reacting through means such as the “like” button on Facebook. Thus, the general and the more political meanings of “participation” partly coincide with the idea of discourse as both interaction and struggle.

Social media could be seen to form a new “layer” through which people organize their lives. This layer, however, is anything but a neutral utility—it is associated with a specific ideology (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; van Dijck, 2013). For a short period in the early 1990s, the internet was connected with a “geek counterculture”, a period when users purportedly helped to construct a new public sphere outside corporate control. It embodied an ideology of egalitarianism and community which was rekindled in the early 2000s (van Dijck, 2013, p. 10)—at least in enthusiastic discourse. Many web idealists then claimed that media consumers now had unprecedented new power in relation to producers (Bruno, 2008; Jenkins, 2006a, 2006b). However, van Dijck (2013) claims that the period of participatory culture lasted but a short time: the ideology started to be appropriated by social media corporations that have made efforts to nurture an image of collectivity and user-generated operation long after their strategies had moved to the commercial realm. As argued by van Dijck (2013) the meaning of “social” in social media seems to encompass both “human connectedness” and “automated connectivity”—a deliberate conflation cultivated by many social media companies. Automated connectivity means that technology renders people’s online activities formal, manageable, and manipulable (van Dijck, 2013), enabling social media companies to make profits by selling user’s data and their attention as an audience to advertising (Fuchs, 2008, 2014). This has led van Dijck (2013) to suggest that “connective media” might currently be a more apt term than social or participatory media.

As the internet has become increasingly filled with commercially operating platforms, these platforms have also become rife with all kinds of other organizations attempting to interact with, or at least market to consumers. Facebook pages are an example of a social media application specifically meant for companies to establish rapport with existing and potential clients (Champoux, Durgee, & McGlynn, 2012).

3.2 Social media as technological forms and cultural practice

In examining social media it is important to note that there is always a technological (material) side and a cultural side to them. Furthermore, these two sides are not isolated but “the construction of platforms and social practices is mutually constitutive” (van Dijck, 2013, p. 6).

The technological side of online media, namely the enablements and constraints of the technologies used, has often been discussed as “affordances” (e.g. Albu & Etter, 2015). The concept was originally used within ecological

psychology to refer to a collection of properties of a thing that determine how it can be used, “action possibilities” latent in the environment (Gibson, 1986). In the context of human-computer interaction, the concept has more specifically been defined as a relationship between the properties of an object and the capabilities of the agent (Norman, 2013). Hutchby (2001) emphasizes that these functional and relational aspects frame, but do not determine, the possibilities for action in relation to an object. Some early studies of computer-mediated communication have, in fact, been criticized for technological determinism (Georgakopoulou, 2006; Thurlow, 2013). It must therefore be emphasized that social media are embedded in a larger sociocultural and political-economic context and molded by historical circumstances (van Dijck, 2013).

In my research context, technological affordances mean for example that the design of a platform substantially influences situational power relations. The design sets limits to the patterns through which participants can interact and relate to each other, which are relevant to the question who can influentially participate. The ideology manifested in the design of online platforms (e.g., in the “like” button on Facebook, see van Dijck, 2013, p. 13) is a key factor because it determines to which extent the design allows participation and power distribution. For example, Orgad (2012) argues that the current media environment, especially online, facilitates or even encourages a lack of narrative closure. Similarly to Bakhtin’s (1984a) finalization or Deetz’s (1992) discursive closure, narrative closure promotes completeness and coherence, and does not leave space for ambiguity, uncertainty and different views. Thus, she argues, media such as blogs or virtual worlds can afford openness to different outcomes and voices. It has to be added, though, that this depends on the features of the media in question, not all social media function this way.

The cultural side of social media and other online context has often been discussed under the terms online or virtual communities. These communities have been studied since the 1990’s, although early on some authors questioned whether “virtual communities” were really communities at all (see discussion by Rheingold, 2000, pp. 149-150). According to Rheingold’s (2000) well-known definition, virtual communities are social aggregations emerging online when enough people carry on public discussions long enough, with sufficient human feeling, to form webs of personal relationships. The online context, then, affords the creation of these kinds of communities, but it can be argued that the communities themselves, for example through their assumptions and values, also affect the perceived technological affordances. In addition, I argue that cultural elements in specific online contexts have “affordances” that are not directly related to technology: these could be called cultural affordances. I believe that it is relevant to juxtapose technological and cultural affordances, at least as a reminder that both aspects should be investigated.

3.3 Consumer groups, online participation and resistance

Consumer groups facilitated by the internet have often been discussed as virtual consumption communities (Kozinets, 1999) or brand communities (Cova & Pace, 2006; Muñiz & Schau, 2005). A brand community is a “specialized, non-geographically bound community, based on a structured set of social relationships among admirers of the brand” (Muniz & O’Guinn, 2001, p. 412); the non-geographical nature of this definition has made it useful also in online contexts.

It might be argued that in online contexts, interest-based communities, such as brand communities, form more easily than they did before (Matikainen & Villi, 2015). Consumer groups or audiences on the internet are also increasingly active, participating, communal, visible and better documented (Matikainen & Villi, 2015). Active consumers and consumer groups in the social media context have often been conceptualized in terms of “prosumption” or “produsage” (Bruns, 2008; Cova & Cova, 2012; Kozinets et al., 2008; Ritzer & Jurgenson, 2010)—or for example as collaborative value creation (Kozinets et al., 2008; Schau, Muñiz, & Arnould, 2009) or simply as participation (Cova & Pace, 2006)—to discuss how the internet enables individuals not only to consume products and content but also to participate in their production. As discussed by Cova, Kozinets, and Shankar (2007), “consumer tribes” are active communities that “do things”, for example sharpen their consumption knowledge, socialize, organize, and play (Kozinets, 1999). In addition, however, consumers may become quite critical and engage in anti-corporate activity (Juris, 2005). Cova et al. (2007, p. 16) argue that consumer tribes could “become collective actors in the marketplace, much in the same that way that companies already are.” The internet and particularly interactive online contexts are, then, often seen as a source of empowerment for consumers.

Other researchers have, however, pessimistically argued that both consumer participation and resistance always produce value that companies end up capitalizing on financially (Cova & Dalli, 2009a; Zwick et al., 2008) and in general that this resistance does not hurt the market; on the contrary, it helps it to rejuvenate itself (Holt, 2002). Interactive online platforms, then, render consumers susceptible to new forms of corporate exploitation, as people engage in “immaterial labor” (Arvidsson, 2008) as “consumer workers” (Cova & Dalli, 2009a; Zwick et al., 2008). From a Marxist perspective, prosumption entails a power relation where consumers’ work is being exploited by companies as consumers are hardly ever compensated for their work in economic terms (Comor, 2011; Cova & Dalli, 2009a; Fischer, 2012; Zwick et al., 2008).

In addition, whereas early commentators expected the internet to bring with it an ideal e-democracy with equal opportunities for all citizens, since then, disappointed observers have suggested that although citizens are active through the internet, that activity is of a passive kind, merely circulating contributions that fail to coalesce into actual debates (Dean, 2009). Similarly, it has been argued that lazy online activism, or “slacktivism”, is nothing but “a pointless showcasing that does more to make the activists feel good about themselves than to address urgent political matters” (Christensen, 2011). In

other contexts, it has been found that some forms of resistance (e.g. cynicism) can actually have the unintended consequence of maintaining domination (Contu, 2008; Fleming & Spicer, 2003)—cynical distance, for example, merely gives people a false sense of freedom (Fleming & Spicer, 2003). It could be that a similar process takes place in social media: people have the opportunity to voice their discontentment or to affirm their identity as critical consumers, without their actions, for example in terms of buying products, significantly changing.

However, I believe that both the views that emphasize consumer agency and those that see online discussion and resistance as pointless are overly exaggerated and one-sided. It is likely that the effects of the online participation in fact vary and depend on many factors, including specific cultural and political circumstances, media affordances and the types of issues being discussed.

4. Conceptual framework

In this part, drawing together the main elements discussed above, I present a summary of the conceptual framework that I use to examine organization–consumer interaction in online media.

In this study, I look at the issue of organization–consumer interaction from a dialogical and critical perspective. I examine this interaction specifically as discursive struggle involving power, resistance and ideology and taking place within the cultural and technological context of various social media. The framework is visualized in Figure 1.

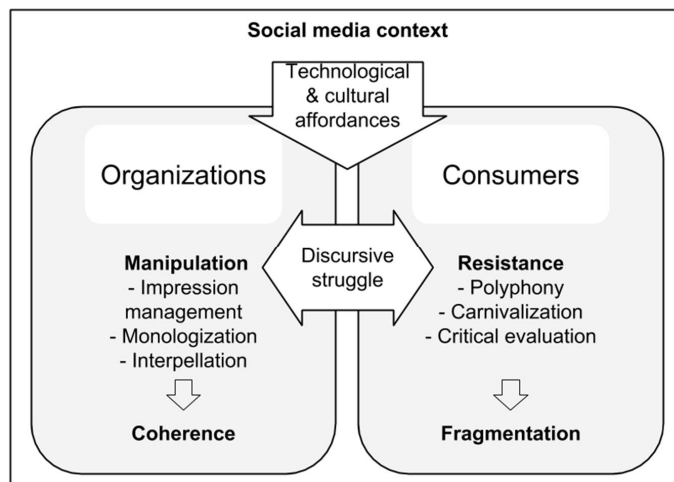


Figure 1. Visualization of the conceptual framework.

As it has been argued that both the “symbolic/discursive *and* material conditions of the organizing process” should be examined (Ashcraft & Mumby, 2004), it must indeed be noted that struggle is not only embedded in rather abstract models of discourse, but it is also materialized in various tools (Callon, Yuval, & Fabian, 2007) such as the social media platforms themselves. They provide the affordances that enable and constrain the interaction (Albu & Etter, 2015; Hutchby, 2001). However, discourse and the material are of course not separate; while the material may constrict discourse; discourse also “enacts and makes possible material changes in the world” (Ashcraft & Mum-

by, 2004, p. 26). I argue that it is not helpful to think of affordances as only material factors, but online settings also involve specific cultural settings that may equally enable and constrain interactions that take place there. In addition, other situational factors such as specific discussion topics also matter in how discursive struggles play out. For example, criticizing a product based on personal taste, or because of child labor, are of course two very different situations and probably lead to different reactions.

By allowing more interaction between organizations and consumers, the online context stirs up traditional power dynamics. It has been argued that as places for discursive activity where large amounts of people participate, interactive online platforms have become a new arena for consumers to influence organizational legitimacy (Veil et al., 2012) and even to coproduce the organization itself (Albu & Etter, 2015), which is possible because organizations are socially constructed entities. These could be seen as the most significant consequences of these communication arenas with regard to discursive struggle between organizations and consumers. However, the present study focuses on the micro-level characteristics of the discursive struggle itself.

I see the interaction enabled by the online context as leading to a dynamic struggle between consumer *resistance*, on the one hand, and organizational *manipulation* on the other (this is, of course, a simplification). While social media platforms provide consumers with a medium and an audience to “demonstrate their creative empowerment”, organizations “appear to find it hard to relinquish their disciplinary power” (Shankar et al., 2006, p. 1025). This is where the struggle arises from.

Aspects of consumer resistance can lead to discursive fragmentation. A key role is played by polyphony and carnivalization, discussed in essay 2. Essay 3 focuses particularly on how consumers, through critical evaluation, participate in and even dominate the negotiation over meanings and legitimacy on Reddit. Reddit is a social media context that provides suitable cultural-technological affordances for consumers to discursively construct the organizational participants as legitimate or not.

Organizational manipulation, in contrast, usually involves a search for what I call ideological coherence, lack of (visible) disagreement. In this study I explore various manipulative discursive processes used by organizations to control thought and discourse. This occurs for example when companies attempt to influence how consumers view them through impression management (Goffman, 1959), as discussed in essay 1. Monologization (Bakhtin, 1984a) or reducing polyphony, discussed in essay 2, is another of these processes. In essay 4, I discuss interpellation which could also be seen as a process for achieving ideological coherence, in a pre-emptive manner, and organizing through identification. By “calling” people who already share a given ideology, possibilities for fragmentation and resistance are minimized.

The affordances of the social media contexts may render resistance more difficult, as these features are not as readily open to situational negotiation. Social media platforms are designed around the fact that many people voluntarily participate in content creation, which allows for many views to be expressed;

however, the platforms also have other built-in affordances, some of which increase the possibilities for organizational control.

5. Methodology

The general goal in discourse studies is to understand society through understanding the language use that constructs and upholds social facts (e.g., Vaara & Laine, 2006). My starting assumption has been that understanding discourse requires rather detailed attention to language, and therefore I use a micro-level approach to DA (Alvesson & Karreman, 2000; Fairclough, 2003; Gee, 1999; Potter, 1996).

In addition, I subscribe to the notion that it is important to consider the context when conducting DA (e.g. van Dijk, 2006b). In particular, this is crucial in researching online discourse (Georgakopoulou, 2006; Kelsey & Bennett, 2014), where both the “local” context of the medium and genre (affordances) and a wider socio-political context should be considered (Herring, 2007; KhosraviNik & Unger, 2015) (see Figure 2 for an illustration of social media and context factors in DA). Contexts—online, in particular media and genre-specific affordances—should, however, not be seen as deterministic constraints (KhosraviNik & Unger, 2015; Thurlow, 2013; Thurlow & Mroczek, 2011). Rather, their influence depends on subjective participant interpretations, their context models (e.g. van Dijk, 2006b, 2014).

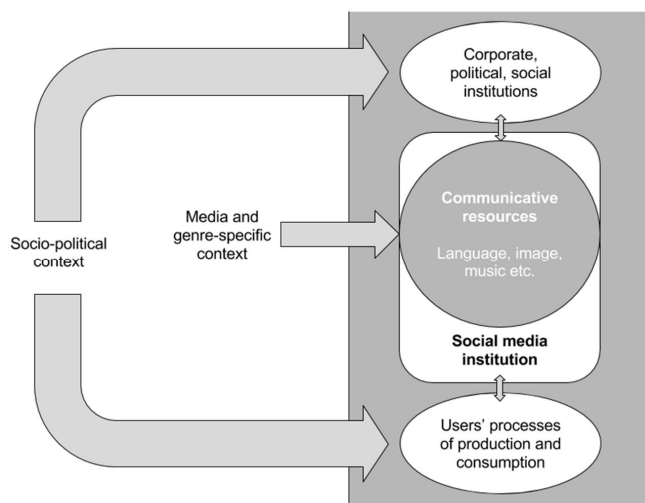


Figure 2. Social media and context, adapted from KhosraviNik and Unger (2015).

To provide contextualization, then, I have used semi-structured, in-depth interviews with discourse participants (company representatives) in essay 2. In addition, I have complemented DA using online ethnography, i.e., *netnography*, in essays 3 and 4. Netnography is a form of ethnography exploring online groups through prolonged observation (Kozinets, 1997, 2002, 2010) (see also Garcia, Standlee, Bechkoff, & Cui, 2009; Murthy, 2008). Fairclough (2003, p. 2) has, in fact, argued that it often makes sense to use DA together with other forms of analysis such as ethnography. This allows gaining an understanding of discourse participants' own context models, their knowledge, attitudes and ideologies (van Dijk, 2009).

5.1 Data

The material for this dissertation was collected primarily from three participatory online media sites, Facebook, Reddit, and YouTube. In addition to texts collected directly from these sites, the data include in-depth interviews and field notes (for an overview of the data, see Table 2).

For essay 1, I collected discussions from the Facebook pages of two large organizations: a food manufacturer and a public transportation company, chosen from among the 50 biggest companies in Finland. In both essay 1 and essay 2, the scope was limited to B2C companies, as this was appropriate for the aim of analyzing discursive struggles between organizations and consumers. In essay 1, more specific criteria for choosing these two pages included active discussions between consumers and organizational representatives as well as widespread criticism by the consumers that was somehow addressed by the companies. The collected material was limited to interactions where consumer criticism was present. These discussions were collected from a period of approximately three months from late 2010 to early 2011. The data set totals approximately 23,000 words.

In Essay 2, four companies with Facebook pages were chosen, again from amongst the biggest companies in Finland. Two of them operate in the food industry, one in the technology sector, and one in transportation. The sampling was purposive; in order to analyze Facebook page interaction "at its best", the aim was to find participants and/or organizations that had good skills and a relatively long experience in using corporate Facebook pages. The chosen companies were found to be particularly active on their Facebook pages, and had many relatively active followers. One of these four companies was also included in essay 1, but new data were collected. Two types of data were included, namely text from the four corporate Facebook pages, covering a two week period in 2013, and six semi-structured interviews with corporate employees working with these pages. For each case, posts (by "post" I refer to a contribution potentially starting a discussion) by both the companies and by consumers where collected, along with the comments to them. This amounted to nearly 40,000 words of data. The interview transcripts comprised over 35,000 words. In addition, to understand the setting, we also conducted ob-

servation on the pages. This was however not ethnographic observation, but merely general observation concerning the functioning of Facebook pages.

Table 2. Overview of the data.

Essay	Social media context	Case	Data types	Total amount
1	Facebook	Facebook pages of 2 large companies	Textual data: Interactions involving criticism on the FB pages over 3 months	22,715 words
2	Facebook	Facebook pages of 4 large companies	Textual data: interactions collected from the FB pages Contextualizing data: semi-structured interviews with six professionals who work with those pages	39,807 words (text) 35,305 words (interview transcripts)
3	Reddit	Promotional communication on Reddit	Textual data: sponsored posts, AMAs, link posts, metadiscussions, site rules Contextualizing data: field notes, interview	440 pages
4	YouTube	Nerdfighters, group formed around Vlogbrothers YouTube channel	Textual data: videos & transcripts, sample of comments (to each video), news articles, other online documents Contextualizing data: field notes (18 month observation period)	218 pages

It is noteworthy that between the data collection for essay 1 (early 2011) and the data collection for essay 2 (mid 2013), Facebook had made significant changes to its layout and functioning (the “timeline” reform). This meant that whereas in 2011 all the data were visible in the same view, in 2013, data had to be collected separately from two places, the view for corporate posts and the view for consumers posts.

In essay 3, the data were collected using netnography from Reddit.com, a large “social news” or content sharing website containing various subgroups known as subreddits where users (i.e. “Redditors”) post links and initiate discussions related to the theme of the group. As a platform, Reddit has certain specific features such as up and downvoting posts and comments so that users may influence what content is most prominently displayed in the various groups and on the aggregate front page of Reddit that shows the most popular contributions from a set of subgroups. Reddit is also known for the presence of certain cultural phenomena that users widely share, such as memes, and a set of norms that users have collaborated in formulating. To begin the data collection, I created a user account and started choosing a number of subreddits to follow. I also conducted a contextualized interview (it was done face to face but by the computer, with Reddit open) and informal discussions with one informant for background information and to help me to get started. This informant first suggested to me that promotional communication on Reddit is particularly negatively received, so this was what I subsequently started to explore. I spent approximately 3 months rather intensively immersed in the data collection, and finally, in addition to the netnographic field notes and interview, I chose and saved 21 documents for further analysis. These include posts

and related discussions (sample of max. 500 comments) that contain either users' reactions to promotional communication or discussions concerning such reactions (metadiscussions). Cases that contained larger quantities of these comments (rather than just sporadic ones) were preferred. There are five different types of this directly copied textual data: sponsored posts, AMAs ("Ask me Anything"), link posts (the post shares a link to an outside site), metadiscussions (discussion specifically related to how promotional communication is perceived on Reddit), as well as Reddit rules and FAQ. All data amounted to a total of 440 pages.

The case in essay 4 concerns a group called Nerdfighteria formed around a YouTube channel, Vlogbrothers, where the brothers John and Hank Green take turns to post videos on varied topics, addressing each other and the wider Nerdfighter group. I found the case by chance while browsing YouTube and, intrigued, started looking into what it actually was. The approach of data collection was netnographic, and exploratory in the sense that in the beginning I did not know what Nerdfighteria was or where the study would lead me. I ended up regularly observing the channel, discussions related to the videos and other Nerdfighter related activity for approximately 18 months, including two more intensive phases (daily observation) of approximately six weeks. The data consist of a selection of key videos that I considered particularly helpful in understanding the case, their transcripts, and a sample of comments to these videos, collected using InfoExtractor, a web service that extracts structured information from a supplied URL. Other collected material include news articles and online documents concerning Nerdfighters and their activities, as well as field notes. The data set totals 218 pages.

5.2 Netnography

In essays 3 and 4, I use netnography, which adapts ethnographic methods to study cultures in online environments using prolonged (participative) observation (Garcia et al., 2009; Kozinets, 1997, 2002, 2010; Murthy, 2008). The role of netnography in my study is complementary; it helps to provide the contextual information needed for analysis. As opposed to other types of qualitative analysis of internet data, such as content analysis, netnography has indeed the advantage of better contextualization for the data due to longer term observation.

Adapting the research process of traditional ethnography, Kozinets (2002) describes the *entrée* as the first phase of netnography; it involves identifying and choosing suitable online forums and learning as much as possible about these forums, groups, and individual participants one seeks to understand, in order to have sufficient understanding of the culture (Kozinets, 2010).

As suggested by Kozinets (2002), in the second phase, the data were collected, guided by the research question, by both directly copying and by making field notes. In the present study, the data include field notes, videos and discussions, as well as other relevant online texts. Observation was conducted both in real time and taking "trips" to older materials. Although a large pro-

portion of research referred to as for example “digital ethnography” seems to be non-participative (Murthy, 2008, p. 839), regular, real time following of the studied group can be considered the minimal level of netnographic participation (Kozinets, 2010, p. 96). This means that simply collecting a large amount of online documents and discussions all at once is not sufficient to constitute netnography.

All ethnographic research poses certain questions concerning research ethics, and online the issue is even more difficult due to the technological complexities and unique contingencies of online interaction (Garcia et al., 2009, pp. 73–77; Kozinets, 2010, p. 137). One reason is that people are not always fully aware of which online spaces are private and which are public (Kozinets, 2010). Consideration is particularly important when the topic is sensitive (Kozinets & Handelman, 1998), or the group is vulnerable (Murthy, 2008, pp. 840–841). As neither of these conditions seems to apply in my cases, “minimum cloaking” (Kozinets, 2010, p. 154) has been applied: no usernames are reproduced, and reproducing verbatim quotes was carefully considered case by case.

5.3 Discourse analysis

The approaches to DA used in this dissertation are focused mainly on an analysis of discursive details (micro-level) of language use (Alvesson & Karreman, 2000; Fairclough, 2003; Gee, 1999; Potter, 1996). Arguably a detailed analysis enables a deeper understanding of texts and interaction, revealing aspects that without it would pass unnoticed. Additionally, the method combines “macro” aspects, as “Discourses with a D” are also considered in essays 1 and 4, be it as resources in micro-level interaction. In essay 2, a CDS perspective is taken, which means that a micro-level analysis is connected to wider social concerns; in CDS, the focus is particularly on the ways that discourse (re)produces, legitimates, or challenges relations of power and inequality (Fairclough, 1989; van Dijk, 2001; Wodak & Meyer, 2015).

In addition to a basic qualitative approach of careful reading and iteratively going back and forth between data and theory, I use specific concepts from previous discursive and linguistic research as analytical lenses, depending on what is relevant in each context. In this section, I will provide a brief overview of the analytical tools used in the four essays.

5.3.1 Essay 1

In essay 1, we look at impression management strategies concerning social acceptability and credibility. Social acceptability is built up by ostensibly complying with cultural systems of norms and values, and it could be said to involve more “overarching” strategies than credibility. In the category of social acceptability, we analyze the use of “big D” discourses, various conventional politeness strategies, as well as and avoiding visibility of unwanted topics through diversion.

As for credibility, analyze it by looking at participative roles or footings of the speakers and hearers (Goffman, 1981) which allow speakers to vary their degree of accountability by positioning themselves in a closer or more distant relationship to the content of their message. Speakers, on the one hand, can act in the roles of a principal where they speak for themselves and take full responsibility, as an author where they take responsibility for the wording, or as an animator where they take no responsibility, instead merely positioning themselves as speaking for someone else. Hearers, on the other hand, can be addressed, non-addressed, or merely bystanders. Participative roles relate to our discussion on managing impressions of the credibility of organizational discourse on Facebook, but we also address participative roles on corporate Facebook pages more widely in the discussion section.

We refer to Potter's (1996) ideas on increasing or decreasing credibility. These relate to objectivity and expertise and elaborate on the idea of footing (see Figure 3).

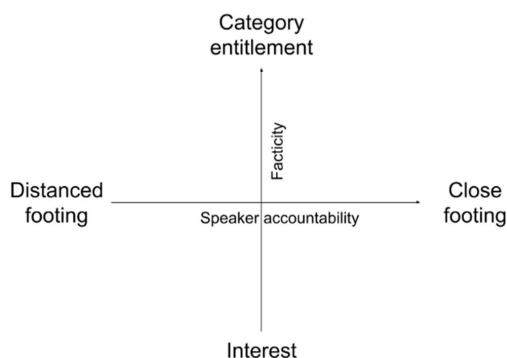


Figure 3. Dynamics of speaker accountability and facticity. Adapted from Potter (1996).

This framework describes the dynamics of speaker accountability (footing) and presents discourse as either factual or as possible misrepresentation. The credibility type referred to as category entitlement refers to people gaining credibility due to a category they belong to or position they occupy: it is immediately clear that the person is involved with the issue and therefore knowledgeable. Being involved in something may, however, also be used to undermine others' credibility; this is called stake or interest, and it refers to the suggestion that the speaker has something to gain by a certain representation of the world and therefore is not objective. "Exposing" stakes is used to undermine others' arguments.

Strategies that undermine others' credibility are "ironizing", whereas supporting strategies are "reifying" (Potter, 1996). In addition to category entitlements, stakes and footing, we bring up a further type of ironizing discourse, namely ridicule of the opponent, which occurs in connection with reifying one's own view as self-evident.

5.3.2 Essay 2

In essay 2 we take a CDS perspective which is based on van Dijk's ideas (2009, 2014), combined with a Bakhtinian perspective. Van Dijk's framework deals with discourse comprehensively as it includes the general areas of context, semantic structures and formal structures (van Dijk, 2009). The framework is based on a socio-cognitive approach to CDS that argues that there is a cognitive interface between discourse structures and the communicative and social environment, and issues such as ideology and context have both cognitive and social dimensions. The relevance of contextual factors, then, depends on discourse participants' mental representations of the situation, "context models" (van Dijk, 2009) which feature such aspects as spatio-temporal setting, participants' identities, roles and relationships as well as the ongoing action and its goals (van Dijk, 2009, 2014). Semantic structures are important as they are best recalled and reproduced by recipients. Semantic macrostructures (namely topics or overall meanings) define the overall coherence of discourse, whereas local semantic structures involve particularly the choice of words (van Dijk, 2014). Formal structures, finally, include aspects such as syntactic, propositional and rhetorical structures, of course ignoring obligatory grammatical structures and focusing instead on the structures that can be chosen by speakers (van Dijk, 2014). In essay 2, the formal structures that we focused on were generic structures and rhetorical moves.

Within the categories of context and semantic and formal structures, we particularly drew on Bakhtin's (1981; 1984a) concepts of responsivity, polyphony and carnivalization. We interpreted responsivity as features that support turn-taking and several people contributing to the production of discourse. Polyphony is an extension of this, seen as the presence of truly different voices. Carnivalization is a feature supporting the creation of polyphony. These factors, then, reveal the dialogizing and monologizing tendencies in the discourse.

5.3.3 Essay 3

Essay 3 focuses on how the promotional communication of organizations is evaluated by users of Reddit, thereby building or questioning organizational legitimacy. The analysis draws on symbolic interactionism, particularly the concepts of interpretive frame and definition of the situation, and utilizes Martin's (2000, 2004) work on appraisal (from the research tradition of systemic functional linguistics) to zoom in on evaluative communication.

Using Martin's appraisal framework helped to locate and analyze evaluative statements in the data. Appraisal, as discussed by Martin, expresses the writer's positive or negative evaluation of something (Martin, 2000, 2004). The three types of "attitude" in appraisal theory are "affect", "judgement" and "appreciation". Affect involves expressing emotions related to the evaluated thing, judgement is assessing behavior based on social norms, and appreciation communicates subjective preferences. The appraisal framework also involves analysis of speaker commitment, i.e. commitment to the evaluative statement, and of graduation (degree; strong or weak) (Martin & White, 2005).

In addition, we employed an iterative coding and categorization process in the analysis, where first order concepts (participants' own words) are identified, followed by the construction of second order themes, and then aggregate dimensions (Van Maanen, 1979). In this process, both Martin's categories and previously discussed legitimacy categories (instrumental, moral, and relational; Tost, 2011) contributed to the analysis.

5.3.4 Essay 4

In essay 4, I examine the discursive resources for constructing identification and membership as part of what I call an interpellative constitution process. More specifically, the analytical framework used in the study combined elements from previous language-centered research synthesized by Bucholtz and Hall (2005) and Fairclough (2003).

I theorize that the interpellative process consists of two stages, the first one focuses on communicating ideology, and the second on communicating membership. Since membership in this specific case is not defined by strict formal criteria, identification plays a key role; therefore I looked at discursive resources that related particularly to expressing identity and thereby membership (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005). Adapting the framework constructed by Bucholtz and Hall (2005), I defined two categories of discursive resources: (a) semiotic resources and (b) relational resources. Semiotic resources include various direct and indirect references using linguistic and visual symbols. Direct references include use of words that clearly and explicitly indicate belonging in the group in question while indirect references require specific contextual knowledge to be correctly interpreted. Indirect references can, then, make use of for example conversational implicatures (Grice, 1975) or interactional stances (e.g. Johnstone, 2007). The category of relational resources include similarity within the group and difference with respect to outsiders as well as genuineness and artifice, that is to say constructing a difference between "real" and "fake" members (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005). Finally, in the analytical framework I also include a category that I call cultural resources. These include particularly cultural discourses (i.e. discourses with a D, ways of representing), but also genres (ways of acting) and styles (ways of being) (Fairclough, 2003).

5.4 Quality of the study

In this section, I will look at issues relating to the quality and trustworthiness of this study. According to Silverman (2006), shortcomings in either reliability or validity are major problems sometimes associated with qualitative research. However, it can be argued that these concepts are drawn from positivist or postpositivist research and are not relevant for discursive or other qualitative research (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008). In other research traditions, validity is often used as a reference to truth, accuracy and objectivity of research, but taking the social constructionist perspective means that one does not subscribe to the idea that there is one objective "truth" out there to be found, nor are there absolute criteria for assessing research—there is no way of breaking out

of our cultural and historical circumstances which influence our view of the world (Moisander & Valtonen, 2006). The view that language use never just describes the world but also constructs it implies that research texts also do this: they involve discursive practices. Therefore I have sought to problematize taken-for-granted ideas and keep in mind my ethical responsibility as a researcher.

Although “validity” does not simply emerge from “evidence”, claims that researchers make have to, of course, be based on data (Moisander & Valtonen, 2006). In some sense, certain things can be “found”, for example it can be determined what was mentioned in certain texts and what was not. The categorizations and interpretations of what was found are, however, more controversial (Moisander & Valtonen, 2006). These are of course constructions, meant to provide one way of understanding the world. Overall, these sorts of tacitly meaning-creating practices should be carefully looked at and problematized. This is often referred to as reflexivity (e.g. Moisander & Valtonen, 2006; Symon & Cassell, 2012; Wetherell, 2001). I have done this, for example, when contemplating the use of the word “consumer” (p. 11), and of course also more widely.

Silverman (2006) associates the complaint made about lack of validity in qualitative research to “anecdotalism”, choosing examples based on what is convenient. Analysis should, in fact, aim to a theoretical understanding that does not betray the richness, dynamism, and complexity of the data (Langley, 1999). I have avoided anecdotalism by conducting systematic analyses and covering various perspectives. In addition, I have sought to ensure trustworthy interpretations through contextualization of data, as discussed above; multiple data sources and prolonged engagement in the field also enhance trustworthiness (see e.g. Jarzabkowski, 2008).

In qualitative research, “reliability” has to do mainly with methodological and theoretical transparency as well as conducting research in a systematic and rigorous way (Moisander & Valtonen, 2006). In this study, I have aimed at transparency, in particular, through detailed presentation of methods and data, as well as reproducing enough data in the research narratives to show readers how conclusions were reached. Within DA, especially in micro-level approaches, it is indeed necessary to use extracts to “show in detail how discursive resources are used and how they operate” (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008). Rigorous research practice, in my case, also involved careful recording, transcription (if applicable) and filing of data.

6. Summary of findings

In this part, the four essays will be summarized—particularly their findings as their methodology and central aspects of theory have been presented above.

6.1 Essay 1

Essay 1 contributes to our understanding of organizational impression management (IM) in participatory media, specifically on Facebook pages, in a context where consumers put forward criticism toward the organization. The IM strategies identified in the study involve (a) attempting to uphold social acceptability and (b) promoting credibility of the organization and its representatives. Several subtypes of strategies helped to achieve these goals. Upholding social acceptability involved conventional politeness (e.g. thanking for feedback; this was by far the most widespread category), as well as moral discourses and diversion (avoiding discussing uncomfortable topics). The centrality of managing impressions of acceptability is demonstrated for example when censorship (a subtype of diversion) from the corporate side was brought up by consumer critics as a morally problematic behavior and thus contested in the discursive struggle. This example shows that sometimes IM strategies can contradict each other and lead to unintended outcomes.

The strategy of promoting credibility involved category entitlement and stake, varying footings, and ridicule. Varying footing (Potter, 1996), in particular, brings into play the personal impression management of the corporate representatives in the social media context that features a more personalized communication style. Saving the credibility of an organizational representative, even somewhat at the expense of the organization as a whole, can still “limit damage” for the organization as well. This also demonstrates that companies should not be assumed to be monolithic blocks in relation to outsiders such as consumers; the interactions and discursive struggles are complicated by individuals who may partly pursue their own goals.

Essay 1 takes a micro-level viewpoint, only referring to “big D” discourses as resources in the interaction (cultural norms and values drawn upon to negotiate social acceptability in a specific situation). We show how the participation framework (Goffman) is relevant in the impression management and ultimately the discursive struggle between organizations and consumers. Firstly, this happens through strategic shifting between personal and organizational speaker perspectives, for example relying on category entitlement (credibility

granted by the status as an organizational insider) when relevant, and distancing oneself from the organization when organizational messages could be seen to lack credibility (through speaking as a mere animator and explicitly referring to a personal, divergent perspective). Secondly, recipient types are also relevant because although the interaction and personalized style often mean explicitly referring to specific, addressed recipients, non-addressed recipients, i.e. the wider audience is also constantly present. It is because of them that the corporate representative might find ridiculing a consumer or offering uninformative responses useful strategies; the act of responding is as much or more a performance to the wider audience as it is an actual attempt to engage in dialogue with a specific participant.

6.2 Essay 2

In essay 2, the discursive struggle between companies and consumers on corporate Facebook pages is analyzed using a framework that combines a CDS perspective (in particular van Dijk, 1996; 2006b, 2009, 2014) and Bakhtin's dialogical theory; responsivity, carnivalization, and polyphony (Bakhtin, 1981; Bakhtin, 1984a, 1984b; Bakhtin, 1986). This approach provides a fresh perspective that allows us to contribute to an increased understanding of discursive power relations between companies and consumers in online media by drawing attention to access to public discourse (the possibilities that consumers have of getting their voice heard) and the possibilities that companies have of manipulating discourse. In the study, we highlight the discursive power struggle between the dialectical tendencies of *dialogization* and *monologization*.

The findings show how the features of a participatory media platform can influence access to discourse and provide methods for manipulation, revealing both polyphonic (e.g. built-in possibility for conversation and variety of voices) and monologizing discursive dynamics (e.g. limits to visibility of postings, avoidance of certain topics) in organizations' interactions with consumers. One example of limits to visibility and the power embedded in Facebook's design is the "timeline" layout with its system of automatically showing "highlights" of a Facebook page; these highlights almost exclusively include company posts. The page "owner" is however provided with the opportunity to make also selected other posts visible in the highlights. The discursive power of companies is therefore supported by the setting, specifically the affordances of the medium. Facebook has, for example, progressively decreased the visibility of consumer posts on corporate pages, thus supporting the power of corporate users. The platform itself has significant power, and it gives the companies possibilities to use coercive power (e.g. to delete or prevent consumer contributions).

In addition, the organizations also use various manipulative strategies, namely control strategies embedded in discursive aspects: topics, generic features and rhetorical moves. For example, they consistently introduce topics

that are pleasant and “safe”. In contrast, issues related to corporate ethics are not brought up by the companies.

Certain carnivalesque features (simultaneous presence of opposites, reversing traditional power roles) were present through the consumers’ participation. It is the interactive nature of the medium that enables these features that, in turn, support polyphony, consumer participation and resistance. In the case of corporate representatives, they engage in certain familiarizing rhetoric—for example, the corporate representatives’ practice of signing their first name at the end of posts—that on the surface also appears to fit the Bakhtinian framework as carnivalesque tendencies. However, on closer inspection, it seems that these are manipulative tendencies similar to those of traditional corporate communication genres; the familiarity is described by the interviewees as a rhetorical strategy with specific, monologizing aims; controlling consumer reactions and minimizing disagreement.

We conclude that “participatory media” do not always support equal participation. Instead, discourse can be made to appear participative, when, in fact, unwanted voices are being suppressed through various coercive and manipulative methods.

6.3 Essay 3

In essay 3, we examine the social construction of organizational legitimacy through evaluations of promotional communication by the users of Reddit, a popular online community and content sharing site. The study shows how legitimacy is conferred or withdrawn through evaluative communication in a participatory media context, and thus it contributes to a communicative view of legitimacy, particularly legitimacy judgments, a so far under-researched topic. We examine the interaction between organizations and users in several sub-groups of Reddit by looking at interpretive frames, definitions of situations (from symbolic interactionism, e.g., Blumer, 1969; Goffman, 1959) and evaluations of legitimacy by the users (Martin, 2000, 2004; Martin & White, 2005). We elaborate on three dimensions of evaluative communication and develop a process model of the social construction of organizational legitimacy in online communities.

In the essay, we argue for a situational understanding of legitimacy where the criteria for evaluating legitimacy depend on contexts, such as online sites and communities, and specific communication situations. We therefore emphasize that it is important to consider the local contexts of social media and the interpretive frames specific to them.

We identify nine categories of legitimacy evaluations, which are grouped into three dimensions. Firstly, “object-related legitimacy” refers to the legitimizing aspects of products or communication and involve evaluations of relevance (e.g. *useful / pointless*), quality (e.g. *original / garbage*) and convenience (e.g. *non-obtrusive / annoying*). Secondly, the dimension of “subject-related legitimacy” contains appraisals of the acceptability of organizations’ behavior, which is assessed as honest (or as *misleading*), selfless (or *spamming*) or re-

spectful (or *insulting*). Finally, “relational legitimacy” focuses on the relationship between the organization and the online community. It is evaluated based on the presence or absence of equal standing, participation, and demonstrated common ground. We argue that if deemed legitimate, organizations on Reddit can be seen to occupy one of the two main roles: they can be seen as “contributors” (legitimate mainly based on object-related and subject-related, i.e. “substantial”, grounds) who are acceptable but still just visitors, or as actual “members” (legitimate mainly on relational grounds).

The findings show that the interpretive frames of Reddit users often include a negative view of promotional communication. This is why relational legitimacy, which depends on understanding and sharing the communal frames, is particularly important for those who wish to engage in promotional communication. It is difficult to achieve, because it requires active participation and shared ideas and values, but it can lead to a stronger kind of legitimacy.

6.4 Essay 4

In essay 4, the aim is to explore the communicative constitution of membership in an online organization, particularly to understand the processes of membership construction. The study contributes to our understanding of the communicative construction of organizations (e.g., Cooren et al., 2011; McPhee & Zaug, 2000) by introducing the concept of “interpellative constitution”. The process of interpellative constitution is explained using the case of Nerdfighteria, an online group that I argue can be seen as a partial (online) organization (Ahrne & Brunsson, 2011).

The findings show how organizational membership is constructed through interpellation: by disseminating ideological discourse, which attracts people who already feel close to the subject position proposed by that discourse. Thus, these people start to identify with the ideology and group, becoming members. I argue that there are two main phases in the interpellative constitution process: *recognition* and *reaction*. In the recognition phase, ideology is communicated by making use of general cultural resources, particularly Discourses with a “D” (which brings familiarity), and by modifying the existing discourses by introducing specific ideological content (which brings appeal). Direct references to membership categories, using the labels Nerdfighter(s) and Nerdfighteria, played a key role here; these labels were created by using existing cultural discourses about nerds and by modifying in a more positive direction.

The recognition phase leads to identification and to the reaction phase where people simultaneously reproduce the ideological discourse and position themselves as members. This involves also indirect references to membership such as the use of unifying symbols, which require cultural-contextual knowledge to be interpreted as Nerdfighteria-related, as well as showing knowledge of and adherence to Nerdfighter values and goals, such as progress and community. In addition, relational resources, particularly focusing on similarity and difference relative to outsiders, are used.

In essay 4, I argue that interpellative constitution leads to an organization that is “insider-oriented”: relevant audiences are positioned as insiders, leading to little need for explicit external communication. Potential new members are, however, not positioned as outsiders, but are instead made to feel as if they already are Nerdfighters—this is key to the interpellative constitution process. In addition, I argue that a logical implication of interpellative constitution is “ideological coherence”: by selecting members who share a way of thinking, and who might easily accept organizational practices, the organization gains a type of control and discursive struggle is avoided to a large extent.

7. Conclusion

In this dissertation, I have constructed an approach to organization–consumer interaction in the online context adopting a dialogical perspective (see Linell, 2009) and focusing on the notion of discursive struggle. I have taken a critical stance while mainly approaching the phenomenon on the micro-level. The research is positioned within the field of organizational communication, organizational discourse in particular. I will conclude this introductory part by first discussing the findings, as well as limitations, future research and practical implications, and then summarizing the main contributions of the dissertation as a whole.

7.1 Discussion

The aim of this doctoral dissertation has been to understand *discursive processes* and *cultural and technological affordances* involved in the discursive struggle between organizations and consumers in social media contexts. As presented in section 4, I look at the issue from the perspective of both consumers and organizations and discuss two main categories: manipulative and resistant discursive processes.

The manipulative discourse of organizations, as discussed in essay 2, apparently stems from the fact that organizations often see criticism towards them as negative and problematic in view of their goals (e.g., Aula, 2010). Based on the findings of this dissertation, *manipulative discursive processes* include particularly (a) coercion, (b) diversion, (c) persuasion, (d) misrepresentation, and (e) interpellation.

In essay 2, we discuss manipulative processes in terms of monologization, which includes various ways of reducing (the appearance of) disagreeing voices (for further discussion on silencing critics, see also Uldam, 2014). These discursive processes involve utilizing, on the one hand, the affordances provided by the context, and on the other, various semantic and formal discursive structures to simply prevent or remove unwanted contributions (*coercion*), to divert attention from some unwanted topics (*diversion*) or to convince people so that they stop voicing criticism (*persuasion*). In fact, all of these points also emerged in essay 1. In essay 1, we argue that impression management, understood as aiming to control how the organization is perceived, depends on social acceptability and credibility. Promoting credibility, in particular, can be included under *persuasion*. Under social acceptability we discuss *diversion*, avoiding discussion of uncomfortable topics that critical consumers bring up.

The possibility of censorship is also discussed; this can be thought of as *coercion* because it leaves the consumers with little they can do to resist it. It can be assumed, then, that these are more general processes that aim for both controlling unwanted voices and, partly through that control, managing impressions that the audience gets.

In essay 1, we also argue that social media has brought with it a shift toward a more “conversational” communication style which moves corporate communication closer to interpersonal communication, and that this kind of style is expected due to the technical and cultural affordances of Facebook as a space “specifically dedicated to forming and managing impressions, relational maintenance, and relationship-seeking” (Tong, Van Der Heide, Langwell, & Walther, 2008, p. 532). However, as discussed in essay 2, organizations seem to adopt a level of familiarity as a carefully crafted rhetoric, a persuasive process that can contribute to monologization.

In essay 3, we show that Reddit users are particularly suspicious of manipulative organizational participation. In our data, such manipulation was referred to, for example, as “astroturfing”, which literally refers to a brand of artificial turf used on game fields, thereby making reference to fake grass roots activity, or dishonest promotional communication that poses as consumer-generated content. This downright lying about organizational participation and goals, it can be argued, is another manipulative process, namely *misrepresentation*.

Essay 4, which illustrates a specific set of circumstances where discursive struggle is absent, brings us to the final (potentially) manipulative process of *interpellation*. In the admittedly unusual case analyzed in essay 4, this absence of struggle is achieved through what I term “interpellative constitution” of an organization, namely gathering members based on shared ideology. Therefore, the discourse is ideologically coherent. *Ideological coherence* could be seen as a source of legitimacy in the form of taken-for-grantedness (cognitive legitimacy, Suchman, 1995) but it is also a potential source of power. Ideological coherence is, in my conceptual framework (see section 4, Figure 1), the assumed ideal state that organizations seem to strive for. I speculate that other, more traditional organizations may sometimes achieve similar coherence in online groups, when these groups principally attract members who are fans of that organization. However, that kind of coherence is fragile, because, given the right incentive, critical consumers can easily join these groups. In the case of Nerdfighteria, the characteristic trait of insider-orientedness protects against this development that I refer to as *fragmentation* in Figure 1.

The *resistant* or *fragmenting communicative processes* that I have discussed in this dissertation include (a) stretching affordances, (b) carnivalization and (b) critical evaluation. These processes increase polyphony in social media contexts.

In both essays 1 and 2, we note that one way for critical consumers to resist unequal affordances provided by the context of Facebook—namely consumers’ inability to post or lack of visibility for their posts—and to get their point heard, is changing or “*stretching*” (as we refer to it in essay 2) the topic of con-

versation in the comment section of an organization's post. As we state in essay 1, "critical consumers insisted on presenting their particular concerns, often using only a feeble link to the topic of conversation". It can be assumed that this kind of creative stretching or circumventing unequal affordances can happen in many other contexts as well.

In essay 2, we also discuss the process of *carnivalization*, which includes eccentricity, namely unusual and non-normative behavior, profanity (lowering of a normally high status), suspension of hierarchies and juxtaposition of opposite or otherwise distant things and ideas. We argue that uninhibited expressions of criticism or sometimes even hate towards a big organization can breach the usual norms of conduct and lower its status. Carnivalization may also draw attention to differing points of view and therefore promote polyphony. We see this happening through hyperbolic or unusual expressions and ideas, particularly when opposites are simultaneously present, as well as through direct insults and cursing. In essay 1, we also discuss the credibility strategy of ridiculing others, and mention that this was done by both company representatives and consumers. Some of these cases can also be seen as carnivalization.

Finally, in essay 3, we focus on how consumers (de)legitimate organizations and their promotional communication through *critical evaluation* on "object-related" (mainly instrumental benefits of products and promotional messages), "subject-related" (moral character of organizations) and relational grounds (quality of the organizations' relation to the online community). Questioning morality was something that also came up in essay 1: consumers discursively undermined the organizational representative's social acceptability, implying that their behavior was immoral. In particular, honesty was questioned, and it was also implied that removing consumers' messages was immoral. With regard to organizations removing comments, the consumers were resisting an unequal standing or unequal affordances for consumers and organizations. This was something that also emerged in essay 3 where consumers disliked the use of sponsored posts because of the affordances that type of post provides for organizations to circumvent normal user power (i.e., voting and commenting).

The interpretive frames of the community on Reddit seem to incorporate anti-commercial ideology, and therefore promotional communication is often understood as an attempt by an outsider to manipulate and exploit the consumers. Reddit therefore has a cultural affordance that enables skepticism and criticism of manipulative organizational participation. In essay 3, we also discuss the importance of individual situations and defining them in line with the community's interpretive frames. AMAs ("Ask me Anything"), for example, are posts that promise answers to questions (cultural affordance); therefore if there are no answers or they are unsatisfying, this defies the expectations of Reddit users and leads to unfavorable, delegitimizing evaluations.

As we discuss in essay 3, our viewpoint on legitimacy is untypical, as the focus is on the discursive micro-level; we examine how the legitimacy of individual actors or acts is negotiated situation by situation. In addition, although essay 1 explicitly deals with impression management, it also sheds some light

on these types of legitimacy struggles. Essay 1 demonstrates that whether the criticism that the organization is subjected to concerns “big” or “small” issues, discursive processes to advance social acceptability and credibility are involved. Social acceptability and credibility can, in fact, be seen as constituent parts of legitimacy (Scott, 2014, p. 71). The centrality of social acceptability, in particular, resonates also with Fleming and Spicer’s (2007) explanation of *manipulative politics* as an attempt to fit one’s activities within the boundaries of the “normal or acceptable”, and further brings to mind Suchman’s (1995) definition of legitimacy as that which is seen as “desirable, proper, or appropriate”.

Manipulative processes minimize discursive fragmentation, and when consumers’ voices are positive from the organization’s perspective, consumers’ participation—their lives, personalities, and voices—is appropriated (see also Fleming, 2013) to the service of organizational marketing efforts, to create a mere illusion of polyphony. Earlier research has discussed this type of phenomenon as “prosumption” (Cova & Cova, 2012; Ritzer & Jurgenson, 2010) or “consumer work” (Cova & Dalli, 2009a; Zwick et al., 2008); it has been argued that in the new communication context of social media, consumers are increasingly doing free work for organizations in the form of marketing, product development or letting their online activities become the product that online service providers sell to marketers. This is also relevant to the field of organizational communication—as Putnam and Mumby (2014) have argued, in the future, organizational communication scholars “need to examine how the production of economic value depends heavily on social reproduction and on communication that occurs *outside of the corporate workplace*” (my emphasis).

In Nerdfighteria, consumers are positioned inside the organization thus forming an informal larger organization; this idea could be thought of as an extension of the notion of “consumer work” (Cova & Dalli, 2009b; Cova, Dalli, & Zwick, 2011): if consumers do work for the organization, why should they be seen as “outside” of it? And if consumers are in fact key participants in organizational communication and constitution (Albu & Etter, 2015), even positioned explicitly as insiders, this needs to be taken into consideration in organizational communication research.

In terms of affordances, this dissertation has emphasized the importance of differences between various forms of social media. In a sense, it is self-evident that there is a lot of variation, but still, many authors discuss “social media” as if they were one uniform thing that always empowers or always leads to exploitation of consumers. This study has shown that the affordances provided by Facebook pages and Reddit, for example, are based on different ideologies, and can divide power among the users in very different ways. On Facebook pages, the “owners” of pages are given control and they have, for example, rights to censorship, whereas on Reddit, the user base at large can normally vote to increase or decrease visibility of posts (not explicit advertising, however, which shows that the cases are not completely different). In addition, social media are in a process of constant change. This is why this dissertation also

acquired an (unintended) temporal dimension: collecting and analyzing data from corporate Facebook pages in both 2011 and 2013, that is, before and after the “timeline” reform, allowed me to concretely reflect on the effects of technological affordances as I witnessed increasing monologizing power given to page owners.

Examining the material aspects in and around interaction also brings into view powerful actors that may otherwise be eclipsed. In addition to the immediate participants in the interaction, such actors as the companies that own the media platforms (e.g. Facebook Inc.) and the designers of the platforms also use significant power.

7.2 Limitations, future research and implications

This dissertation, with its four empirical essays that all have a fairly restricted focus, has only been able to provide a partial picture of the different social and communicative processes at work in the discursive struggle in social media contexts. Therefore, naturally, I do not claim that discursive struggle is always, at least visibly, present in social media contexts or that the macro processes of resistance and manipulation cover all aspects that may be of interest in relation to this phenomenon. Future research should therefore continue to examine these processes, their consequences and potential ways to alleviate the effects of organizational manipulation. One interesting point of view is also to theorize the reasons of acceptance of prevailing conditions and further examine the possibilities that various affordances, whether technological or cultural, have to encourage criticism and change.

In this introduction, I have explicitly taken a critical perspective. As critical theories such as CDS are aimed at producing “enlightenment and emancipation” by providing knowledge that enables people to “emancipate themselves from forms of domination through self-reflection” (Wodak & Meyer, 2015, p. 7), it is also my hope that this study and possible future efforts to popularize its results will help to illuminate the possibilities for manipulation and resistance in social media contexts that we are often not clearly aware of in our everyday life. Lately, at least in Finland, it has become fashionable also for public organizations such as libraries or local government agencies to participate in social media, for example on Twitter or on their own Facebook pages. A practical implication of this and future studies on the same topic could also be to encourage these actors to critically reflect on the affordances provided by the online platforms in question, and search for options that are as participatory as possible. Naturally, in terms of participation, there is also much to be said for going to where people already are, but there are always various alternatives available. One, be it perhaps an utopist option, would be a publicly funded platform for online interaction. As long as social media companies gain their profits by essentially selling users as audiences for advertising and as sources of content and data, while the individual users do not pay for the service in monetary terms, it is difficult to imagine that the development towards increasing corporate manipulation could be reversed.

7.3 Contributions

This dissertation offers several contributions: (1) to the field of organizational communication in general, (2) to the study of discursive struggle in particular, (3) to the study of social media interaction between organizations and consumers, as well as (4) to methodology.

Firstly, the present study contributes to an under-researched area of *organizational communication*, namely the emerging focus on organizational outsiders and organization–society relations, by adopting a perspective that focuses particularly on the relevance of consumers. This is enabled by a dialogical perspective and an empirical focus on micro-level discourse analysis. The approach is dialogical in two senses, in a broader meaning that stresses the role of the other, interaction and contextualization in communication (Linell, 2009), and in a more specific Bakhtinian sense that foregrounds the importance of juxtaposing genuinely diverse points of view. The dialogical approach opens new perspectives on discursive struggle between organizations and consumers.

Secondly, in this study, power relations between companies and consumers have been conceptualized as *discursive struggle*, as a process of constant negotiation in interaction. Emphasis has been placed on the analysis of the micro-level discursive details. Unlike many previous studies that have focused on controversy on a wider level, this study has taken a micro perspective also in the sense that small, everyday struggles count in an ongoing process of discursive struggle. In addition, unlike many earlier approaches to discursive struggle that have emphasized legitimacy as the outcome of discursive struggle (Erkama & Vaara, 2010; Hardy & Phillips, 1999; Harley & Hardy, 2004; Real & Putnam, 2005), this study has focused particularly on examining the struggle itself and less on the resulting legitimacy or illegitimacy for actors, although the legitimation aspect is also discussed in essay 3.

Thirdly, the present study contributes particularly towards our understanding of the specific characteristics of organization-consumer communication and discursive struggle in *social media* environments, which, unlike traditional media, have not yet been studied extensively. This study has aimed to question a common assumption that social media distributes power “democratically” as “anyone” can participate in public discourse (e.g. Barros, 2014). This study shows that social media can open avenues of consumer resistance and create potential for change, but they also support many kinds of manipulative discourse. There is, then, a dialectic between fragmentation and resistance on the one hand, principally advanced by consumers, and on the other hand, organizations’ search for ideological coherence.

Fourthly, this study has discussed the importance of contextualization in discourse studies and specifically proposed a combination of discourse analysis and netnography, thereby contributing to *methodology* within organizational discourse studies.

References

- Ahrne, G., & Brunsson, N. (2011). Organization outside organizations: the significance of partial organization. *Organization*, 18(1), 83-104. doi:10.1177/1350508410376256
- Albu, O. B., & Etter, M. (2015). Hypertextuality and Social Media: A Study of the Constitutive and Paradoxical Implications of Organizational Twitter Use. *Management Communication Quarterly*. doi:10.1177/0893318915601161
- Allen, B. J. (2005). Social constructionism. In S. May & D. K. Mumby (Eds.), *Engaging Organizational Communication Theory and Research: Multiple Perspectives*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Althusser, L. (2008). Ideology and ideological state apparatuses. In L. Althusser (Ed.), *On ideology* (pp. 1-60). London: Verso.
- Alvesson, M., & Kärreman, D. (2000). Varieties of discourse: on the study of organizations through discourse analysis. *Human Relations*, 53(9), 1125-1149. doi:10.1177/0018726700539002
- Alvesson, M., & Kärreman, D. (2011). Decolonializing discourse: Critical reflections on organizational discourse analysis. *Human Relations*, 64(9), 1121-1146. doi:10.1177/0018726711408629
- Angermüller, J., Maingueneau, D., & Wodak, R. (2014). The Discourse Studies Reader: An Introduction. In J. Angermüller, D. Maingueneau, & R. Wodak (Eds.), *The Discourse Studies Reader: Main currents in theory and analysis* (pp. 1-14): John Benjamins Publishing Company.
- Arvidsson, A. (2008). The Ethical Economy of Customer Coproduction. *Journal of Macromarketing*, 28(4), 326-338.
- Ashcraft, K. L., Kuhn, T. R., & Cooren, F. (2009). Constitutional amendments: "materializing" organizational communication. *The Academy of Management Annals*, 3(1), 1-64. doi:10.1080/19416520903047186
- Ashcraft, K. L., & Mumby, D. K. (2004). Organizing a critical communicology of gender and work. *International Journal of the Sociology of Language*, 166, 19-43.
- Aula, P. (2010). Social media, reputation risk and ambient publicity management. *Strategy & Leadership*, 38(6), 43-49. doi:10.1108/10878571011088069
- Bakhtin, M. (1981). *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays* (C. Emerson & M. Holquist, Trans.). Austin and London: University of Texas Press.
- Bakhtin, M. (1984a). *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Bakhtin, M. (1984b). *Rabelais and His World*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Bakhtin, M. (1986). *Speech Genres, and Other Late Essays* (V. W. McGee, Trans.). Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Barros, M. (2014). Tools of Legitimacy: The Case of the Petrobras Corporate Blog. *Organization Studies*, 35(8), 1211-1230. doi:10.1177/0170840614530914
- Berger, P. L., & Luckmann, T. (1966). *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge*. Garden City, NY: Anchor Books.
- Blumer, H. (1969). *Symbolic interactionism. Perspective and method*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- Bruns, A. (2008). *Blogs, Wikipedia, Second Life, and Beyond: From Production to Producership*. New York: Peter Lang.
- Bucholtz, M., & Hall, K. (2005). Identity and interaction: a sociocultural linguistic approach. *Discourse Studies*, 7(4-5), 585-614. doi:10.1177/1461445605054407
- Callon, M., Yuval, M., & Fabian, M. e. (2007). *Market Devices*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers.
- Carpentier, N. (2011). *Media and Participation: A Site of Ideological-democratic Struggle*. Bristol, UK: Intellect.

- Champoux, V., Durgee, J., & McGlynn, L. (2012). Corporate Facebook pages: when “fans” attack. *Journal of Business Strategy*, 33(2), 22-30. doi:10.1108/02756661211206717
- Cheney, G., & Christensen, L. T. (2001). Organizational identity. Linkages between internal and external communication. In F. M. Jablin & L. L. Putnam (Eds.), *The New Handbook of Organizational Communication. Advances in Theory, Research, and Methods*. Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Christensen, H. S. (2011). Political activities on the Internet: Slacktivism or political participation by other means? *First Monday*, 16(2-7). doi:10.5210/fm.v16i2.3336
- Comor, E. (2011). Contextualizing and critiquing the fantastic prosumer: power, alienation and hegemony. *Critical Sociology*, 37(3), 309-327. doi:10.1177/0896920510378767
- Contu, A. (2008). Decaf Resistance: On Misbehavior, Cynicism, and Desire in Liberal Workplaces. *Management Communication Quarterly*, 21(3), 364-379. doi:10.1177/0893318907310941
- Cooren, F. (2015). *Organizational Discourse: Communication and Constitution*. Cambridge: Polity press.
- Cooren, F., Kuhn, T., Cornelissen, J. P., & Clark, T. (2011). Communication, organizing and organization: An overview and introduction to the special issue. *Organization Studies*, 32(9), 1149-1170. doi:10.1177/0170840611410836
- Cova, B., & Cova, V. (2012). On the road to prosumption: marketing discourse and the development of consumer competencies. *Consumption Markets & Culture*, 15(2), 149-168. doi:10.1080/10253866.2012.654956
- Cova, B., & Dalli, D. (2009a). Working Consumers: The Next Step in Marketing Theory? *Marketing Theory*, 9(3), 312-339.
- Cova, B., & Dalli, D. (2009b). Working consumers: the next step in marketing theory? *Marketing Theory*, 9(3), 315-339. doi:10.1177/1470593109338144
- Cova, B., Dalli, D., & Zwick, D. (2011). Critical perspectives on consumers' role as 'producers': Broadening the debate on value co-creation in marketing processes. *Marketing Theory*, 11(3), 231-241. doi:10.1177/1470593111408171
- Cova, B., Kozinets, R. V., & Shankar, A. (2007). Tribes, Inc.: The new paradigm of consumer tribes. In B. Cova, R. V. Kozinets, & A. Shankar (Eds.), *Consumer Tribes* (pp. 3–26). Oxford and Burlington, MA: Butterworth-Heinemann.
- Cova, B., & Pace, S. (2006). Brand community of convenience products: new forms of customer empowerment – the case “my Nutella The Community”. *European Journal of Marketing*, 40(9/10), 1087-1105. doi:10.1108/03090560610681023
- Dean, J. (2009). *Democracy and Other Neoliberal Fantasies: Communicative Capitalism and Left Politics*. Durham and London: Duke University Press.
- Deephouse, D. L., & Suchman, M. C. (2008). Legitimacy in organizational institutionalism. In R. Greenwood, C. Oliver, K. Sahlin, & R. Suddaby (Eds.), *The Sage handbook of organizational institutionalism* (pp. 49–77). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Deetz, S. (1992). *Democracy in an age of corporate colonization: developments in communication and the politics of everyday life* Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Deetz, S. (2001). Conceptual Foundations. In F. M. Jablin & L. L. Putnam (Eds.), *The New Handbook of Organizational Communication* (pp. 4-47).
- Deetz, S. (2005). Critical theory. In S. May & D. K. Mumby (Eds.), *Engaging Organizational Communication Theory and Research: Multiple Perspectives* (pp. 85-112). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Denegri-Knott, J. (2006). Consumers behaving badly: deviation or innovation? Power struggles on the web. *Journal of Consumer Behaviour*, 5(1), 82-94. doi:10.1002/cb.45
- Dennis, A., & Martin, P. J. (2005). Symbolic interactionism and the concept of power. *Br J Sociol*, 56(2), 191-213. doi:10.1111/j.1468-4446.2005.00055.x
- Deuze, M. (2007). Convergence culture in the creative industries. *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, 10(2), 243-263. doi:10.1177/1367877907076793
- Eagleton, T. (1991). *Ideology: An Introduction*. London: Verso.
- Ekström, A., Jülich, S., Lundgren, F., & Wisselgren, P. (2012). Participatory media in historical perspective: an introduction. In A. Ekström, S. Jülich, F. Lundgren,

- & P. Wisselgren (Eds.), *History of Participatory Media: Politics and Publics, 1750–2000*. New York: Routledge.
- Eriksson, P., & Kovalainen, A. (2008). *Qualitative Methods in Business Research*. London: SAGE Publications.
- Erkama, N., & Vaara, E. (2010). Struggles Over Legitimacy in Global Organizational Restructuring: A Rhetorical Perspective on Legitimation Strategies and Dynamics in a Shutdown Case. *Organization Studies*, 31(7), 813–839. doi:10.1177/0170840609346924
- Fairclough, N. (1989). *Language and Power*. London: Longman.
- Fairclough, N. (1993). Critical discourse analysis and the marketization of public discourse: the universities. *Discourse & Society*, 4(2), 133–168. doi:10.1177/0957926593004002002
- Fairclough, N. (1995). *Critical Discourse Analysis: The Critical Study of Language*. London: Longman.
- Fairclough, N. (2003). *Analysing discourse: Textual analysis for social research*. London & New York: Routledge.
- Fischer, E. (2012). How less alienation creates more exploitation? Audience labour on social network sites. *tripleC*, 10(2), 171–183.
- Fleming, P. (2007). Sexuality, power and resistance in the workplace. *Organization Studies*, 28(2), 239–256. doi:10.1177/0170840606068307
- Fleming, P. (2013). Review Article: When ‘life itself’ goes to work: Reviewing shifts in organizational life through the lens of biopower. *Human Relations*. doi:10.1177/0018726713508142
- Fleming, P., & Spicer, A. (2003). Working at a Cynical Distance: Implications for Power, Subjectivity and Resistance. *Organization*, 10(1), 157–179. doi:10.1177/1350508403010001376
- Fleming, P., & Spicer, S. (2007). *Contesting the corporation: Struggle, power and resistance in organizations*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Foucault, M. (1989). *The Archaeology of Knowledge and The Discourse on Language*. London: Routledge.
- Fournier, V., & Grey, C. (2000). At the Critical Moment: Conditions and Prospects for Critical Management Studies. *Human Relations*, 53(1), 7–32. doi:10.1177/0018726700531002
- Fuchs, C. (2008). *Internet and society: Social theory in the information age*. New York: Routledge.
- Fuchs, C. (2014). *Digital labour and Karl Marx*. New York: Routledge.
- Füller, J., Mühlbacher, H., Matzler, K., & Jawecki, G. (2009). Consumer empowerment through internet-based co-creation. *Journal of Management Information Systems*, 26(3), 71–102. doi:10.2753/MISO742-1222260303
- Garcia, A. C., Standlee, A. I., Bechkoff, J., & Cui, Y. (2009). Ethnographic approaches to the Internet and computer-mediated communication. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, 38, 52–84.
- Gee, J. P. (1999). *An introduction to discourse analysis: Theory and method*. London & New York, NY: Routledge.
- Gee, J. P. (2015). *Social Linguistics and Literacies: Ideology in Discourses*. Abingdon: Taylor & Francis.
- Georgakopoulou, A. (2006). Postscript: Computer-mediated communication in sociolinguistics. *Journal of Sociolinguistics*, 10(4), 548–557. doi:10.1111/j.1467-9841.2006.00292.x
- Gergen, K. J. (2001). *Social Construction in Context*. London: SAGE Publications.
- Gibson, J. J. (1986). *The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception*. Hillsdale, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Goffman, E. (1959). *The presentation of self in everyday life*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday.
- Goffman, E. (1981). *Forms of talk*. Oxford, England: Basil Blackwell.
- Goffman, E. (1986 [1974]). *Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience*. Boston: Northeastern University Press.
- Grant, D., Hardy, C., Osrick, C., & Putnam, L. L. (2004). Introduction: Organizational discourse: exploring the field. In D. Grant, C. Hardy, C. Osrick, & L. L. Putnam (Eds.), *The SAGE Handbook of Organizational Discourse*. London: SAGE Publications.
- Grant, D., Keenoy, T. W., & Osrick, C. (1998). *Discourse and Organization*: SAGE Publications.

- Grice, H. P. (1975). Logic and conversation. In P. Cole & J. L. Morgan (Eds.), *Syntax and Semantics, Vol. 3, Speech Acts* (pp. 41–58). New York: Academic Press.
- Hall, S. (1985). Signification, representation, ideology: Althusser and the post-structuralist debates. *Critical Studies in Mass Communication*, 2, 91-114.
- Hall, S. (1986). The problem of ideology: Marxism without guarantees. *Journal of Communication Inquiry*, 10(2), 28–44.
- Hardy, C., & Grant, D. (2012). Readers beware: Provocation, problematization and ... problems. *Human Relations*, 65(5), 547-566. doi:10.1177/0018726711435181
- Hardy, C., & Phillips, N. (1999). No Joking Matter: Discursive Struggle in the Canadian Refugee System. *Organization Studies*, 20(1), 1-24. doi:10.1177/0170840699201001
- Harley, B., & Hardy, C. (2004). Firing Blanks? An Analysis of Discursive Struggle in HRM. *Journal of Management Studies*, 41(3), 377-400. doi:10.1111/j.1467-6486.2004.00437.x
- Herring, C. S. (2007). A faceted classification scheme for computer-mediated discourse. *Language@Internet*, 4(1). Retrieved from <http://nbn-resolving.de/urn:nbn:de:0009-7-7611>
- Holt, D. B. (2002). Why do brands cause trouble? A dialectical theory of consumer culture and branding. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 29, 70–90.
- Howard, R. G. (2008). The Vernacular Web of Participatory Media. *Critical Studies in Media Communication*, 25(5), 490-513. doi:10.1080/15295030802468065
- Hutchby, I. (2001). Technologies, Texts and Affordances. *Sociology*, 35(2), 441-456. doi:10.1177/s0038038501000219
- Jarzabkowski, P. (2008). Shaping strategy as a structuration process. *Academy of Management Journal*, 51(4), 621-650. doi:10.5465/amr.2008.33664922
- Jenkins, H. (2006a). *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*. New York: NYU Press.
- Jenkins, H. (2006b). *Fans, Bloggers, and Gamers: Exploring Participatory Culture*. NYU Press.
- Jian, G., Schmisser, A. M., & Fairhurst, G. T. (2008). Organizational discourse and communication: the progeny of Proteus. *Discourse & Communication*, 2(3), 299-320. doi:10.1177/1750481308091912
- Johnstone, B. (2007). Linking identity and dialect through stancetaking. In R. Englebretson (Ed.), *Stancetaking in Discourse: Subjectivity, Evaluation, Interaction* (pp. 49-68). Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company.
- Joutsenvirta, M., & Vaara, E. (2015). Legitimacy Struggles and Political Corporate Social Responsibility in International Settings: A Comparative Discursive Analysis of a Contested Investment in Latin America. *Organization Studies*, 36(6), 741-777. doi:10.1177/0170840615571958
- Juris, J. S. (2005). The New Digital Media and Activist Networking within Anti-Corporate Globalization Movements. *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 597(1), 189-208. doi:10.1177/0002716204270338
- Kaplan, A. M., & Haenlein, M. (2010). Users of the world, unite! The challenges and opportunities of Social Media. *Business Horizons*, 53(1), 59-68. doi:10.1016/j.bushor.2009.09.003
- Kelleher, C., Whalley, A., & Helkkula, A. (2011). Collaborative Value Co-Creation in Crowd-Sourced Online Communities – Acknowledging and Resolving Competing Commercial and Communal Orientations. 13, 1-18. doi:10.1108/s0885-2111(2011)0000013004
- Kelsey, D., & Bennett, L. (2014). Discipline and resistance on social media: Discourse, power and context in the Paul Chambers “Twitter Joke Trial”. *Discourse, Context & Media*, 3(0), 37-45. doi:10.1016/j.dcm.2013.12.001
- KhosraviNik, M., & Unger, J. W. (2015). Critical discourse studies and social media: Power, resistance and critique in changing media ecologies. In R. Wodak & M. Meyer (Eds.), *Methods of Critical Discourse Studies* (pp. 205-233). London: Sage.
- Kietzmann, J. H., Hermkens, K., McCarthy, I. P., & Silvestre, B. S. (2011). Social media? Get serious! Understanding the functional building blocks of social media. *Business Horizons*, 54(3), 241-251. doi:10.1016/j.bushor.2011.01.005

- Kozinets, R. V. (1997). "I want to believe": A netnography of the X-Philes' subculture of consumption. In M. Brucks & D. J. MacInnis (Eds.), *Advances in Consumer Research*, 24 (pp. 470-475).
- Kozinets, R. V. (1999). E-tribalized marketing? The strategic implications of virtual communities of consumption. *European Management Journal*, 17, 252-264. doi:10.1016/S0263-2373(99)00004-3
- Kozinets, R. V. (2002). The field behind the screen: using netnography for marketing research in online communities. *Journal of Marketing Research*, 39, 61-72. doi:10.1509/jmkr.39.1.61.18935
- Kozinets, R. V. (2010). *Netnography: Doing ethnographic research online*. Los Angeles: Sage.
- Kozinets, R. V., & Handelman, J. (1998). Ensouling consumption: a netnographic exploration of the meaning of boycotting behavior. In J. W. Alba & J. W. Hutchinson (Eds.), *Advances in Consumer Research* (Vol. 25, pp. 475-480). Provo, UT: Association for Consumer Research.
- Kozinets, R. V., Hemetsberger, A., & Schau, H. J. (2008). The Wisdom of Consumer Crowds: Collective Innovation in the Age of Networked Marketing. *Journal of Macromarketing*, 28(4), 339-354. doi:10.1177/0276146708325382
- Kuhn, T. (2006). A 'demented work ethic' and a 'lifestyle firm': discourse, identity, and workplace time commitments. *Organization Studies*, 27(9), 1339-1358. doi:10.1177/0170840606067249
- Kuhn, T. (2009). Positioning lawyers: discursive resources, professional ethics and identification. *Organization*, 16(5), 681-704. doi:10.1177/1350508409338886
- Kuhn, T. (2010). Subjectivity. In R. L. Jackson (Ed.), *Encyclopedia of Identity* (Vol. 2, pp. 800-803). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Labrecque, L. I., vor dem Esche, J., Mathwick, C., Novak, T. P., & Hofacker, C. F. (2013). Consumer power: Evolution in the digital age. *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, 27(4), 257-269. doi:<http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.intmar.2013.09.002>
- Laine, P.-M., & Vaara, E. (2007). Struggling over subjectivity: A discursive analysis of strategic development in an engineering group. *Human Relations*, 60(1), 29-58. doi:10.1177/0018726707075279
- Langley, A. (1999). Strategies for theorizing from process data. *Academy of Management Review*, 24(4), 691-710. doi:10.5465/amr.1999.2553248
- Lazzarato, M. (1996). Immaterial Labor. In P. Virno & M. Hardy (Eds.), *Radical Thought In Italy: A Potential Politics*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Leary, M. R., & Kowalski, R. M. (1990). Impression management: A literature review and two-component model. *Psychological Bulletin*, 107, 34-47.
- Linell, P. (2009). *Rethinking language, mind, and world dialogically: interactional and contextual theories of human sense-making*. Charlotte (N.C.): IAP-Information Age.
- Livesey, S. M. (2001). Eco-Identity as Discursive Struggle: Royal Dutch/Shell, Brent Spar, and Nigeria. *Journal of Business Communication*, 38(1), 58-91. doi:10.1177/002194360103800105
- Lukes, S. (1974). *Power: a radical view*. Basingstoke: Macmillan.
- Lutz, C., Hoffmann, C. P., & Meckel, M. (2014). Beyond just politics: A systematic literature review of online participation. *First Monday*, 19(7). doi:10.5210/fm.v19i7.5260
- Malmelin, N., & Villi, M. (2015). Co-creation of what? Modes of audience community collaboration in media work. *Convergence: The International Journal of Research into New Media Technologies*. doi:10.1177/1354856515592511
- Martin, J. R. (2000). Beyond exchange: Appraisal systems in english. In S. Hunston & G. Thompson (Eds.), *Evaluation in text: Authorial stance and the construction of discourse*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Martin, J. R. (2004). Mourning: how we get aligned. *Discourse & Society*, 15(2-3), 321-344. doi:10.1177/0957926504041022
- Martin, J. R., & White, P. R. R. (2005). *The Language of Evaluation: Appraisal in English*. Basingstoke Palgrave Macmillan.
- Matikainen, J., & Villi, M. (2015). Yleisö ja yhteisöt mediassa. In N. Malmelin & M. Villi (Eds.), *Mediajohtaminen: Näkökulmia uudistuvaan media-alaan* (pp. 77-94). Helsinki: Gaudeamus.

- McPhee, R. D., & Zaug, P. (2000). The communicative constitution of organizations: A framework for explanation. *Electronic Journal of Communication, 10*(1-2). Retrieved from <http://www.cios.org/EJCPUBLIC/010/1/01017.html>
- Mead, G. H. (1934). *Mind, self, and society: From the standpoint of a social behaviorist*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Moisander, J., Könkkölä, S., & Laine, P.-M. (2013). Consumer workers as immaterial labour in the converging media markets: three value-creation practices. *International Journal of Consumer Studies, 37*(2), 222-227. doi:10.1111/j.1470-6431.2012.01107.x
- Moisander, J., & Valtonen, A. (2006). *Qualitative Marketing Research: A Cultural Approach*. London: SAGE Publications.
- Mumby, D. K. (1987). The political function of narrative in organizations. *Communication Monographs, 54*, 113-127.
- Mumby, D. K. (1997). The problem of hegemony: Rereading Gramsci for organizational communication studies. *Western Journal of Communication, 61*(4), 343-375.
- Mumby, D. K. (2004). Discourse, power and ideology: Unpacking the critical approach. In D. Grant, C. Hardy, C. Osrick, & L. Putnam (Eds.), *The Sage handbook of organizational discourse*. London: Sage.
- Mumby, D. K. (2005). Theorizing Resistance in Organization Studies: A Dialectical Approach. *Management Communication Quarterly, 19*(1), 19-44. doi:10.1177/0893318905276558
- Muniz, A. M., & O'Guinn, T. C. (2001). Brand Community. *Journal of Consumer Research, 27*(4), 412-432.
- Muñiz, A. M., & Schau, H. J. (2005). Religiosity in the Abandoned Apple Newton Brand Community. *Journal of Consumer Research, 31*(4), 737-747.
- Murthy, D. (2008). Digital ethnography: An examination of the use of new technologies for social research. *Sociology, 42*(5), 837-855. doi:10.1177/0038038508094565
- Norman, D. A. (2013). *The Design of Everyday Things: Revised and Expanded Edition*: Basic Books.
- Orgad, S. (2012). *Media Representation and the Global Imagination*. Cambridge: Polity.
- Potter, J. (1996). *Representing reality: Discourse, rhetoric and social construction*. London: Sage.
- Potter, J., & Wetherell, M. (1987). *Discourse and social psychology: Beyond attitudes and behaviour*. London, England: Sage.
- Putnam, L. L., & Fairhurst, G. T. (2001). Discourse analysis in organizations. Issues and concerns. In F. M. Jablin & L. L. Putnam (Eds.), *The New Handbook of Organizational Communication* (pp. 79-137). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Putnam, L. L., & Mumby, D. K. (2014). Introduction: Advancing theory and research in organizational communication. In L. L. Putnam & D. K. Mumby (Eds.), *The SAGE Handbook of Organizational Communication: Advances in Theory, Research, and Methods*. Thousand Oaks, California: SAGE Publications.
- Putnam, L. L., & Nicotera, A. M. (2010). Communicative Constitution of Organization Is a Question: Critical Issues for Addressing It. *Management Communication Quarterly, 24*(1), 158-165. doi:10.1177/0893318909351581
- Putnam, L. L., & Nicotera, A. M. E. (2009). *Building theories of organization: The constitutive role of communication*. New York: Routledge.
- Real, K., & Putnam, L. L. (2005). Ironies in the Discursive Struggle of Pilots Defending the Profession. *Management Communication Quarterly, 19*(1), 91-119. doi:10.1177/0893318905276561
- Rheingold, H. (2000). *The virtual community: Homesteading on the electronic frontier*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Rheingold, H. (2008). Using participatory media and public voice to encourage civic engagement. In W. L. Bennett (Ed.), *Civic Life Online: Learning How Digital Media Can Engage Youth* (pp. 97-118). Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.
- Ritzer, G., & Jurgenson, N. (2010). Production, consumption, prosumption: The nature of capitalism in the age of the digital 'prosumer'. *Journal of Consumer Culture, 10*(1), 13-36. doi:10.1177/1469540509354673
- Sandel, M. J. (2012). *What money can't buy: the moral limits of markets*. London: Allen Lane.
- Saussure, F. (1967). *Cours de linguistique générale*. Paris: Payot.

- Schau, H. J., Muñiz, A. M., & Arnould, E. J. (2009). How Brand Community Practices Create Value. *Journal of Marketing*, 73, 30–51.
- Schoeneborn, D., & Scherer, A. G. (2012). Clandestine organizations, al Qaeda, and the paradox of (in)visibility: a response to Stohl and Stohl. *Organization Studies*, 33(7), 963-971. doi:10.1177/0170840612448031
- Scott, W. R. (2014). *Institutions and organizations: Ideas, interests, and identities* (4th ed. ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.
- Searle, J. R. (1995). *The construction of social reality*. London: Penguin Books.
- Searle, J. R. (2009). Language and social ontology. In C. Mantzavinos (Ed.), *Philosophy of the Social Sciences: Philosophical Theory and Scientific Practice*: Cambridge University Press.
- Shankar, A., Cherrier, H., & Canniford, R. (2006). Consumer empowerment: a Foucauldian interpretation. *European Journal of Marketing*, 40(9/10), 1013-1030. doi:10.1108/03090560610680989
- Shannon, C. E., & Weaver, W. (1949). *The Mathematical Theory of Communication*. Urbana, Illinois: University of Illinois Press.
- Silverman, D. (2006). *Interpreting Qualitative Data: Methods for Analyzing Talk, Text and Interaction*. London: SAGE Publications.
- Suchman, M. C. (1995). Managing legitimacy: Strategic and institutional approaches. *Academy of Management Review*, 20, 571-610.
- Symon, G., & Cassell, C. (2012). Assessing qualitative research. In G. Symon & C. Cassell (Eds.), *Qualitative Organizational Research: Core Methods and Current Challenges*. London: SAGE Publications.
- Taylor, B. C. (2005). Postmodern theory. In S. May & D. K. Mumby (Eds.), *Engaging Organizational Communication Theory and Research: Multiple Perspectives* (pp. 113-140). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Taylor, J. R., & Robichaud, D. (2004). Finding the Organization in the Communication: Discourse as Action and Sensemaking. *Organization*, 11(3), 395-413. doi:10.1177/1350508404041999
- Taylor, J. R., & Van Every, E. (2011). *The situated organization: Case studies in the pragmatics of communication*. London & New York: Routledge.
- Thompson, J. B. (2013). *Ideology and Modern Culture: Critical Social Theory in the Era of Mass Communication*: Wiley.
- Thurlow, C. (2013). Fakebook: Synthetic media, pseudo-sociality and the rhetorics of web 2.0. In D. Tannen & A. M. Trester (Eds.), *Discourse 2.0: Language and New Media* (pp. 225-249). Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press.
- Thurlow, C., & Mroczek, K. (2011). Introduction: Fresh perspectives on new media sociolinguistics. In C. Thurlow & K. Mroczek (Eds.), *Digital Discourse: Language in the New Media* (pp. xix-xliv). New York: Oxford University Press.
- Tong, S. T., Van Der Heide, B., Langwell, L., & Walther, J. B. (2008). Too Much of a Good Thing? The Relationship Between Number of Friends and Interpersonal Impressions on Facebook. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 13(3), 531-549. doi:10.1111/j.1083-6101.2008.00409.x
- Tost, L. P. (2011). An integrative model of legitimacy judgments. *Academy of Management Review*, 36(4), 686-710. doi:10.5465/amr.2010.0227
- Uldam, J. (2014). Corporate management of visibility and the fantasy of the post-political: Social media and surveillance. *New Media & Society*. doi:10.1177/1461444814541526
- Vaara, E., & Laine, P.-M. (2006). Kriittinen diskurssianalyysi metodologiana strategiatutkimuksessa. In K. Rolin, M.-L. Kakkuri-Knuuttila, & E. Henttonen (Eds.), *Soveltava yhteiskuntatiede ja filosofia* (pp. 155–173). Helsinki: Gaudeamus.
- Vaara, E., Tienari, J., & Laurila, J. (2006). Pulp and paper fiction: On the discursive legitimation of global industrial restructuring. *Organization Studies*, 27(6), 789–810.
- van Dijk, J. (2013). *The Culture of Connectivity: A Critical History of Social Media*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- van Dijk, T. A. (1996). Discourse, power and access. In C. R. Caldas-Coulthard & M. Coulthard (Eds.), *Texts and Practices. Readings in Critical Discourse Analysis* (pp. 84-104). London: Routledge.
- van Dijk, T. A. (1998). *Ideology: a multidisciplinary approach*. London: Sage.

- van Dijk, T. A. (2001). Critical discourse analysis. In D. Tannen, D. Schiffrin, & H. Hamilton (Eds.), *Handbook of Discourse Analysis* (pp. 352-371). Oxford: Blackwell.
- van Dijk, T. A. (2006a). Discourse and manipulation. *Discourse & Society*, 17(3), 359-383. doi:10.1177/0957926506060250
- van Dijk, T. A. (2006b). Discourse, context and cognition. *Discourse Studies*, 8(1), 159-177. doi:10.1177/1461445606059565
- van Dijk, T. A. (2006c). Ideology and discourse analysis. *Journal of Political Ideologies*, 11(2), 115-140.
- van Dijk, T. A. (2009). Critical discourse studies: a sociocognitive approach. In R. Wodak & M. Meyer (Eds.), *Methods of critical discourse analysis* (pp. 62-86). London: Sage.
- van Dijk, T. A. (2014). Discourse-cognition-society. Current state and prospects of the socio-cognitive approach to discourse. In C. Hart & P. Cap (Eds.), *Contemporary critical discourse studies*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing.
- Van Maanen, J. (1979). The fact of fiction in organizational ethnography. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 24(4), 539-550.
- Weber, M. (1978). *Economy and society: an outline of interpretive sociology*. University of Berkeley, CA: California Press.
- 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
- Wetherell, M. (2001). Debates in discourse research. In M. Wetherell, S. Taylor, S. J. Yates, & O. University (Eds.), *Discourse Theory and Practice: A Reader* (pp. 380-399). London: SAGE Publications.
- Villi, M. (2012). Social curation in audience communities: UDC (user-distributed content) in the networked media ecosystem. *Participations: Journal of Audience & Reception Studies*, 9(2), 614-632.
- Wodak, R., & Meyer, M. (2015). Critical discourse analysis: History, agenda, theory and methodology. In R. Wodak & M. Meyer (Eds.), *Methods of Critical Discourse Studies* (pp. 1-33). London: Sage.
- Zwick, D., Bonsu, S. K., & Darmody, A. (2008). Putting Consumers to Work 'Co-creation' and new marketing govern-mentality. *Journal of Consumer Culture*, 8(2), 163-196.

Essays

Essay 1

Lillqvist, Ella & Louhiala-Salminen, Leena (2014). Facing Facebook: Impression management strategies in company–consumer interactions. *Journal of Business and Technical Communication*, 28, 3-30. DOI: [10.1177/1050651913502359](https://doi.org/10.1177/1050651913502359)

© 2014 SAGE Publications
Reprinted with permission

Facing Facebook: Impression management strategies in company–consumer interactions

Ella Lillqvist & Leena Louhiala-Salminen

Abstract

This study examines interaction between corporate representatives and critical consumers in today's social media environment. Applying a microanalytical form of discourse analysis to a data set of corporate Facebook page discussions, the study contributes to a better understanding of the communicative resources that organizations use as part of their impression management for upholding their acceptability and promoting their credibility. The study also reveals the complexity of the work of corporate Facebook representatives, who need to align their individual impression management with that of the organization while adjusting to the technologically mediated context.

Keywords

impression management, social media, social networking sites, Facebook, discourse analysis

Consumer: First you have to “like” the company to be able to give a comment. If I liked you I wouldn't be on this page, but I'm so angry I will use any channel to make my point. ...

Company representative: ... I can only say I'm really sorry and, of course, will pass on your feedback in our organization.

The preceding IText, or text-centered interaction mediated by information technology (Geisler et al., 2001; see also, Geisler, 2011), which took place on a public transportation company's Facebook page, illustrates one of the challenges that company representatives face in the online environment—having to react in public to critical comments from dissatisfied consumers. Social me-

dia make up a new, and quite influential, textual space (Geisler et al., 2001, p. 281) for consumers to get their voices heard. Interaction—or the reciprocal influence of individuals in each other’s presence (Goffman, 1959, p. 26)—is a crucial feature of the IText environment. Especially critical and negative comments (such as those of the consumer in the preceding extract) call for companies to participate actively in the interaction and make use of impression management (IM) strategies in order to establish and uphold desired images of themselves (cf. Goffman, 1959).

In recent years, with the proliferation of Web platforms known as social media, on which people interact, share and produce content, IText interactions occur on a scale that involves unprecedented numbers of participants (e.g., Geisler, 2011; Fernheimer, Litterio, & Hendler, 2011), and the concept itself has expanded to include texts such as voice recordings (Tulley, 2011). Today, this IText2 (Geisler, 2011) environment spawned by social media has led to what might be seen as a change of paradigm in corporate communication—or at least an opportunity for such a change. Companies now have less control over their communication because for example real-time dialogue with their stakeholders allows little opportunity to prepare messages (Argenti, 2006). Customers and other stakeholders increasingly want companies to listen and respond to them (Kietzmann, Hermkens, McCarthy, & Silvestre, 2011). Such spontaneous professional communication in social media spaces can, in fact, be characterized as “conversation” (Spinuzzi, 2009, p. 257), and it leads to the “juxtaposition of two voices in one intact written artifact” (Haas, Carr, & Takayoshi, 2011, p. 288)—or, in many cases, more than two voices. Searls and Weinberger (2000) suggested that the corporate voice heard in this interaction should be a “conversational human voice”, which would lead to a more engaging, natural style of corporate communication (e.g., Kelleher, 2009). The changes brought by new technology certainly deserve further serious attention—as Geisler et al. (2001) noted in their “IText manifesto” (p. 269) and several other communication scholars have emphasized (e.g., Argenti, 2006; Jackson, 2007; Reinsch & Turner, 2006; St.Amant, 2002).

Several recent scholars (e.g., Briones, Kuch, Liu, & Jin, 2011; Byrd, 2012) have suggested that maintaining a dialogue—a conversation—with stakeholders is one way for companies to promote (although not guarantee) good relations, and social media, by definition, can be useful for this purpose. But, as Grunig (2009) argued, companies do not always make use of new digital media’s dialogical, interactive, and relational properties. Particularly, companies often do not seem to see that responding to negative feedback can be an opportunity to build positive relations with customers and stakeholders (Dekay, 2012). Nevertheless, along with the rapid development of information technologies, the use of social media in corporate communication is now increasing drastically (Verhoeven, Tench, Zerfass, Moreno, & Verčič, 2012; Wright & Hinson, 2009), and companies and other organizations must learn to communicate in this new environment. Therefore, we need to explore concrete ways in which companies participate and manage their impressions in social media conversations.

In this article, we introduce an empirical study that aims to (a) identify the central IM strategies used on corporate Facebook pages, particularly in the context of responding to critical feedback and (b) gain an understanding of the specific features of IM in the IText2 environment. To achieve these aims, we use microanalytical discourse analysis to examine social media interaction. We collected discussions from the Facebook pages of two large North European companies: Foody, a food manufacturer, and Logy, a public transportation company. (Both company names are pseudonyms.)

The discursive perspective that we have adopted in this study has so far received little attention in the context of social media (see, however, Haas et al., 2011)—which is somewhat surprising because an understanding of social interaction and interpersonal communication, involving complex meaning-making processes, is clearly relevant for this type of IText (see Geisler et al., 2001; Reinsch & Turner, 2006). As Rogers (2006) has argued, certain age-old questions of communication stay relevant in spite of rapidly changing technology. Indeed, the ever-changing technology intensifies the need to study such issues as the linguistic choices of communicators in professional contexts. We believe that employing a microanalytical discursive approach toward consumer–company interaction will deepen the understanding of corporate IM strategies in social media (for discursive approaches toward other corporate communication topics, see, e.g., Livesey, 2002; Mason & Mason, 2012). This approach involves an analysis of discursive details, which enables the discovery of aspects of interaction that would otherwise pass unnoticed (e.g., Brown & Yule, 1983; Paltridge, 2006; Wood & Kroger, 2000), thus offering useful insight into IM in our particular research context, corporate Facebook pages.

In what follows, we elaborate on the notion of impression management and then briefly discuss the context for our study, corporate Facebook pages. Next, we introduce our method of data collection and discourse analysis. Finally, we present our findings and provide a discussion and conclusions about what this study has achieved.

Impression Management

IM is a fundamental interpersonal process by which individuals attempt to control the impressions others form of them (Leary & Kowalski, 1990). A classic author in the field of IM, Goffman (1959), has viewed human interaction as drama, with actors performing roles before audiences. Goffman separated scenes that happen “frontstage” where an audience is present and IM is most relevant, and “backstage” where people can relax because there is no audience (i.e., outsiders to their own close-knit group). But this difference is not clear-cut; backstage moments, in which actors step out of character, may happen in the middle of an otherwise frontstage interaction. Corporate Facebook pages can be seen as a frontstage environment because communication there is public, and participants are not close friends; however, because Facebook is an arena for interaction (unlike traditional one-way corporate communication,

such as leaflets), corporate Facebook communication could include some backstage moments as well.

Earlier studies of IM have come from the realm of social psychology (e.g., Goffman, 1959, Leary & Kowalski, 1990), but more recently this process has also been studied at work (Rosenfeld, Giacalone, & Riordan, 1995), in the case of organizations as a whole (e.g., Allen & Caillouet, 1994; Arndt & Bigelow, 2000; Elsbach & Sutton, 1992; Mohamed & Gardner, 2004; for a review, see Bolino, Kacmar, Turnley, & Gilstrap, 2008), and online (e.g., Tong, Van Der Heide, Langwell, & Walther, 2008; Walther, Van Der Heide, Hamel, & Shulman, 2009; Zhao, Grasmuck, & Martin, 2008). Although some scholars have combined these perspectives, using the IM framework to examine, for example, organizational Web sites (Boyer, Brunner, Charles, & Coleman, 2006) and e-mail signatures (Rains & Young, 2006), the impact of interactional social media IT texts on organizational IM remains unexplored.

Like individuals, companies and other organizations (or rather their representatives and spokespersons) may use IM to influence the perceptions that others have of them (Bolino et al., 2008; Elsbach & Sutton, 1992; Mohamed & Gardner, 2004). But organizational IM is complex in nature—for example, many different individuals may engage in IM on behalf of the organization (Bolino et al., 2008). In earlier studies, a wide variety of defensive (protective) and assertive (acquisitive) IM strategies have also been analyzed (e.g., Allen & Caillouet, 1994; Arndt & Bigelow, 2000; Rosenfeld et al., 1995).

Studies of online IM often refer to *social information processing theory*. This theory explains how impressions of others are developed on the Internet when few nonverbal cues for interpretation are available (Walther, 1992; Walther & Parks, 2002). Communicators adapt to whatever cues they can find in order to form an impression of others. For example, on Facebook pages, communicators might look for cues embedded in content, style, and timing (cf. Walther & Parks, 2002). Therefore, the importance of linguistic and discursive features, in addition to context-specific cues, such as emoticons, is accentuated online.

Further, according to the *warranting principle*, information about a person is more credible in online contexts when that information cannot be easily manipulated by the person in question (Walther & Parks, 2002). This principle has been shown to apply to individual Facebook users—the pictures, comments, and number of Facebook friends present in a profile influence the impressions that others form of the profile owner (Tong et al., 2008; Utz, 2010, Walther et al., 2009; Zhao et al., 2008). On corporate Facebook pages, followers' posts seem to represent a type of warranting—positive comments by consumers are likely to affect impressions positively and critical comments negatively. In fact, the use of social media has caused organizations to be concerned over explicit criticism, false information, and activist groups (DiStaso, McCorkindale, & Wright, 2011; cf. Champoux et al., 2012; Veil, Sellnow, & Petrun, 2012); these may cause them to lose control of their IM. Especially critical comments, then, seem to require companies to engage in active IM.

Corporate Facebook Pages

Social media could be defined as interactive Web platforms “via which individuals and communities share, co-create, discuss, and modify user-generated content” (Kietzmann et al., 2011, p. 241). Social networking sites, such as Facebook, are among the most popular social media today. The pages of companies on Facebook work somewhat differently from individuals’ Facebook profiles (see, e.g., boyd & Ellison, 2007). Facebook users can join companies as followers (i.e., they may like the page), but otherwise the pages more or less resemble discussion boards in that they involve public, asynchronous (cf. Geisler, 2011, p. 253, on the IText2 trend “shift towards the asynchronous”) and largely text-based interactions, although they may also include pictures, links, and videos. But these interactions, unlike those on traditional discussion boards, are not anonymous because corporate Facebook pages require that followers have a Facebook profile, which usually includes their real name.

The followers of corporate Facebook pages fall into two categories: those who actively voice their views and those who only follow the discussions as *lurkers* (i.e., “a persistent but silent audience,” resembling audiences for conventional mass media; Rafaeli, Ravid, & Soroka, 2004, p. 2). This audience is fluid in nature. Although a limited number of people participate at a given moment, any audience member, at any time, may participate (Hogan & Quan-Haase, 2010, call this a “two-way audience”) provided they are Facebook users, logged on, and like the page. They can also manifest their presence in a discussion by using the like button which acts as a form of minimal feedback.

Furthermore, because corporate Facebook pages are public, anyone (not only followers) may visit and read the discussions, and as is typical on the Internet, issues of particular interest may spread to unexpected new arenas. This kind of publicity is important, because gaining larger audiences has been shown to increase people’s motivation to engage in IM (Leary & Kowalski, 1990). In such cases, making a positive impression on the majority may then take precedence over considering the opinion of any individual participant.

In recent literature, corporate Facebook pages have received some attention. For example, Champoux, Dugree and McGlynn (2012) argued that Facebook pages permit and even create an expectation of interaction, thus allowing companies to establish rapport with existing and potential clients. As companies struggle to adapt their communication practices to the new environment (Cho & Huh, 2010; Grunig, 2009; Waters, Burnett, Lamm, & Lucas, 2009) researchers and other experts often emphasize the need for genuine two-way engagement with stakeholders (e.g. Byrd, 2012). Corporate responses even to negative feedback have been suggested as a good practice, but many corporations still have not seemed to adopt strategies that “translate negative comments into useful opportunities” (Dekay, 2012, p. 295). Furthermore, as Champoux et al. (2012) illustrated by analyzing Nestlé’s Facebook page, responding to negative feedback has not always been very successful; examples of successful outcomes also exist, of course, as shown in Byrd’s (2012) discussion of Toyota’s communication in a crisis situation on their Facebook page. Men and Tsai’s (2012) study indicates that there might be country-specific or

cultural differences in companies' practices of responding to consumers' posts and also in consumers' criticism toward companies. Nevertheless, little is known about specific communication strategies or practices that appear on corporate Facebook pages.

Method

In this section, we describe our data and the discourse analysis that we used to identify IM strategies and gain a better understanding of IM in this particular IText2 context.

Data

We examined corporate Facebook pages because they provide ample possibilities for interaction between consumers and companies—because of both the structure and the massive popularity of Facebook. The data contain discussion threads that we collected from the corporate Facebook pages of two large Finland-based companies. We chose these two after examining the Facebook pages of the 50 biggest companies in Finland (according to Talouselämä, 2010). We selected the pages according to the following criteria: the page contained (a) active discussions between consumers and company representatives, (b) more than just sporadic criticism toward the company, and (c) criticism that is addressed by the company representatives. These criteria led to our selection of the corporate Facebook pages of two well-known Finnish organizations that do business with consumers: Foody, which produces dairy products, and Logy, which operates the railway traffic in Finland. These two cases provided rich data for analyzing company Facebook pages as an arena for corporate IM. The data collection and reporting complied with the Finnish guidelines for human subject research (Finnish Advisory Board on Research Integrity, 2012).

Naturally, some noncritical discussion took place on the Facebook pages of both companies, but considering the aims of this study, we only collected discussion threads containing criticisms and responses. The data span a period of approximately 3 months for each page during late 2010 through early 2011. We made a permanent copy of the material and organized the posts chronologically in a grid to facilitate reading and analysis. The original posts were written in Finnish and we translated into English extracts that are cited here. Table 1 contains a detailed description of the data.

As Table 1 shows, in the 3-month period of study, Foody's page had nearly 18,500 and Logy's page more than 11,000 followers, which indicates that both pages were quite popular at the time. The number of consumers participating (individuals who posted at least once during the 3-month period) was 48 for Foody and 72 for Logy. Although during this period there were 130 posts by consumers on Foody's page, on average 2.7 posts per person, only 7 of these consumers were particularly active participants posting from 6 to 18 times, and as many as 30 individuals posted only once. We observed the same tendency for Logy—206 consumer posts, an average of 2.9 per person, but with

only 10 individuals posting from 6 to 21 times. Naturally, the number of lurkers on these pages remains unknown.

Table 1. Description of the Data.

Facebook Page	Foody	Logy
Period	Oct. 22, 2010– Jan. 30, 2011	Jan. 4, 2011– Mar. 23, 2011
Followers	18,407	11,295
Active consumer participants	48	72
Company participants	7	2
Words	8,902	13,813
Discussion threads	31	43
Consumer posts	130	206
Company responses	23	59
Main topics of criticism	nuclear power, product issues	delays in train traffic

Seven corporate representatives on Foody’s page and two corporate representatives on Logy’s page engaged in dialogue with the consumers. We concluded these numbers from the representatives’ practice of signing posts by using their first name. Foody’s representatives also included a reference to their departmental affiliation (e.g., marketing or communications). We use corporate representative as a general term referring to all individuals posting for their company on its Facebook page, whatever their actual job titles may be. Logy’s representatives replied to critical consumers 59 times, and Foody’s representatives replied 23 times (some of their replies were quite long). Consecutive replies by the same person to the same comment were counted as one response.

We retrieved slightly more text from Logy’s page (nearly 14,000 words divided into 43 discussion threads) than from Foody’s page (with nearly 9,000 words and 31 discussions). On Foody’s page, critical discussion mainly dealt with the company’s involvement in a nuclear power plant project, and it was initiated by Greenpeace activists. Some product-related issues were also raised by consumers. On Logy’s page, consumers criticized the company for repeated delays and other disturbances in train traffic during a harsh winter.

Discourse Analysis

To examine the interaction between critical consumers and corporate representatives, we use microanalytical discourse analysis (DA; see, e.g., Gee, 1999; Paltridge, 2006; Potter, 1996; Potter & Wetherell, 1987). The DA framework allows analysis at various levels: particularly discourse with a small d, or language in use, and Discourse with a capital D which signifies a “form of life” (Gee, 1999, p. 7) and emphasizes what is sayable or thinkable about a topic in any given political, social, historical, or cultural context (e.g., Wodak & Meyer, 2009). In this study, our focus is on language in use in a particular social media context; thus, our approach can be characterized as a small-d analysis. But the two d’s are by no means entirely separate but intertwined, as larger Dis-

courses accumulate from repetitive patterns of language in use and can be used again as communicative resources in new instances of language in use.

Our first close reading of the data enabled us to identify a set of distinct passages, which we classified under two broad categories of IM strategies: (a) upholding social acceptability and (b) promoting credibility. Because DA enables us to use and combine such discursive and rhetorical tools that are relevant for a particular study, we used three analytical concepts—footing (Goffman, 1981), category entitlement and stake (Potter, 1996)—as conceptual lenses for further analyzing the two broad categories. These three conceptual lenses relate both to argumentation and to the negotiation of social relations, which is why they seemed particularly fitting for analyzing IM in consumer–corporate IText interactions.

Footing (Goffman, 1981, p. 144) refers to the participative roles that speakers can adopt—they can act as a principal (to present their own position), an author (to use their own words), or an animator (to speak for someone else). The participative roles are, as Johansson (2009) noted, particularly relevant for the corporate communication context because they may affect whether people perceive the organization as trustworthy. In fact, different footings may function as IM tools because they allow speakers to vary their relationship to what they are saying (closer or more distant), thus varying their degree of accountability.

Further elaborating the concept of footing, Potter (1996) presented related dynamics concerning trustworthiness as a result of expertise and objectivity. Potter claimed that people are, on the one hand, treated as knowledgeable in certain contexts based on their expertise; that is, they are automatically granted the legitimate right to speak (p. 133). Potter called this expertise-based credibility *category entitlement*. On the other hand, there are also negative rhetorical consequences to being deeply involved in something: The fact that speakers have something to gain (a *stake*) may undermine their argument. In other words, if speakers are shown to have a stake, their objectivity will be questioned. As we show in the next section, both Goffman's (1981) and Potter's (1996) frameworks are indeed relevant for social media dialogue between consumers and corporate representatives.

Findings

In this section, we present the IM strategies that we found were most relevant in the context of corporate Facebook pages. Although our focus is on the corporate IM strategies, we also point out some strategies used by the critical consumers that are relevant in the interaction. First, we discuss the strategies for upholding social acceptability and then those for promoting credibility. As we discuss the strategies, we point out the IText-specific features of the data.

Upholding Social Acceptability

We identified three types of IM strategies that corporate representatives (and consumers) used to uphold social acceptability: (1) conventional politeness, (2)

moral discourses, and (3) diversion. These strategies worked to uphold and increase social acceptability by complying with the cultural system of norms and values.

Conventional politeness

Communicative acts of conventional politeness, such as greeting, thanking, apologizing, using emoticons, and signing the posts seemed to play an important role in company interactions with consumers. Corporate representatives frequently greeted the other party and signed their posts, but more rarely used emoticons. Except for thanking, all of these politeness forms are exemplified in Extract 1:

Extract 1. Corporate representative (Foody): Hello [name]! Apologies for the delay in posting prizes for our promotion campaign! I will check the situation and get back to you soon. Br. Niina from customer services :)

As Dresner and Herring (2010) argued, the standard smiley (smiling emoticon)—as used in Extract 1—often serves a mitigating function, just as a polite smile would in face-to-face interaction. Because emoticons are an obvious resource in computerized interaction, their sparing use in the data is interesting.

Direct apologies, such as in Extract 1, are quite rare in the data, but an expression such as *unfortunately* occurs from time to time and may serve an apologetic function (e.g., “Unfortunately there are problems concerning feedback and refund forms”). When speakers use *unfortunately* in this way, they present the circumstances as being beyond their control and do not take accountability. But the use of the expression adds a touch of polite sympathy to the response.

Moral discourses

The second type of strategy that corporate representatives used to uphold social acceptability involved appealing to common moral discourses—Discourses with a D (Gee, 1999)—in order to present themselves as moral or the other participant as immoral. In Extract 2, the corporate representative uses this strategy to undermine the social acceptability of a consumer who disagrees with him (or the company). The Logy representative refers to environmental considerations and presents his argument as one that is generally accepted:

Extract 2. Corporate representative (Logy): Today, choosing the train or another form of public transport should, I guess, also be partly motivated by the environmental viewpoint.

The interaction subsequent to Extract 2 reveals that the consumer did not agree with the company representative’s view that protecting the environment should be a motivation for a person’s transport choice. In this extract, then, the representative appeals to common moral discourses (or Discourses) and makes the consumer look immoral (using the word *should*) and old-fashioned

(referring to *today*) while giving the impression that he—or the company—is more moral. In many instances, it is in fact impossible to interpret whether the representatives are voicing their own view or that of the company (i.e., to detect footing), which undoubtedly gives them room to maneuver in case of differing opinions. Widespread moral discourses (Discourses) such as protecting the environment are, however, unlikely to raise opposition, and are therefore a safe choice in terms of appearing socially acceptable.

In Extract 3, a representative of Foody also seems to be appealing to moral discourse by labeling nuclear power critics as rulebreakers.

Extract 3. Corporate representative (Foody): Hello [Foody's] fans. Lately our pages have been targeted by outside campaigns. ... The site is not meant for marketing or covert marketing by third parties. ... Moderators will remove impertinent messages. If a user repeatedly breaks the rules of the site, she/he may be banned. Best regards, Outi from marketing

This post was followed by consumer replies that included references to freedom of speech and the negatively evaluated phenomenon of censorship. The critics, then, seemed to use a similar strategy of undermining the other speaker's social acceptability, implying in their critical comments that removing messages was immoral. Therefore, although moderating messages (including deleting comments that do not comply with rules) is common on discussion boards and in similar contexts, using this power on corporate Facebook pages can lead to negative impressions (cf. Champoux et al., 2012).

Diversion

The third type of strategy for upholding social acceptability, diversion, was essential in these interactions. Active critical consumers insisted on presenting their particular concerns, often using only a feeble link to the topic of conversation or without even attempting to connect their viewpoint to what was being discussed. The corporate representatives (of Foody in particular) responded to the persistent critics by using a diversion strategy, which appears to be an attempt to avoid further attention to the issues that could cause consumers to have a negative impression of the company by undermining its social acceptability. At first, Foody's representatives answered the nuclear energy critics quite thoroughly, but as the critics repeated their questions, the corporate representatives started to answer only (new) parts of the criticism or to just refer to their earlier answers. Although earlier discussions remain available on company Facebook pages, a specific post can be difficult to find, requiring scanning through considerable amounts of text because there is no page-specific search feature and linking to earlier posts, although possible, is not commonly done. Therefore, referring to earlier posts may be quite an effective way to avoid further attention to an issue. In addition, even though this strategy may be completely uninformative, the fact that the representatives give some kind of an answer may convey an impression of politeness and openness

for those members of the audience who are not particularly concerned with the issue.

In addition to their practice of referring to earlier posts, corporate representatives used another type of diversion by changing the subject of the discussion. In the case of Extract 4, that subject was the censorship issue that was sparked in Extract 3:

Extract 4. Corporate representative (Foody): A question to you Greenpeace activists: we would like to know why you don't advance the cause of GMO free food here in Finland? ...

Consumer A: ... Does [Foody] intend to start genetically manipulating its dairy products, or why did you want to bring this up?

This strategy of changing the subject seems unlikely to satisfy consumers who have a genuine interest in the subject that is being changed. In Extract 4, Consumer A's reaction to the Foody representative's question suggests that the consumer did not accept the diversion strategy and even managed to use the change of subject to the advantage of the critics. Although this diversion tactic did not seem to convince the critical consumer in Extract 4, it might have a positive impact on other readers and thus contribute to corporate IM in a wider sense.

In summary, we identified a set of IM strategies in the data that were significant for upholding and increasing social acceptability by using (a) conventional politeness (b) appeals to common moral discourses in order to undermine others' social acceptability and to increase one's own and (c) diversion tactics to avoid uncomfortable subjects. We also detected IText specific issues such as the use of emoticons, the problematic practice of moderating, and features that enable diversion. Furthermore, both the consumer critics and the company representatives made use of the medium's asynchronous nature by leaving questions or comments unanswered and by responding off-topic as best suited their IM goals in the particular context.

Promoting Credibility

Geisler et al. (2001) predicted that in the IText environment the significance of credibility in communication will increase (p. 283). Our analysis of the IText data from corporate Facebook pages supports that assumption because we found that the corporate representatives' strategies to promote their own credibility or to undermine that of others were central. These strategies involved the use of (a) category entitlement and stake, (b) varying footings, and (c) ridicule.

Category Entitlement and Stake

Potter's (1996) dynamic concepts of stake and category entitlement apply to the corporate communication context that we examined because in company-related issues, corporate representatives are, in fact, experts who have inside

knowledge, which should increase their credibility (category entitlement). For example, if company CEOs speak about the current market situation in their area, we readily assume that they know what they are talking about. Similarly, in our data, the corporate representatives were entitled to correct faulty—or seemingly faulty—claims by consumers without having to specifically justify their own credibility. Corporate representatives' interest (stake) to protect their company, however, strongly counteracts this entitlement, reducing their credibility; this is particularly essential when responding to criticism toward the company. We identified this loss of credibility, for example, when a critical consumer expressed doubts concerning a Logy representative's honesty by posting: "Thank you for your reply, which, however, does not seem to be true".

In Extract 3, the Foody representative seemed to be using a stake argument to undermine the credibility of the nuclear power critics by referring to their activities as "outside campaigns". At least, the consumer in Extract 5 seems to interpret the representative's comment in this way because he responds by using "stake inoculation" (Potter, 1996), protecting his own credibility by claiming to have no connection to Greenpeace and emphasizing his right to speak:

Extract 5. Consumer B (Foody): I am not Greenpeace, I am [name], even though I agree with Greenpeace in nuclear power issues. I buy [Foody's] products, and I don't want my opinion to be disregarded just because it is similar to that of Greenpeace.

Footing

In their responses, the corporate representatives of both companies also varied their footing (Goffman, 1981), that is, their relationship to what they were saying (close versus distant), thus assuming different degrees of accountability. In Extract 6, the representative distances himself from what he probably knows is an unsatisfying answer (to a question about why e-tickets differ from other tickets in terms of their validity period) by referring to his colleagues ("people who know more than me"). In the actual response, he acts as a mere animator (p. 144) when repeating the direct quote, qualifying the answer as "somewhat bureaucratic", and claiming to "hope" that the answer is satisfactory.

Extract 6. Corporate representative (Logy): Hello [name]. I will ask people who know more than me and get back to you. -mikko.

Corporate representative (Logy): Hi [name]. Here's a somewhat bureaucratic answer to your question: "The terms of the transaction vary according to channel. According to e-commerce terms an e-ticket cannot be exchanged and therefore it is only valid in the train which it is sold for. ..." I hope this answered your question... -mikko.

Thus in Extract 6 the Logy representative uses footing to distance himself from a response that does not actually answer the customer's question, thereby protecting his own personal credibility. In addition, by presenting the compa-

ny as consisting of a variety of actors and departments (instead of as a single, unified whole) the Facebook representative may also be trying to limit potential damage to the company's credibility; at least part of the company—the representative—still appears reasonable. Then, if the consumer does not accept that explanation, the representative can switch positions. In Extract 7 (which continues the dialogue of Extract 6), the representative does just that—he now agrees with the consumer:

Extract 7. Consumer C (Logy): The answer did not make it clear why the e-ticket is only valid in the train marked on it ...

Corporate representative (Logy): Hello [name]! I agree with you but I can assure you that there will be some kind of change to this issue within this year. ... -mikko.

Ridicule

Finally, we found that both consumers and corporate representatives used ridicule to promote their own credibility by undermining the credibility of others. For example, a consumer who was a nuclear power supporter described the nuclear power critics as irrational extremists, as “fanatics” who believe in their views “in spite of facts”. Consumers also applied the strategy of ridicule by using straightforward insults, such as when a consumer referred to Logy management as “clowns who wear a tie”. Somewhat unexpectedly, the Logy's representative's also used ridicule, for example in the following post:

Extract 8. Consumer D (Logy): The right price of a train ticket from Lahti to Helsinki would be about five euros because when you drive a car, it costs less than ten. ...

Corporate representative (Logy): Considering the costs of using a private car, it is good to remember that no car moves without, e.g., the costs of service and insurance. And buying a car also costs something, I suppose...

In Extract 8, the Logy representative makes the consumer's statement look ridiculous by presenting his own view as factual and self-evident. He emphasizes his factual claim with the verb “remember” and an extreme case expression, “no car”. In addition, the representative uses an ironic “I suppose” in conjunction with the other self-evident fact that “cars cost something”.

In summary, we found that in their IM strategies related to promoting their own credibility and undermining the credibility of others corporate representatives and consumers used category entitlement, stakes, various footings and attempts to make the other party seem ridiculous. Our findings suggest that, in participating in discussions on their corporate Facebook page, company representatives faced the dynamic tension between having increased credibility (due to category entitlement as company insiders) and yet having reduced credibility (due to having a stake in protecting the company). Consumers also accused each other of having stakes, but, unlike company representatives, they could

defend themselves by simply denying that they had any such stake. Company representatives used distant footing to avoid accountability and protect their credibility when the criticism was about company messages that came from elsewhere in the organization. They also resorted to attacking the credibility of consumers by referring to consumer stakes and by making them look ridiculous, which were perhaps attempts to ward off any negative warranting effects—that is, to prevent consumers' negative comments from having a pronounced impact on other consumers' impressions of the company. Such attempts may work on two levels: by making the critic seem less credible and by making others hesitant to voice similar criticisms. But such strategies could also make the company representatives seem contemptuous or otherwise unlikable, thus working against their strategies for upholding social acceptability.

Discussion and Conclusions

This study had two aims: to identify the central IM strategies on the Facebook pages of two Finnish companies and to gain an understanding of how this social media context might affect corporate IM. We used discourse analysis to gain a detailed understanding of the interaction on these pages. Overall, we met these aims; the data revealed salient IM strategies and text features that were specific to social media. Thus our microanalytical approach proved fruitful in revealing these strategies and providing us with a better understanding of the nature of corporate Facebook pages.

We identified two significant categories of IM strategies: social acceptability and credibility. Table 2 provides an overview of the types of strategies that we found in each category including their percentage of occurrence in the total number of responses for each company. Because this is a qualitative study based on a detailed analysis of a small data set, however, the percentages should be interpreted with caution.

The types of strategies for upholding social acceptability that we found included the use of conventional politeness, moral discourses, and diversion from topics that might reflect negatively on the company. Conventional politeness was the type of strategy that was used by far the most, which perhaps indicates that unlike the other types of strategies, politeness needs to be used consistently rather than occasionally. Perhaps politeness is also used more consciously than are other types of strategies. For instance, company representatives might have used politeness to appear professional (role constraints as a determinant of impression content; see Leary & Kowalski, 1990), thereby contributing to their own IM which in turn contributes also to the IM of their company.

A look at the percentages for the occurrences of the other strategy types reveals that the approaches of the two companies vary significantly and that the individual representatives' writing style of seems to have a major influence on their choice of strategies. For example, in the category of promoting credibility, we found that ridicule was a strategy preferred by one Logy representative, who used it to undermine the critics' credibility and thereby increase his own.

Table 2. An Overview of the Strategies for Organizational Impression Management on Facebook Pages.

Strategy Category	Type	Description	Example	% of Total Responses	
				Logy	Foody
Upholding social acceptability	Conventional politeness	Greeting, thanking, apologizing, using emoticons, signing posts	"Hello [name]! Apologies for the delay in posting prizes for our promotion campaign! I will check the situation and get back to you soon. Br. Niina from customer services :)"	97 %	70 %
	Moral discourse	Presenting oneself as moral or the other as immoral in some way	"Today, choosing the train or another form of public transport should, I guess, also be partly motivated by the environmental viewpoint."	2 %	26 %
	Diversion	Leaving comments unanswered (not included in the percentage), answering only some part of the feedback, referring to earlier answers, changing the topic	"A question to you Greenpeace activists: we would like to know why you don't advance the cause of GMO free food here in Finland?"	7 %	39 %
Promoting credibility	Category entitlement and stake	People's connection to their organization increases their credibility (category entitlement) or puts their credibility in doubt (stake)	a) Consumer: "Because of lactose problems, Foody should start processing milk in the same way as is done in other countries." Representative: "Milk is processed in Finland in the same way as in other European countries." (category entitlement) b) Representative: "The site is not meant for marketing or covert marketing by third parties." Consumer: "... I don't want my opinion to be disregarded just because it is similar to that of Greenpeace." (stake)	10 %	17 %
	Footing	Distancing oneself from an answer or the lack of an answer	"I will ask people who know more than me and get back to you. - mikko. ... Here's a somewhat bureaucratic answer to your question ..."	25 %	26 %
	Ridicule	Making the other's view look ridiculous (e.g., by presenting an opposing view as factual and self-evident)	"Considering the costs of using a private car, it is good to remember that no car moves without, e.g., the costs of service and insurance. And buying a car also costs something. I suppose.."	22 %	0 %

We were surprised that a company representative would use this IM strategy because it seems to conflict with upholding social acceptability. Overall, the struggle over credibility was indeed a crucial factor in this IText interaction (cf. Geisler et al., 2001, p. 283), and as Geisler et al. have suggested, affiliation and autonomy (cf. category entitlement and stake) emerged as interesting components of credibility in our data (p. 284).

As for the effect of this social media context on corporate IM, we detected certain text-specific issues, as well as more general ones. On the text level, we found that emoticons were quite rarely used in the data even though they could have provided a useful resource for building social acceptability. A possible explanation may be that a considerable proportion of the participants are from a generation older than that of the digital natives (e.g., in Finland 26% of 50-year-olds had Facebook profiles in 2011; Pönkä, 2011), which may explain a more traditional style of writing. This phenomenon might also be connected to the communication context. For example, Derks, Bos, and von Grumbkow (2007) found that fewer emoticons to be used in task-oriented contexts, especially in negative ones, than in socioemotional contexts—the context of our data could be regarded as more task-oriented than socioemotional. Whether the infrequent use of emoticons is a general tendency in professional social media communication and what the reasons might be for such a tendency, should be examined in future research.

Further, we argue that the computer-mediated and asynchronous context of Facebook plays a part in making diversion-type IM strategies possible: In face-to-face interaction, it is more difficult to avoid answering a direct question or to bring up issues that are unrelated to the current topic whereas in asynchronous computer-mediated communication, the time delays between messages and perhaps also the reduced normative social pressure (Bordia, 1997) that participants experience make such strategies easier to implement and more acceptable. Facebook's lack of such features that allow searches within one page and linking to earlier posts also facilitate diversion strategies. Furthermore, the consumer comments revealed that moderating, or "censorship," which seems to be quite a common practice (Dekay, 2012), is potentially a sensitive issue in corporate social media contexts. Indeed, as Champoux et al. (2012) argued, even though companies have the right to delete posts and comments, they may be better served by using these comments to start an interaction. Yet, we do not categorically recommend or discourage the use of any strategy. Instead, IM on corporate Facebook pages seems to require sensitive, case-by-case consideration.

On a more general level, our study shows that the IText environment of Facebook enables interactive corporate communication, which leads to a more personalized communication style than that found in traditional corporate communication. This shift toward a more conversational communication style moves corporate communication closer to interpersonal communication and makes way for warranting effects. Warranting effects in turn mean that companies lose some of the control they had in earlier unidirectional communication practices (c.f. Argenti, 2006). This is, in fact, an important difference be-

tween individual and corporate IM in IText contexts because individuals may, in fact, gain more control over their impressions due to the asynchronous and text-based nature of online communication (Walther, 1996).

The shift toward a more personalized style in corporate communication, then, complicates companies' IM. Thus, the most striking conclusion that we draw from this study relates to the paradoxical situation that social media can cause for corporate representatives. Because the context allows communication to become interactional and fastpaced, resembling the day-to-day communication between individuals, the representatives are on the one hand communicating on Facebook as individuals and this makes their own persona and their individual IM highly relevant. On the other hand, their organizational role is to communicate on behalf of the company, requiring them to align their own individual IM with that of the organization. (For an interesting pre-social-media discussion on how "literacy as a human skill is recruited as an instrument of production in the knowledge economy," see Brandt, 2005, p. 179.) Furthermore, corporate Facebook pages are public, and a wider audience is ever present. This characteristic causes another paradoxical situation: although Facebook provides an informal textual space where addressing individuals is natural, in doing so, corporate representatives must always be mindful of the impressions they are giving their wider audience.

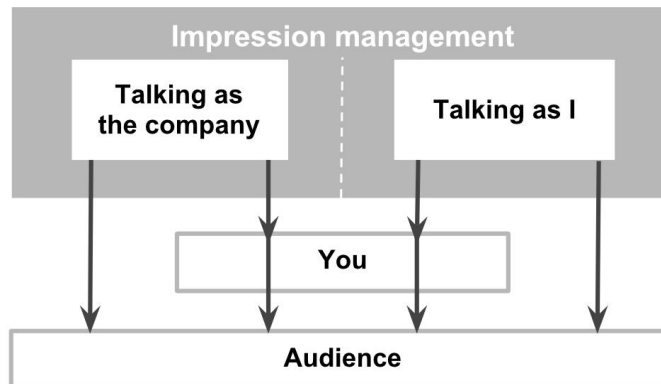


Figure 1. The complexity of corporate IM in social media.

To illustrate the complexity of corporate IM in social media, Figure 1 depicts the dynamics involved in the (at times) contradictory role of a corporate representative on Facebook. In Figure 1, "Talking as the company" represents the traditional standpoint of external corporate communication, nonpersonalized corporate communication (used e.g. in static Web sites, press releases, and leaflets). We could see some examples of this approach also in our Facebook data—in companies' general status updates that were unsigned and devoid of personalized features. In contrast, "Talking as I" embodies the personalized corporate communication that has been noted and even encouraged in previous literature (e.g., the "conversational human voice," Kelleher, 2009, Kelleher

& Miller, 2006, Searls & Weinberger, 2000) and exemplified in this study. “Talking as I” appears particularly in the conversation sequences that have been the focus of this study.

In the corporate Facebook interactions that we analyzed, on the one hand, a main recipient (“You” in Figure 1) was often distinctly present (see also Goffman, 1981, p. 131), usually addressed by first name in the beginning of the reply. On the other hand, public social media environments such as corporate Facebook pages also have an audience made up of nonaddressed recipients and bystanders (i.e., lurkers) (cf. primary and secondary recipients, Skovholt & Svennevig, 2006). We argue that talking to this potentially wide audience is crucial for the company. Corporate representatives seemed to be focusing on a wide audience, for example, when they used diversion strategies (i.e., when they referred to earlier answers or brought up a competing topic). Although this diversion strategy probably did not satisfy the critics, it may have managed to persuade a wider audience—the representatives may have appeared forthcoming and polite even though their answers were uninformative. Therefore, their use of diversion may contribute to upholding their company’s social acceptability. Furthermore, representatives use of a more personal style also contributes to boosting their company’s social acceptability; a personal style of communication is expected due to the nature (or the genre-specific features) of Facebook as a space for communicating and having relationships—that is, as a space “specifically dedicated to forming and managing impressions, relational maintenance, and relationship-seeking” (Tong et al., 2008, p. 532).

The main limitation of the study is that it is rather specific: We analyzed only two corporate Facebook sites for a period of 3 months. Also, some features noted in this study, such as the use of first names, may well be culture-specific, so further work should be carried out in other cultural contexts—and also multicultural ones. Particularly, the complex role (see Figure 1) of corporate representatives in social media interaction with consumers merits further attention from several perspectives (e.g., genre, cultural, technological, competence). These are central concerns in the corporate communication field, because along with the continuous development of the Internet corporate communication continues to globalize and this requires a variety of new competencies of companies and company representatives (see, e.g., Louhiala-Salminen & Kankaanranta, 2011).

In conclusion, this study provides a close-up perspective on social media interactions between consumers and companies, and the findings reveal salient IM strategies. The study contributes to three areas. First, it builds on the body of IText research, particularly in the IText2 environment (Geisler, 2011). Second, it further develops IM theory by combining corporate and social media perspectives. Third, it adds to the work in corporate communication by revealing the complexity involved in corporate representatives’ the day-to-day IM efforts in social media.

Acknowledgments

We would like to thank David R. Russell, Lori Peterson and the two anonymous reviewers for their valuable suggestions. We are also grateful to Geert Jacobs (Ghent University), Sylvain Deltjens (Katholieke Universiteit Leuven) and Johanna Moisander (Aalto University School of Business) for their helpful comments on earlier versions of this article.

References

- Allen, M. W., & Caillouet, R. H. (1994). Legitimation endeavors: Impression management strategies used by an organization in crises. *Communication Monographs*, 61, 44–62.
- Argenti, P. A. (2006). How technology has influenced the field of corporate communication. *Journal of Business and Technical Communication*, 20, 357–370.
- Arndt, M., & Bigelow, B. (2000). Presenting structural innovation in an institutional environment: Hospitals' use of impression management. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 45, 494–522.
- Bolino, M. C., Kacmar, K. M., Turnley, W. H., & Gilstrap, J. B. (2008). A multi-level review of impression management motives and behaviors. *Journal of Management*, 34, 1080–1109.
- Bordia, P. (1997). Face-to-face versus computer-mediated communication: A synthesis of the experimental literature. *Journal of Business Communication*, 34, 99–118.
- boyd, d. m., & Ellison, N.B. (2007). Social network sites: Definition, history, and scholarship. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 13, 210–230.
- Boyer, L., Brunner, B. R., Charles, T., & Coleman, P. (2006). Managing impressions in a virtual environment: Is ethnic diversity a self-presentation strategy for colleges and universities? *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 12, 136–154.
- Brandt, D. (2005). Writing for a living: Literacy and the knowledge economy. *Written Communication*, 22, 166–197.
- Briones, R. L., Kuch, B., Liu, B. F., & Jin, Y. (2011). Keeping up with the digital age: How the American Red Cross uses social media to build relationships. *Public Relations Review*, 37, 37–43.
- Brown, G., & Yule, G. (1983). *Discourse analysis*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Byrd, S. (2012). Hi fans! Tell us your story! Incorporating a stewardship-based social media strategy to maintain brand reputation during a crisis. *Corporate Communications: An International Journal*, 17, 241–254.
- Champoux, V., Dugree, J., & McGlynn, L. (2012). Corporate Facebook pages: When “fans” attack. *Journal of Business Strategy*, 33(2), 22–30.
- Cho, S., & Huh, J. (2010). Content analysis of corporate blogs as a relationship management tool. *Corporate Communications: An International Journal*, 15, 30–48.
- Dekay, S. H. (2012). How large companies react to negative Facebook comments. *Corporate Communications: An International Journal*, 17, 3, 289–299.
- Derks, D., Bos, A. E. R., & von Grumbkow, J. (2007). Emoticons and social interaction on the Internet: The importance of social context. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 23, 842–849.
- DiStaso, M. W., McCorkindale, T., & Wright, D. K. (2011). How public relations executives perceive and measure the impact of social media in their organizations. *Public Relations Review*, 37, 325–328.
- Dresner, E., & Herring, S. C. (2010). Functions of the non-verbal in CMC: Emoticons and illocutionary force. *Communication Theory*, 20, 249–268.
- Elsbach, K. D., & Sutton, R. I. (1992). Acquiring organizational legitimacy through illegitimate actions: A marriage of institutional and impression management theories. *The Academy of Management Journal*, 35, 699–738.
- Fernheimer, J. W., Litterio, L., & Hendler, J. (2011). Transdisciplinary IT texts and the future of Web-scale collaboration. *Journal of Business and Technical Communication*, 25, 322–337.
- Finnish Advisory Board on Research Integrity (2012). Ethical review in human sciences. Retrieved from <http://www.tenk.fi/en/ethical-review-human-sciences>
- Gee, J. P. (1999). *An introduction to discourse analysis: Theory and method*. London, UK: Routledge.
- Geisler, C. (2011). IText revisited: The continuing interaction of information technology and text. *Journal of Business and Technical Communication*, 25, 251–255.
- Geisler, C., Bazerman, C., Doheny-Farina, S., Gurak, L., Hass, C., Johnson-Eilola, J., ...Yates, J. (2001). IText: Future directions for research on the relationship be-

- tween information technology and writing. *Journal of Business and Technical Communication*, 15, 269–308.
- Goffman, E. (1959). *The presentation of self in everyday life*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday.
- Goffman, E. (1981). *Forms of talk*. Oxford, UK: Basil Blackwell.
- Grunig, J. E. (2009). Paradigms of global public relations in an age of digitalisation. *PRism* 6(2), 1–19.
- Haas, C., Carr, B. J., & Takayoshi, P. (2011). Building and maintaining contexts in interactive networked writing: An examination of deixis and intertextuality in instant messaging. *Journal of Business and Technical Communication*, 25, 276–298.
- Hogan, B., & Quan-Haase, A. (2010). Persistence and change in social media. *Bulletin of Science Technology & Society*, 30, 309–315.
- Jackson, M. H. (2007). Should emerging technologies change business communication scholarship? *Journal of Business Communication*, 44, 3–12.
- Johansson, C. (2009). On Goffman: Researching relations with Erving Goffman as pathfinder. In Ø. Ihlen, B. Van Ruler, & M. Fredriksson (Eds.), *Public relations and social theory: Key figures and concepts*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Kelleher, T. (2009). Conversational voice, communicated commitment, and public relations outcomes in interactive online communication. *Journal of Communication*, 59, 172–188.
- Kelleher, T., & Miller, B. M. (2006). Organizational blogs and the human voice: Relational strategies and relational outcomes. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 11, 395–414.
- Kietzmann, J. H., Hermkens, K., McCarthy, I. P., & Silvestre, B. S. (2011). Social media? Get serious! Understanding the functional building blocks of social media. *Business Horizons*, 54, 241–251.
- Leary, M. R., & Kowalski, R. M. (1990). Impression management: A literature review and two-component model. *Psychological Bulletin*, 107, 34–47.
- Livesey, S. M. (2002). Global warming wars: Rhetorical and discourse analytic approaches to ExxonMobil's corporate public discourse. *Journal of Business Communication*, 39, 117–148.
- Louhiala-Salminen, L., & Kankaanranta, A. (2011). Professional communication in a global business context: The notion of global communicative competence. *IEEE Transactions on Professional Communication*, 54, 244–262.
- Mason, M., & Mason, R. D. (2012). Communicating a green corporate perspective: Ideological persuasion in the corporate environmental report. *Journal of Business and Technical Communication*, 26, 479–506.
- Men, L. R., & Tsai, W. S. (2012). How companies cultivate relationships with publics on social network sites: Evidence from China and the United States. *Public Relations Review*, 38, 723–730.
- Mohamed, A. A., & Gardner, W. L. (2004). An exploratory study of interorganizational defamation: An organizational impression management perspective. *Organizational Analysis*, 12, 129–145.
- Paltridge, B. (2006). *Discourse analysis: An introduction*. London and New York: Continuum.
- Pönkä, H. (2011, July 22). Re: Facebookissa ei ole 2 miljoonaa suomalaista. Paljonko sitten? [Web log message]. Retrieved from <http://harto.wordpress.com/2011/07/22/facebookissa-ei-ole-2-miljoonaa-suomalaista-paljonko-sitten/>
- Potter, J. (1996). *Representing reality: Discourse, rhetoric and social construction*. London: Sage.
- Potter, J., & Wetherell, M. (1987). *Discourse and social psychology: Beyond attitudes and behaviour*. London: Sage.
- Rafaëli, S., Ravid, G., & Soroka, V. (2004, January). De-lurking in virtual communities: A social communication network approach to measuring the effects of social and cultural capital. In *Proceedings of the 37th Annual Hawaii International Conference on System Sciences, 2004* (pp. 1–10). IEEE.
- Rains, S. A., & Young, A. M. (2006). A sign of the times: An analysis of organizational members' email signatures. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 11, 1046–1061.

- Reinsch, N. L., Jr., & Turner, J. W. (2006). Ari, R U there? Reorienting business communication for a technological era. *Journal of Business and Technical Communication*, 20, 339–356.
- Rogers, P. S. (2006). Introduction to the special issue: Communication challenges from new technology. *Journal of Business and Technical Communication*, 20, 246–251.
- Rosenfeld, P., Giacalone, R. A., & Riordan, C. A. (1995). *Impression management in organizations: Theory, measurement, practice*. London: Routledge.
- Searls, D., & Weinberger, D. (2000). Markets are conversations. In R. Levine, C. Locke, D. Searls, & D. Weinberger (Eds.), *The cluetrain manifesto: The end of business as usual* (pp. 75–114). New York, NY: Perseus.
- Skovholt, K., & Svennevig, J. (2006). Email copies in workplace interaction. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 12, 42–65.
- Spinuzzi, C. (2009). Starter ecologies: Introduction to the special issue on social software. *Journal of Business and Technical Communication*, 23, 251–262.
- St.Amant, K. (2002). When cultures and computers collide: Rethinking computer-mediated communication according to international and intercultural communication expectations. *Journal of Business and Technical Communication*, 16, 196–214.
- Talouselämä (2010). Talouselämä 500. Retrieved from <http://www.talouselama.fi/te500/>
- Tong, S. T., Van Der Heide, B., Langwell, L., & Walther, J. B. (2008). Too much of a good thing? The relationship between number of friends and interpersonal impressions on Facebook. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 13, 531–549.
- Tulley, C. (2011). IText reconfigured: The rise of the podcast. *Journal of Business and Technical Communication*, 25, 256–275.
- Utz, S. (2010). Show me your friends and I will tell you what type of person you are: How one's profile, number of friends, and type of friends influence impression formation on social network sites. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 15, 314–335.
- 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, 322–345.
- Verhoeven, P., Tench, R., Zerfass, A., Moreno, A., & Verčič, D. (2012). How European PR practitioners handle digital and social media. *Public Relations Review*, 38, 162–164.
- Walther, J. B. (1992). Interpersonal effects in computer-mediated interaction: A relational perspective. *Communication Research*, 19, 52–90.
- Walther, J. B. (1996). Computer-mediated communication: Impersonal, interpersonal, and hyperpersonal interaction. *Communication Research*, 23, 3–43.
- Walther, J. B., & Parks, M. R. (2002). Cues filtered out, cues filtered in: Computer-mediated communication and relationships. In M. L. Knapp & J. A. Daly (Eds.), *Handbook of interpersonal communication* (pp. 529–563). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Walther, J. B., Van Der Heide, B., Hamel, L. M., & Shulman, H. C. (2009). Self-generated versus other-generated statements and impressions in computer-mediated communication: A test of warranting theory using Facebook. *Communication Research*, 36, 229–253.
- Waters, R. D., Burnett, E., Lamm, A., & Lucas, J. (2009). Engaging stakeholders through social networking: How nonprofit organizations are using Facebook. *Public Relations Review*, 35, 102–106.
- Wodak, R., & Meyer, M. (2009). *Methods of critical discourse analysis*. London: Sage.
- Wood, L. A., & Kroger, R. O. (2000). *Doing discourse analysis: Methods for studying action in talk and text*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Wright, D. K., & Hinson, M. D. (2009). An updated look at the impact of social media on public relations practice. *Public Relations Journal*, 3(2), 1–27.
- Zhao, S., Grasmuck, S., & Martin, J. (2008). Identity construction on Facebook: Digital empowerment in anchored relationships. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 24, 1816–1836.

Essay 2

Lillqvist, Ella; Louhiala-Salminen, Leena & Kankaanranta, Anne (2015, online). Power relations in social media discourse: Dialogization and monologization on corporate Facebook pages. *Discourse, Context & Media*. DOI: [10.1016/j.dcm.2015.11.001](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.dcm.2015.11.001)

© 2015 Elsevier
Reprinted with permission



Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

Discourse, Context and Media

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/dcm

Power relations in social media discourse: Dialogization and monologization on corporate Facebook pages

Ella Lillqvist*, Leena Louhiala-Salminen, Anne Kankaanranta

Aalto University School of Business, Unit of Organizational Communication, PO box 21210, 00076 Aalto, Helsinki, Finland

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 15 May 2015

Received in revised form

30 October 2015

Accepted 6 November 2015

Keywords:

Critical discourse studies

Power

Dialogue

Corporate communication

Online media

Facebook

ABSTRACT

Social media have inspired optimistic claims of empowerment of consumers vis-à-vis corporations; however, an ongoing commercialization of online contexts may compromise such equalization. This study takes a critical discourse studies perspective and contributes to a nuanced understanding of discursive power relations between companies and consumers on social media by analyzing the possibilities that corporate Facebook pages provide for consumer participation and criticism and for corporate manipulation of discourse. To do this, the study draws from Bakhtin's view of dialogue to shed light on contextual and discursive features which operate to either promote or silence voices. We show how the features of Facebook provide methods for "monologization" making the discourse appear participative while still controlling which voices are heard.

© 2015 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

The current popularity of social media, such as Facebook and Twitter, has resulted in the widespread use of these online media by companies for their public relations and marketing activities (Barnes et al., 2015; Barnes and Mattson, 2008; Verhoeven et al., 2012). As social media enable and emphasize interaction, corporate use of these media has often been discussed from the point of view of "dialogue" with consumers—the claim often put forward is that "[d]ialogue and participation is what social media is all about" (Baird and Parasnis, 2011). This typical feature of social media also means that an increasing number of people are able to publicly voice their opinions to and about companies and their activities. It has been argued that, in this way, interactive online media can empower consumers who have traditionally had little clout when dealing with large companies (Cova and Pace, 2006; Fuller et al., 2009; Shankar et al., 2006). Such public discourse is potentially significant if it draws attention to or influences corporate activities that impact for example the environment, health or culture.

While consumers may be empowered in some ways, companies are still powerful players on the increasingly commercialized internet. New online communication technologies have a central

role in contemporary capitalism (e.g. Fairclough, 2002; Thurlow, 2013), and indeed, as Fairclough (2002) argues, commercial interest has turned online media into a key context for "processes of economic calculation, manipulation and design" of semiosis. Arguably, then, there is an ongoing power struggle taking place between corporations and consumers in online contexts.

Such power struggles have been investigated through critical discourse studies (CDS), which is fundamentally interested in the analysis of "structural relationships of dominance, discrimination, power and control as manifested in language" (Wodak and Meyer, 2009). CDS also provides a useful perspective for examining power in online discourse (Kelsey and Bennett, 2014). A common view of power within CDS is that social power, increasingly manifested in and through language (e.g. Fairclough, 1989), is based on "preferential access to public discourse and communication", for example through mass media (van Dijk, 1996). This access to participation is a highly relevant perspective in online contexts, as the interactivity of current online media can widen access to public discourse (e.g. Gee, 2015). In contrast, some studies point to corporate manipulation (i.e., illegitimate control by means of discourse; van Dijk, 2006a) in online contexts. Thurlow (2013), for example, argues that corporate social media, rooted in neoliberal ideologies of commerce, can be more aptly described as "synthetic media" as these types of media are based on highly stylized, commoditized notions of language and communication and, instead of generating real interaction or dialogue, foster a kind of "pseudo-sociality". Some researchers also criticize social media for

* Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: ella.lillqvist@aalto.fi (E. Lillqvist), leena.louhiala-salminen@aalto.fi (L. Louhiala-Salminen), anne.kankaanranta@aalto.fi (A. Kankaanranta).

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.dcm.2015.11.001>

2211-6958/© 2015 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

their potential to exploit consumers as a type of free labor (Comor, 2011; Fuchs, 2014; Kozinets et al., 2008).

In the present article, we contribute to a critical line of discourse research in online contexts by examining power relations between companies and consumers on corporate Facebook pages. In particular, we focus on consumer access to the production of public discourse and resources for corporate manipulation in online contexts. To do this, we draw from Bakhtin's view of dialogue to examine the rather vague notion of "access" (van Dijk, 1996) as the presence of multiple independent voices in a text (polyphony) (Bakhtin, 1981, 1984a, 1984b, 1986). This approach asserts that polyphonic dialogue involves, firstly, basic interactive or responsive properties of language and, secondly, a less common process, carnivalization, which is the discursive equivalent of the medieval carnival; it overturns the rules and power relations of ordinary life (Bakhtin, 1981, 1984a, 1984b, 1986). Through this framework, we focus on the struggle between two contradicting tendencies: how these "dialogizing" discursive tendencies—together with the opposite, "monologizing" tendencies—operate to either encourage or silence voices in this online context. Our study aims to show how, through what discursive features, divergent voices are promoted and silenced on corporate Facebook pages. The data consist of two sets: (a) textual material collected from four corporate Facebook pages and (b) semi-structured interviews with six professionals who work on those specific pages. The interviews were conducted to increase our understanding of the context of the discourse. We adopt the discourse analytical framework presented by van Dijk (2009, 2014) which covers context as well as semantic and formal discourse structures. Throughout, we locate and zoom in particularly on the Bakhtinian aspects mentioned above.

Applying this theoretical framework, we are able to show how the features of a social media platform, Facebook, can influence access to discourse production and provide methods for manipulating it, making the discourse appear participative while still controlling which voices are heard. This demonstrates that social media platforms do not necessarily provide a level playing field for discourse participants, but instead help to skew power relations in favor of one side.

2. CDS and power

Power relations are a central concern in the field of CDS. In this field, a primary aim is to describe and explain how social power abuse, dominance and inequality are enacted, reproduced and resisted in text and talk (e.g. Fairclough, 1989; van Dijk, 2001; Wodak and Meyer, 2009). The interest is not in the power of individuals, but in social power which may be defined as control by members of one group on the actions or minds of another (van Dijk, 1996). Through discourse, powerful participants may control the contributions of non-powerful participants, constraining their freedom of action or influencing, for example, their attitudes or ideologies (Fairclough, 1989; van Dijk, 1996). Power relations are not immutable or merely one-sided, however, as there is always a possibility to resist (Foucault, 1976)—power and resistance appear as a complex mixture, as struggle (e.g. Fleming, 2007). This is why we choose to look at both the features that enable and those that hamper the discursive power of consumers.

Underlying CDS views on power are such theoretical underpinnings as Lukes's (1974) view of power as the discrete shaping of agendas and people's wants and preferences, not only as observable conflicts. In fact, in democratic societies power is often persuasive and manipulative instead of coercive (using force) or incentive (using commands, sanctions) (van Dijk, 1996). Manipulation is a form of illegitimate mind control by means of

discourse, which serves the interests of the manipulator while usually acting against the best interests of the recipients (van Dijk, 2006a).

Power is based on a privileged access to valued social resources such as wealth or public discourse, which means that dominant groups may influence others for example through their access to media (van Dijk, 1996, 2006a). The producers of media discourse exercise power over its consumers as "they have sole producing rights and can therefore determine what is included and excluded, how events are represented, and [...] even the subject positions of their audiences" (Fairclough, 1989). Mass media and their role in "manufacturing consent" (Herman and Chomsky, 1988) has indeed long been a key concern of CDS. With the advent of interactive online media, however, a clear division between producers and consumers of media discourse is blurring (e.g. Comor, 2011; Deuze, 2007; Kozinets et al., 2008). Kelsey and Bennett (2014), for example, argue that the internet has a potentially liberating power in certain cases; even though institutions exert power in social media, the interactive environment may cause that power to be less monolithic and produce oppositions, resistance and negotiated power.

In research on online media, it is important to avoid deterministic and simplistic representations of discourse (Thurlow, 2013; Thurlow and Mroczek, 2011) and a single-minded focus on medium specificities. Instead, it has been argued that it is important to conduct more contextualized studies, with the aim of making connections between communicative events on these media and larger economic, political and historical processes (Georgakopoulou, 2006; Kelsey and Bennett, 2014). A CDS and power perspective is appropriate for bringing these kinds of macro-level contextual processes into light; at the same time, attention to micro-level contextual features is needed, because dimensions of power "shift according to the contextual environments in which they are produced and consumed" (Kelsey and Bennett, 2014).

3. Bakhtinian dialogue as an approach to power in online discourse

In building a theoretical framework that allows us to shed light on discursive power relations in the interactive social media environment, we draw from Bakhtin's ideas on dialogue. Although originally developed for literary studies, this theoretical approach has been usefully applied to various contexts such as studying organizations (Belova et al., 2008) or second language learning (Hall et al., 2004).

From this perspective, one way to conceptualize dialogue is to see it as polyphony, where differing voices are particularly apparent and show the diversity and complexity of human experience (Bakhtin, 1984a). Bakhtin considered polyphony desirable, as opposed to monologue or monologization, which fixes meanings and accepts only one perspective: "Monologue is finalized and deaf to other's response, does not expect it and does not acknowledge in it any force" (Bakhtin, 1984a). Monologue objectifies others instead of accepting them as another consciousness with equal rights and equal responsibilities (Bakhtin, 1984a). Dialogue, in contrast, leads to discourse that is relativized, de-privileged, and aware of competing definitions [Holquist, in Bakhtin (1981)]. Therefore both acceptance of the presence of other voices and openness to the possibility of being influenced by them are central characteristics of Bakhtinian dialogue.

Dialogization is supported by carnivalization, which refers to adopting, in a text, the central features of the carnivalesque world view of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance (Bakhtin, 1981, 1984a). The carnival, a play without a separation between performers and audience, turned ordinary life with its rules and hierarchies upside down: it was characterized by alternation,

change and contrasting paired images, such as the simultaneous presence of birth and death, praise and abuse, crownings and discrownings (Bakhtin, 1984a). Carnivalizing features include eccentricity (unusual, non-normative behavior), profanity (lowering of a normally high status), familiar contacts between people (as hierarchies are suspended), and familiarity between opposite or distant things and ideas, such as high and low, sacred and profane, wise and stupid (Bakhtin, 1984a).

More generally, dialogue is embedded in all human communication as the responsive nature of communication; “all real and integral understanding is actively responsive” and “the speaker himself [sic] is oriented precisely toward such an actively responsive understanding” (Bakhtin, 1986). However, although omnipresent, the general responsive nature of communication can still be more or less strongly present in a specific situation, and we consider a certain level of turn-taking, listening and responding to be another dialogizing feature, a prerequisite for polyphony. Interestingly, previous research has shown that “normal” responsiveness has often been missing in various organizations’ social media communication (e.g. McAllister-Spooner, 2009), and Facebook communication in particular (Bortree and Seltzer, 2009; McAllister, 2012; Waters et al., 2009). In other words, social media have been used as unidirectional mass media.

If, however, dialogue is understood as the simultaneous presence of different and more or less equal voices, it may be argued that engaging in dialogue is perhaps an ideal that is not realistically achievable for companies: public relations practice deliberately aims to persuade, and applies a systematic planning process that objectifies the stakeholder, which is not in line with a dialogic process (Theunissen and Wan Noordin, 2012). Dialogue is not about achieving consensus, but about giving up some control—in Bakhtin’s (1984a) terms, it should be unfinalized, open to any outcome. This seems to be difficult for companies as the professional communication practice is about “controlling messages, information and the process of communication” (Theunissen and Wan Noordin, 2012). As Motion and Weaver (2005) argue, public relations aims to provide and shape the meanings for experiences in order to benefit the organization. It can be argued, then, that corporate communication has a tendency to be manipulative (see van Dijk, 2006a).

4. Method

Methodologically, we draw from the socio-cognitive approach to CDS. According to this view, subjective semantic situation models (representations of the situation that the discourse is

about), pragmatic context models (representations of the ongoing communicative experience) and underlying shared knowledge, attitudes and ideologies act as a cognitive interface between discourse and the social environment (van Dijk, 2014). Power may be exercised by controlling these structures of context and the structures of text and talk (van Dijk, 2014).

We adopt an approach to CDS that places the analysis of dialogizing and monologizing discourse features within the general areas of discourse as suggested by van Dijk (2009, 2014). These areas—(1) context, (2) semantic structures, and (3) formal structures—each include global (general) and local (specific) aspects (van Dijk, 2009) (see Fig. 1 for an overview of the framework).

The importance of including the context in discourse analysis is widely accepted, although sometimes a far too straightforward relationship between discourse and context is assumed; van Dijk (2006b) argues that contexts should not be seen as deterministic constraints but as subjective participant interpretations. Global aspects of context involve social, political, cultural and historical surroundings as they appear in the participants’ context models, whereas local context relates to the interactional situation, i.e. the overall domain (e.g. business), the ongoing social action, the setting (e.g. the internet) and the participants (their identities, roles, relationships, goals, knowledge and ideologies) (van Dijk, 2006b, 2009, 2014). In the case of computer-mediated discourse, it has been argued that it is important to analyze the context particularly in terms of the medium (technological setting) and the social situation (Herring, 2007). For the purposes of understanding the context of corporate Facebook pages, we conducted interviews as well as observation of the Facebook pages regarding, for example, layout and functioning.

Semantic structures include global topic choices and local meanings such as word choices and implicit meanings. Topics, in particular, are important as they are usually controlled by powerful speakers, they influence other discourse structures, and they have clear effects on the recipients (van Dijk, 2009, 2014). Formal structures are less consciously controlled and include global formal features such as genre categories (marked e.g. by style), and local features, such as syntactic structures, propositional structures and rhetorical figures (van Dijk, 2009, 2014). We decided, after initial analysis, to zoom in particularly on generic structures and rhetorical moves.

In analyzing the contextual and discursive structures, we directed particular attention to any features that dialogize or monologize the discourse through increased or reduced responsiveness, polyphony or carnivalization. Rather than provide a very detailed analysis of one or two discourse features, our aim is to

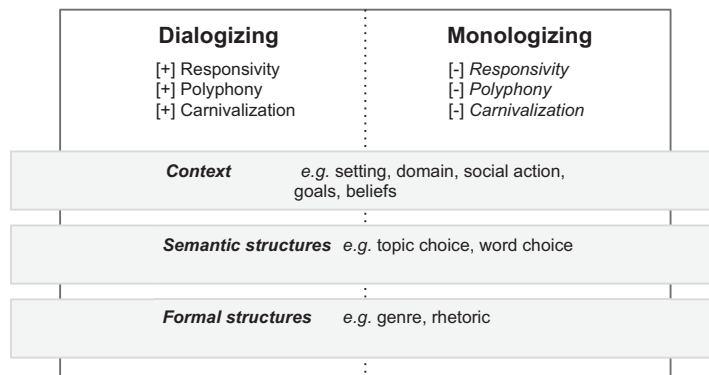


Fig. 1. Analytical framework.

offer a broad overview of various key issues in the discourse taking place on corporate Facebook pages.

5. Data

The data include (a) text from four corporate Facebook pages of large Finland-based companies (see Table 1) and (b) six semi-structured interviews with corporate employees who work on these Facebook pages (see Table 2). As all of us authors are Finns, we chose Finland-based companies to minimize any difficulties in analysis related to linguistic or cultural differences. The scope of the study was limited to large companies selling consumer products; two of the companies operate in the food industry, one in the technology sector, and one in transportation.

We collected the textual data from four Facebook pages, spanning a randomly selected two-week period in 2013. From each Facebook page, posts by (a) the companies and (b) other actors (customers, other consumers) were collected, along with comments to them; this amounted to nearly 40,000 words (figures include users' names, timestamps, etc.). By "post", we refer to an electronic utterance (potentially starting a discussion), while "comments" are responses to posts. As in some cases there was a large amount of comments (up to several hundred), the number of comments collected for each post was limited to the first 50 shown by Facebook. Three of the companies posted in Finnish, while one posted in both English and Finnish. The cited extracts were, wherever needed, translated into English by the authors.

A total of six semi-structured interviews were conducted, in early 2012, with employees who interacted daily with consumers on the Facebook pages of the four companies. Interview themes focused on the content and aims of the interviewees' job and their views on the style and topics of corporate Facebook communication. The interviews, which lasted on average for one hour and 12 minutes, were tape-recorded and transcribed soon after. They were conducted in Finnish and extracts cited in this article have been translated by the authors.

6. Findings

6.1. Context

The global context of our data is the capitalist Western world; because of space limitations and as this wide context is probably quite well known to the reader, we focus on the local context: the medium and its power implications, as well as the overall domain, social action, and goals involved.

6.1.1. Power of the medium

In our observation of the Facebook setting, we found that Facebook controlled interaction on the pages through access and visibility, which means that it was able both to support responsivity and polyphony and also to monologize discourse.

Table 1

Data from corporate Facebook pages.

Facebook page & language	Page likes (on August 14, 2013)	Company posts & related comments (words)	Consumer posts & related comments (words)	Words, total
Food Company (Finnish)	256,276	2004	2618	4622
Technology Company (Finnish)	46,698	957	8989	9946
Grocery Company (Finnish)	154,633	6219	2812	9031
Transportation Company (English & Finnish)	223,909	3762	12,446	16,208
Words, total		12,942	26,865	39,807

The built-in possibility to comment to a specific post is perhaps the most important feature of this digital setting from the perspective of responsivity; it allows turn-taking by all participants, be it by page owner companies or consumers. As all participants may assume the roles of both writer and reader, the medium would seem to allow for polyphony, i.e. various viewpoints and voices. However, Facebook's design could also monologize discourse by giving companies an advantage over consumers through the prioritization of company posts. At the time of data collection, Facebook had started to use a "timeline" layout which included a system of automatically showing a selection of posts as "highlights" on the page. In our data, the "highlights" exclusively included company posts, whereas a few of the most recent consumer posts were featured in a small, separate box. It is worth noting that this prioritization of corporate posts is a result of development over time; in 2011, in the context of gathering data for an earlier study on corporate Facebook pages (Lillqvist and Louhiala-Salminen, 2014), we noted that posts by the page owner and those by consumers were visible in the same view. At that time, a flood of criticism could effectively take over an entire Facebook page.

Another notable feature was the appearance of page posts in individuals' "newsfeeds". No consumer posts were included in the newsfeeds and if, as speculated by the interviewees, it was rare for followers to visit the corporate page itself, they would then only be exposed to the posts by the page owner company. Similarly, corporate posts also had higher visibility than the comments to these posts because only a few comments appeared in the default view.

The prioritization of company posts thus seemed to monologize discourse by filtering out consumer voices through lowered visibility. In our data, also the number of comments attested to this tendency: consumer posts typically received 3–5 comments, compared to 50–100 comments to posts by companies. These features show how the technological setting wields power on the interaction, both enabling and in major ways limiting responsivity and polyphony.

6.1.2. Power given by the medium

Our observation and interviews also showed that Facebook gave some power, namely certain optional possibilities to monologize discourse, to page owner companies. The interviewees mentioned the option of preventing consumers from posting to

Table 2
Interviews.

Company	Interview participant	Transcript, words
Food Company	P1	8922
	P2	6209
Technology Company	P3	6381
	P4	4289
Grocery Company	P5	3221
Transportation Company	P6	6283
Total		35,305

the Facebook page, which limits the equal turn-taking discussed above. According to the Transportation Company representative (P6), the company had used this option at a time when it was affected by a scandal concerning its management's actions. She said she was *afraid* that allowing posting at that time would *lead to a public bashing* (P6). The emotion reflected by the word *afraid* and the negative connotation of the expression that we translated as *bashing* suggest that in the context model of P6, this kind of consumer criticism was problematic. More specifically, she constructed a difference between two different types of criticism, instrumentally useful *feedback* and non-useful *bashing*, stating that *it's not really going to help us improve our activities if our management is bashed on our [Facebook] page*.

Companies were also able to monologize discourse by deleting consumer posts and comments. For obvious reasons, it was not possible to identify missing contributions in our text data, but this strategy was also mentioned by the Transportation Company representative as a possibility in difficult situations: *we have had to delete a lot of comments, because they contained personal insults towards specific employees* (P6). However, deleting comments was clearly seen as problematic, because providing an explanation was deemed necessary.

In addition, we noted that Facebook page administrators were able to manually highlight a post that was not automatically visible on the highlights timeline. The technological setting therefore endowed company representatives with the power to choose particular consumer voices to display more prominently. Finally, the interviews allowed us to identify a practice of composing posts ahead of time and scheduling them to appear later. Two representatives (P2, P5) stated that it would be preferable to be able to respond to any comments immediately, thus implying that scheduling reduces responsiveness. The Technology Company found scheduling practically useful, however, due to a need to communicate to audiences across several time zones even though all the Facebook staff members were located in Europe.

In sum, Facebook enabled the page owner to exercise power over other participants through several features. This suggests that a medium may not be a mere setting for the discourse; it is also an actor constricting and enabling communication in an uneven fashion.

6.1.3. Domain, social action and goals

Based on the interviews, we identified some further features of the context models of the corporate representatives, specifically as the overall domain of the communication and the social action and goals involved in their corporate communication practice were concerned.

The goals of corporate Facebook pages that the interviewees mainly referred to were both *reaching people* (or *one-way communication*) and *conversation* (or *two-way communication*). Reaching people seems to involve having many fans (people who, in Facebook's terms, "like" the page) and keeping them interested. In one way or another all interviewees stressed the significance of *conversation as more and more central* (P1) in their professional practice, although apparently company-consumer interaction is not yet considered as a given, as suggested by Extract 1. Here, after talking about her own aim of promoting discussion, P2 brought up her personal experience as a fan on other corporate Facebook pages:

Extract 1.

Myself, when I'm a fan of some [company page] and comment something there, it is always nice if there is actually someone there who answers me. (P2)

Extract 1, together with the interviewees' overall emphasis on conversation, suggests that responsiveness on corporate Facebook pages was regarded as a good thing (*nice*), but also rare; a degree of unexpectedness is expressed by the word *actually*. The interviewees seemed proud of having responsive practices (e.g. answering questions as soon as possible). However, our interview data indicate that neither reaching consumers nor conversation with them was seen as having intrinsic value; the underlying reason for their significance was described as improving sales—*we want to listen and react, and finally end up with a sale* (P4)—and supporting the company's overall business goals, basically *making as much profit for our owners as we can* (P5). Naturally, this can be expected as the usual logic of the overall domain of business and consumer markets.

In conclusion, our interviews confirmed that even though the rhetoric of the interviewees focused on responsive communication practices, their context models included a strategic, profit-centered orientation. This suggests that the discourse is finalized, i.e. not open to all possible outcomes, as would be required for real polyphony.

6.2. Semantic structures

6.2.1. Topic choices

In terms of global semantic structures, polyphony seemed to be supported by the fact that both company representatives and consumers were able to introduce various topics and viewpoints on the corporate Facebook pages. The topics taken up by companies and consumers were quite similar within the two groups, but very different from each other; the company posts were predominantly about competitions, offerings, marketing campaigns, tips for using products and pleasant events such as holidays, whereas consumers frequently brought up complaints (although also thanks) about products, service and corporate ethics.

Our analysis showed that overwhelmingly all four companies resorted to easy and light topics (see Extract 2):

Extract 2.

Food Company: What kind of goodies do you prefer at Midsummer? We give out prizes for lovers of cookies, chocolate, salty liquorice and savory delicacies!

As in Extract 2, the company posts often contained a question presupposing a specific kind of answer, and responses to such questions were indeed usually highly predictable (in this case, for example, the answers *savory* or *Chocolate* <3). The Finnish *Midsummer* celebration and *goodies* are associated with pleasant connotations and are generally inoffensive topics, unlikely to encourage criticism. In fact, this post had a positive reception, reflected in a high number of "likes" and short comments (usually less than five words) that mentioned some of the same food items as the post. This kind of topic choice, particularly combined with closed questions which also discourage critical or otherwise unexpected responses, represent a monologizing tendency. However, occasionally there were also more critical comments, although often still formulated as answers to the specific question, as in Extract 3:

Extract 3.

June 13

Technology Company: Would you like to know more of [Technology Company's products X and Y]?

Consumer 1: No.

June 13 at 8:53pm

Consumer 2: Not interested in [product X] any more. The quality is getting shittier all the time [...]

June 14 at 3:19pm

[4 comments omitted]

Consumer 3: Nothing but shit for a long time now. [...] June 15 at 1:50pm

In our data, vast amounts of positive and predictable contributions (the norm within the context of these pages) could then suddenly be met with a profound challenge to the value of the entire company, its products or its communication. Extract 3 demonstrates such a switch in the semantic orientation from positive to negative, a “carnivalistic twist” reversing the norm of the page in the form of profanity, when the consumers describe the products of the Technology Company as *shit*.

Further, we found that issues of wider social significance, such as corporate ethics, were totally lacking in company posts. This is in line with the reports by interviewees P2, P6 and P3 who explicitly told us that they avoided topics that risked being received negatively, and the examples they referred to were related to ethical issues. In contrast, consumers did bring up questions related to ethics in corporate activities. For example, some consumers voiced their concern that the cocoa used by the Food Company was being produced by African child slaves. On the Grocery Company Facebook page, cattle keeping conditions emerged as an issue; for example in Extract 4, a comment given in response to the company’s question *When did you last cook with Grocery Company butter?*

Extract 4.

Consumer 4: I haven’t used Grocery Company’s products since the “happy cows” marketing campaign. In my opinion, honest communication is an essential part of ethical corporate behavior. Dark grey does not become white just by saying so.

In a similar way to the consumers in Extract 3, Consumer 4 also resists the predictable type of answer to the company’s question about butter (e.g. *today, I always do!, I don’t remember*). The comment that implicitly accuses the company of lying about the conditions of the cattle (marketing communication depicted cows as *happy*) has little to do with the original topic of butter. This shows that critics may use a change or “stretch” of topic to get their point heard—after all, if instead of commenting to a company post they initiated their own topic by posting about it, their contribution would be less visible on the page than as part of the discussion started by the company (see Section 6.1.1.). In this case, the consumer was not only able to introduce an unexpected, critical voice to the discussion, but was also able to temporarily change the topic as some other participants (not the company, however) subsequently engaged in the discussion about the living conditions of cattle. This shows that polyphony may arise occasionally through willful resistance to the easy topics introduced by companies.

The topic choices in our data can, on the one hand, be seen as contributing to polyphony, since a wide variety of topics are raised. On the other hand, certain topics are avoided by the companies, and these are especially those that they suspect might give rise to critical voices. This is therefore a monologizing tendency. Further, as the predominant issues reflected in the posts of companies and consumers, respectively, were often very different, the discourse participants could, to a certain extent, be considered to be involved in a set of simultaneous monologues. However, it is also noteworthy that most safe and easy company posts did receive considerable attention in the form of likes, shares and comments, suggesting that many consumers were not even looking for dialogue of any depth.

6.2.2. Word choices

A striking difference between the contributions of companies and those of consumers could also be seen in their local semantic

structures, i.e. in the lexical choices the writers had made. While companies used standard but somewhat informal language, consumer contributions manifested more colloquial tendencies (see Extracts 5 and 6). In addition, we identified what we interpret as a carnivalistic tendency recurring in consumer posts and comments. Extract 5 is a post by a consumer who seems exceedingly happy about a “limited edition” yogurt flavor and a Facebook competition by the Grocery Company. In Extract 6, opinions differ concerning another product.

Extract 5.

Consumer 5: The new seasonal [yogurt] flavor MANGO is SUPER DELICIOUS! Add this to regulars please! awesome competition..... Have a good summer everyone!

Extract 6.

June 11

Grocery company: Is viili [Finnish dairy product similar to yogurt] one of your summer favorites?

[several comments omitted]

Consumer 6: I’d rather eat half cooked iguana with skin on than viili, yogurts ok, but not that slimy stuff

June 13 at 11:36pm

[several comments omitted]

Consumer 7: yes, I’m a real addict

June 19 at 4:46pm

The carnivalistic tendency included extreme opposite positions where hyperbolic expressions were frequently used. In Extract 5, hyperbolic features include capitalization, exclamation marks, and highly positive adjectives (*SUPER DELICIOUS, awesome*). The comments in Extract 6 also demonstrate hyperbolic word choices and highly contrasting positions related to a product; this is simultaneously an example of the juxtaposition of opposites (love and hate) and of carnivalistic eccentricity expressed in an unusual analogy—presumably it is uncommon to be a *viili addict* or to prefer *half cooked iguana* to it, particularly as Finnish wildlife or diet do not include iguanas.

Carnivalistic, unusual or extreme expressions or positions draw attention to differing points of view and can therefore promote polyphony. It could also be argued that uninhibited expressions of criticism or sometimes even hate towards a normally powerful entity, such as a big company, can breach the usual norms of conduct and, in some cases, lower the status of the company and empower the consumer.

6.3. Formal structures

6.3.1. Generic structures

In the category of global formal structures, we focus on a few central generic features. The generic structure of corporate posts typically included an *activating part* (as P1 referred to it) such as a question (e.g. Extract 6), suggestion or request. P1 explained that *when there is a straight question, the post attracts answers more easily*. Responsivity was, then, strategically promoted when it was considered desirable.

The companies’ responses to consumer complaints were also strikingly similar. They seemed to reflect the communication guidelines described by the interviewees (e.g. *be businesslike, but friendly and positive*) and typically included elements from the more global generic structures of traditional (business) correspondence, such as a greeting (here usually with the consumer’s first name), an apology or expression of sympathy, and best wishes in some form (see Extract 7) (see also Zhang and Vásquez (2014), who discuss very similar generic features in responses to criticism on TripAdvisor).

Extract 7.

Grocery Company: Hello [first name of consumer]! We are very sorry to hear about this flaw in the product. Please complete the consumer service contact form so that we can compensate you. [Web address] Best regards, [first name] from marketing.

It is interesting that a key part of this type of acknowledgment of complaint was an invitation to continue the discussion elsewhere, for example through a *contact form*. Thus the essence of the consumer's criticism was not addressed in public, and the company's response can rather be seen as a rhetorical move focusing on appearing polite and responsive (see also Lillqvist and Louhiala-Salminen, 2014). In contrast, this repetitive "copy-paste" practice could undermine responsivity in the company-consumer interaction as the answers were almost identical irrespective of the consumer comment and they were focused on ending the discussion, at least on the Facebook page.

6.3.2. Rhetorical moves

In terms of local formal structures, we draw attention to a set of rhetorical moves related to the personalization of corporate discourse (Lillqvist and Louhiala-Salminen, 2014; Maagaard, 2014; Page, 2012). Overall, in our data, companies seemed to adopt a level of familiarity, which in our theoretical context could perhaps be viewed as carnivalization that promotes polyphony by humanizing the company and lowering its status. In the interviews, this tendency towards familiarity was described as *sounding like a real person or an ordinary person* (P1, P6, P4). Company posts were written in a relatively simple language, i.e. with short sentences, active voice and without nominalizations (see Extracts 2, 3, 6). If any reference to the writer was given, it was either the name of the company or the pronoun *we*. However, when answering questions and complaints, the corporate representatives signed their comments by using their first name and the name of the unit they worked for (see Extract 7). In three of the four companies, representatives reported that they consistently signed the company's comments (but not posts) since it *gives a more personal and approachable feel* (P1). When asked for a reason for the signing policy, P6 referred to her experience of its effects; Extract 8 suggests the practice was used as a rhetorical move with the specific function of influencing the *tone* of consumer comments:

Extract 8.

It is a really effective way to change the tone of the conversation when people notice that there is a real person commenting, under their own name. (P6)

A different type of signature move was used by the Food Company; its head of communications responded to criticism relating to ethical issues and signed the comment [*full name*], *Head of Communications*. Criticism on "serious" issues was, then, met with a more formal approach that relied on increasing credibility through the authority connected to hierarchical rank. However, both signature moves—informal and formal—seemed to be used to confront criticism and thus reduce differing voices through a kind of rhetorical manipulation. The Transportation Company representative also talked about *killing [the critics] with friendliness* which referred more generally to the familiar approach as a rhetorical move (P6).

Utilizing these moves, then, the representatives communicated the company's voice in an apparently personal manner to seem "approachable". Our data suggest that this personalization is a carefully crafted set of rhetorical moves that give an illusion of carnivalization, but in fact can even contribute to monologization.

7. Discussion and conclusion

The present article has examined corporate Facebook pages to determine how (i.e. through what discursive features) divergent voices are promoted and silenced in this interactive online context. Using a theoretical framework that combines a critical discourse perspective with Bakhtin's dialogical theory, the study contributes to a nuanced understanding of discursive power relations between companies and consumers on corporate Facebook pages. This understanding involves, on the one hand, consumer access to the production of public discourse, namely the possibilities that consumers have to criticize, interact with and influence corporations, and, on the other, the strategies that companies can use for the manipulation of discourse.

Our findings (summarized in Table 3) show that corporate Facebook pages contain certain dialogizing (i.e. responsive, carnivalistic and polyphonic) features that, to some extent, even out the power relations in terms of equal access to public discourse among the

Table 3

Summary of findings. Abbreviations: +r/c/p=increased responsivity/carnivalization/polyphony; -r/c/p=reduced responsivity/carnivalization/polyphony.

Context	Semantic structures	Formal structures
Dialogizing Setting - allows turn-taking (+r) Social action - Corporate representatives' context model of responsive practice as good professional practice (+r)	Topic choice - anyone can introduce topics (+r/p) - topics are varied (+p) - "carnivalistic twist" to switch semantic orientation of discussion (+c) Word choice - hyperbolic expressions of love and hate towards companies, products (+c)	Generic structures - "activating parts" (e.g. questions) in company posts increases consumer responses (+r) Rhetorical moves - various moves (e.g. signing) create a personal and approachable feel (+c?)
Monologizing Setting, non-optional - design gives higher visibility for company posts & comments (-r/p) Setting, optional - preventing & deleting consumers' contributions - manual highlighting of certain voices (-p) - scheduling posts (-p) Domain, goals - corporate representatives' context model: priority of business goals, criticism to be avoided, discourse not open to all outcomes (-p)	Topic choice - simultaneous monologues on completely different topics (-r/p) - companies: topics which do not provoke - disagreement & closed questions which discourage unexpected answers (-p) - issues of wider social significance avoided (-p)	Generic structures - repetitive "copy-paste" responses to complaints (-r) Rhetorical moves - "killing the critics with friendliness" (-p) - illusion of carnivalization (-c)

participants. These features include the possibility for turn-taking (contributions from several authors), which allows anyone to introduce topics. Corporate representatives also seem to consider responsive practice as an ideal, and use generic structures to support responsiveness. However, we also found several monologizing factors. Monologization, a process aiming to control unwanted voices, is in this context a form of power use involving both coercive (using force) and manipulative aspects (mind control through discourse). We have shown that the corporate representatives strategically utilized the possibilities afforded by the context (e.g. preventing consumers from posting) for coercive monologization, and they also made use of manipulative strategies based on semantic and formal discourse features. For example, the companies avoided ethics-related issues and focused on “safe” topics with pleasant connotations, unlikely to remind consumers of any points of dissatisfaction. It is reasonable to speak of manipulation here, as the companies use these monologizing strategies to control minds and discourse in order to serve their own interests (increasing profits) against the interests of consumers (being heard) (see van Dijk, 2006a).

Facebook Inc. has an important part to play in the monologizing tendency, because it has introduced features that block consumer voices from being fully heard: their posts are less visible than those of the companies and may be subject to censorship by page administrators. The power of Facebook to restrict and enable discourse in an unequal manner suggests that it should be considered more than a setting—it also has power in itself (see also Lenihan, 2011).

When companies use Facebook’s services, they appropriate consumer participation and the content consumers create on the Facebook pages (primarily as a marketing effort, but sometimes also product development etc.). As others have argued, social media may enable this kind of exploitation of consumer “labor” (Comor, 2011; Fuchs, 2014; Kozinets et al., 2008). Our findings show, in particular, that equal dialogue which is left open, “unfinalized” in Bakhtin’s terminology, is sidelined when non-critical and positive voices are highlighted and integrated into the overall strategic marketing effort, while negative and critical voices are effaced as much as possible.

Corporate rhetoric makes companies appear closer, familiar or “human”, which within the Bakhtinian framework might appear to be a carnivalizing tendency. Yet, unsurprisingly, it seems that companies find it hard to accept the bipolar nature of the carnivalistic ritual, where praise and abuse, love and hate, are constantly juxtaposed (Bakhtin, 1984a). The result is that corporate Facebook interaction is finalized (i.e. not open to all possible outcomes). This may be explained by corporate representatives’ context models that relate social media communication to the aims of corporate communication and business more widely: A common ideal of corporate communication is to be “integrated”, single-voiced communication (e.g. Christensen and Cornelissen, 2011) and corporate Facebook communication has developed within this “genre ecology” (Erickson, 2000). Therefore the familiarity found on corporate Facebook pages is not carnivalistic familiarity as much as it is conversationalization (Fairclough, 1994, 1995)—apparent friendliness and informality used for instrumental goals—or synthetic personalization, i.e. simulated equalization disguising an “instrumental and manipulative relationship to the mass of people beneath a façade of personal and equal relationship” (Fairclough, 1989). Although synthetic personalization is not a tendency specific to online media, it is very relevant in these contexts, as shown by Page (2012) and Thurlow (2013). This pseudo-sociality, as Thurlow (2013) calls it, allows institutional agents to “stylize themselves as participatory, interactive or accessible”, but this impression is a mere illusion. Nevertheless, we argue that although our findings also point to manipulation that creates illusions of participation and personalization, sometimes in

interactive online media there are also genuinely carnivalistic moments where traditional hierarchy and power relations are suspended. This is a result of the true responsive features which allow participation and resistance. Therefore, as in a medieval carnival, extremes alternate: love and hate, and praise and abuse, take their turns in the words of the consumers. Despite widespread syntheticity, sometimes the “king” does become a “fool” (Bakhtin, 1984a) on corporate Facebook pages.

We do not claim that our findings are directly applicable to other interactive online media contexts, as the level and possibilities for monologization probably vary greatly. Therefore future studies should examine other social media such as Twitter, Instagram, YouTube or Reddit from this perspective. However, the new online media are not completely dissimilar; there is an increasing tendency towards commercialization of online spaces, exploitation of users and appropriation of their contributions (Fuchs, 2014). Two-way interaction may be glorified, but increasing monologization often reduces it to marketing communication performed partly by consumers themselves.

References

- Baird, C.H., Parasnis, G., 2011. From social media to social customer relationship management. *Strategy Leadersh.* 39, 30–37.
- Bakhtin, M., 1981. *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*. University of Texas Press, Austin and London.
- Bakhtin, M., 1984a. *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics*. University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis.
- Bakhtin, M., 1984b. *Rabelais and His World*. Indiana University Press, Bloomington.
- Bakhtin, M., 1986. *Speech Genres, and Other Late Essays*. University of Texas Press, Austin.
- Barnes, N.G., Lescault, A.M., Augusto, K.D., 2015. LinkedIn Dominates, Twitter Trends and Facebook Falls: The 2014 Inc. 500 and Social Media. Available at: <http://www.umassd.edu/cmr/socialmediaresearch/2015fortune500andsocialmedia/>.
- Barnes, N.G., Mattson, E., 2008. Social media in the Inc. 500: the first longitudinal study. *J. New Commun. Res.* 3, 74–78.
- Belova, O., King, I., Sliwa, M., 2008. Introduction: polyphony and organization studies: Mikhail Bakhtin and beyond. *Organ. Stud.* 29, 493–500.
- Bortree, D.S., Seltzer, T., 2009. Dialogic strategies and outcomes: an analysis of environmental advocacy groups’ Facebook profiles. *Public Relat. Rev.* 35, 317–319.
- Christensen, T.L., Cornelissen, J., 2011. Bridging corporate and organizational communication: review, development and a look to the future. *Manag. Commun. Q.* 25, 383–414.
- Comor, E., 2011. Contextualizing and critiquing the fantastic prosumer: power, alienation and hegemony. *Crit. Sociol.* 37, 309–327.
- Cova, B., Pace, S., 2006. Brand community of convenience products: new forms of customer empowerment – the case “my Nutella The Community”. *Eur. J. Mark.* 40, 1087–1105.
- Deuze, M., 2007. Convergence culture in the creative industries. *Int. J. Cult. Stud.* 10, 243–263.
- Erickson, T., 2000. Making sense of computer-mediated communication (CMC): conversations as genres, CMC systems as genre ecologies. In: *Proceedings of the 33rd Hawaii International Conference on System Sciences (HICSS-33)*. IEEE Press, Maui, HI.
- Fairclough, N., 1989. *Language and Power*. Longman, London.
- Fairclough, N., 1994. Conversationalization of public discourse and the authority of the consumer. In: *Abercrombie, N., Keat, R., Whiteley, N. (Eds.), The Authority of the Consumer*. Taylor & Francis, London, pp. 235–249.
- Fairclough, N., 1995. *Critical Discourse Analysis: The Critical Study of Language*. Longman, London.
- Fairclough, N., 2002. Language in new capitalism. *Discourse Soc.* 13, 163–166.
- Fleming, P., 2007. Sexuality, power and resistance in the workplace. *Organ. Stud.* 28, 239–256.
- Foucault, M., 1976. *Histoire de la sexualité 1: La volonté de savoir*. Gallimard, Paris.
- Fuchs, C., 2014. *Digital Labour and Karl Marx*. Routledge, New York.
- Füller, J., Mühlbacher, H., Matzler, K., Jawecki, G., 2009. Consumer empowerment through internet-based co-creation. *J. Manag. Inf. Syst.* 26, 71–102.
- Gee, J.P., 2015. *Social Linguistics and Literacies: Ideology in Discourses*. Taylor & Francis, Abingdon.
- Georgakopoulou, A., 2006. Postscript: computer-mediated communication in sociolinguistics. *J. Socioling.* 10, 548–557.
- Hall, J.K., Vitanova, G., Marchenkova, L.A., 2004. *Dialogue With Bakhtin on Second and Foreign Language Learning: New Perspectives*. Taylor & Francis, Mahwah, NJ.
- Herman, E.S., Chomsky, N., 1988. *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media*. Pantheon Books, New York.
- Herring, C.S., 2007. A Faceted Classification Scheme for Computer-mediated Discourse. Language@Internet.4.

- Kelsey, D., Bennett, L., 2014. Discipline and resistance on social media: discourse, power and context in the Paul Chambers 'Twitter Joke Trial'. *Discourse Context Media* 3, 37–45.
- Kozinets, R.V., Hemetsberger, A., Schau, H.J., 2008. The wisdom of consumer crowds: collective innovation in the age of networked marketing. *J. Macromark.* 28, 339–354.
- Lenihan, A., 2011. "Join our community of translators": language ideologies and/in Facebook. In: Thurlow, C., Mroczek, K. (Eds.), *Digital Discourse: Language in the New Media*. Oxford University Press, New York, pp. 48–64.
- Lillqvist, E., Louhiala-Salminen, L., 2014. Facing Facebook: impression management strategies in company–consumer interactions. *J. Bus. Tech. Commun.* 28, 3–30.
- Lukes, S., 1974. *Power: A Radical View*. Macmillan, Basingstoke.
- Maagaard, C., 2014. Employee testimonials: animating corporate messages through employees' stories. *Discourse Context Media* 6, 22–32.
- McAllister-Spooner, S.M., 2009. Fulfilling the dialogic promise: a ten-year reflective survey on dialogic internet principles. *Public Relat. Rev.* 35, 320–322.
- McAllister, S.M., 2012. How the world's top universities provide dialogic forums for marginalized voices. *Public Relat. Rev.* 38, 319–327.
- Motion, J., Weaver, C.K., 2005. A discourse perspective for critical public relations research: life sciences network and the battle for truth. *J. Public Relat. Res.* 17, 49–67.
- Page, R., 2012. The linguistics of self-branding and micro-celebrity in Twitter: the role of hashtags. *Discourse Commun.* 6, 181–201.
- Shankar, A., Cherrier, H., Canniford, R., 2006. Consumer empowerment: a Foucauldian interpretation. *Eur. J. Mark.* 40, 1013–1030.
- Theunissen, P., Wan Noordin, W.N., 2012. Revisiting the concept "dialogue" in public relations. *Public Relat. Rev.* 38, 5–13.
- Thurlow, C., 2013. Fakebook: synthetic media, pseudo-sociality and the rhetorics of web 2.0. In: Tannen, D., Trester, A.M. (Eds.), *Discourse 2.0: Language and New Media*. Georgetown University Press, Washington, DC, pp. 225–249.
- Thurlow, C., Mroczek, K., 2011. Introduction: fresh perspectives on new media sociolinguistics. In: Thurlow, C., Mroczek, K. (Eds.), *Digital Discourse: Language in the New Media*. Oxford University Press, New York, pp. xix–xliv.
- van Dijk, T.A., 1996. Discourse, power and access. In: Caldas-Coulthard, C.R., Coulthard, M. (Eds.), *Texts and Practices: Readings in Critical Discourse Analysis*. Routledge, London, pp. 84–104.
- van Dijk, T.A., 2001. Critical discourse analysis. In: Tannen, D., Schiffrin, D., Hamilton, H. (Eds.), *Handbook of Discourse Analysis*. Blackwell, Oxford, pp. 352–371.
- van Dijk, T.A., 2006a. Discourse and manipulation. *Discourse Soc.* 17, 359–383.
- van Dijk, T.A., 2006b. Discourse, context and cognition. *Discourse Stud.* 8, 159–177.
- van Dijk, T.A., 2009. Critical discourse studies: a sociocognitive approach. In: Wodak, M., Meyer, M. (Eds.), *Methods of critical discourse analysis*. Sage, London, pp. 62–86.
- van Dijk, T.A., 2014. Discourse-cognition-society: current state and prospects of the socio-cognitive approach to discourse. In: Hart, C., Cap, P. (Eds.), *Contemporary Critical Discourse Studies*. Bloomsbury Publishing, London.
- Waters, R.D., Burnett, E., Lamm, A., Lucas, J., 2009. Engaging stakeholders through social networking: how nonprofit organizations are using Facebook. *Public Relat. Rev.* 35, 102–106.
- Verhoeven, P., Tench, R., Zerfass, A., Moreno, A., Verčič, D., 2012. How European PR practitioners handle digital and social media. *Public Relat. Rev.* 38, 162–164.
- Wodak, R., Meyer, M., 2009. Critical discourse analysis: history, agenda, theory and methodology. In: Wodak, R., Meyer, M. (Eds.), *Methods of Critical Discourse Analysis*. Sage, London, pp. 1–33.
- Zhang, Y., Vásquez, C., 2014. Hotels' responses to online reviews: managing consumer dissatisfaction. *Discourse Context Media* 6, 54–64.

Essay 3

Lillqvist, Ella & Moisander, Johanna. Constructing organizational legitimacy on social media: Reddit users as legitimacy evaluators. Unpublished manuscript.

Constructing organizational legitimacy on social media: Reddit users as legitimacy evaluators

*Ella Lillqvist
Johanna Moisander*

Abstract

This paper explores how organizational legitimacy is socially constructed by evaluators on social media. While most of the nascent literature on legitimacy judgments has focused on individuals' assessments, we shift analytical attention to the communicative construction of legitimacy by means of evaluative communication in interaction with others. We develop a theoretical framework that integrates legitimacy with symbolic interactionist notions and appraisal theory (from linguistics). This perspective allows us to unpack the interactional process that shapes organizational legitimacy situation by situation; in particular, we identify and elaborate on the role of interpretive frames, definitions of situations and evaluative communication practices through which legitimacy is constructed in specific situations and for specific acts, actors and objects. In our empirical study we analyze how the members of a popular online community and content sharing site, Reddit, (a) interpret and define social situations where organizations participate with promotional messages, and (b) articulate evaluations of organizations and their communication. We elaborate on three dimensions of legitimacy from the perspective of evaluative communication and develop a process model of the social construction of organizational legitimacy in online communities.

Keywords

Legitimacy, legitimacy judgment, evaluators, communicative institutionalism, symbolic interactionism, participatory media, social media, promotional communication

Introduction

Traditionally, research on organizational legitimacy—the general social acceptance of an organization and its activities stemming from congruence with norms and rules of its institutional environment (Suchman, 1995; Weber, 1978)—has focused on how organizations acquire, manage and use legitimacy (Greenwood, Oliver, Sahlin, & Suddaby, 2008). While it has long been recognized that fundamentally legitimacy is a social judgment, accorded to the organization by its constituents (Ashforth & Gibbs, 1990) and that the assessments made by internal and external audiences are therefore of key importance (Bansal & Clelland, 2004; Deephouse & Suchman, 2008, p. 54; Ruef & Scott, 1998), researchers have only relatively recently taken a specific interest in legitimacy evaluators and their judgments. The limited research that exists has mainly drawn from cognitive and social psychology (Bitektine, 2011; Bitektine & Haack, 2015; Hofer & Green Jr, 2016; Huy, Corley, & Kraatz, 2014; Tost, 2011), thus taking the individual evaluators' perspective. Therefore, we still have a very limited understanding of how legitimacy is socially constructed through evaluations in interaction “between the legitimacy’s subject, typically the organization, and the beholders, typically the stakeholders” (Castelló, Etter, & Nielsen, 2015). From a communicative perspective it should indeed be acknowledged that “speech and other forms of symbolic interactions are not just [...] reflections of inner thoughts or collective intentions but [...] potentially formative of institutional reality” (Cornelissen, Durand, Fiss, Lammers, & Vaara, 2015, p. 11); that is to say, meaning arises through social interaction in concrete settings (Barley, 2008; Hallett & Ventresca, 2006). In this paper, we address this gap by focusing particularly on the communicative construction (see also Cornelissen et al., 2015; Ocasio, Loewenstein, & Nigam, 2015) of legitimacy by means of evaluative communication in interaction with others.

In the existing literature, the communicative aspects of legitimation—“the process by which the legitimacy of a subject changes over time” (Deephouse & Suchman, 2008)—have been studied from a discursive perspective, but these studies have mostly focused on examining how discursive strategies (Barros, 2014) or rhetorical tactics (Harmon, Green, & Goodnight, 2015) are deployed in order to gain, maintain and repair, or to question, organizational legitimacy for example in controversial situations (Erkama & Vaara, 2010; Vaara & Monin, 2008; Vaara & Tienari, 2002). In these studies, then, legitimation and delegitimation are primarily conceptualized and analyzed as processes of *argumentation* (Erkama & Vaara, 2010; Harmon et al., 2015), presenting reasoning in order to persuade others. In other words, while discursive studies of legitimation have looked at the role of communication in forming legitimacy, they have not yet shed much light on communicative processes of *evaluation*, namely voicing opinions concerning others' arguments or their behavior in general—this parallels the scant research on legitimacy evaluators and judgments. Arguments and evaluations are, of course, entangled in actual communication, but in order to better understand the different facets of the social construction of legitimacy, it is analytically useful to look at them separately.

We should therefore examine not only how organizations manage legitimacy discursively or rhetorically, but also how others take position to organizations' messages. How, on what grounds and through what processes is legitimacy conferred or denied?

In this study, we build a theoretical framework that integrates symbolic interactionist notions (Blumer, 1969; Goffman, 1959, 1986 [1974]; see also Hallett & Ventresca, 2006) with an analytical approach based on appraisal theory (Martin, 2000, 2004; Martin & White, 2005), a linguistic classification of evaluative expressions. Symbolic interaction crucially involves *interpretation* of the meaning of others' actions and remarks, as well as *definition*, namely indicating to other people how they should act in specific situations (Blumer, 1969). Definition depends on interpretive *frameworks* and *frames* which allow organizing experiences to make sense of the social world (Goffman, 1986 [1974]). Evaluation both reflects and socially constructs interpretations and definitions in observable communication. It "concerns the way that speakers code or implicitly convey various kinds of subjective opinion in discourse and in so doing attempt to achieve some intersubjective consensus of values" (Hart, 2014, p. 43). In order to explore this aspect of communication, we use one of the best developed linguistic frameworks on evaluation, appraisal theory (Martin, 2000, 2004; Martin & White, 2005), as a valuable empirical tool.

Empirically, the study is set in the context of promotional communication in social media: we focus on the legitimacy challenges that organizations face when communicating in social media environments, specifically in the context of a popular online community and content sharing site, Reddit. In contemporary "social" or "participatory" media environments (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; e.g. Rheingold, 2008), the legitimacy of aggressive "in-your-face marketing" (Johansson, 2004) or intrusive promotional communication is increasingly questioned. Based on existing literature, the criticism and legitimacy attacks that organizations encounter in online communities arise from a tension between communal and commercial norms and practices (Fournier & Avery, 2011; Kozinets, de Valck, Wojnicki, & Wilner, 2010). As Fournier and Avery (2011, p. 193) put it, "the Web was created not to sell branded products, but to link people together in collective conversational webs". This means that organizational and individual users of social media often have different interpretive frames, namely basic principles that govern their definition of events and their interpretation of people's actions and utterances. Therefore, in many social media contexts, the promotional push communication that organizations typically resort to in their interaction with consumers does not represent a communally appropriate form of participation.

Our aim is, then, to explore and better understand how the legitimacy or lack of legitimacy of organizations and their promotional communication is constructed in interaction by social media users as evaluators. Specifically, we focus on evaluative communication as a legitimation process by analyzing and showing how Reddit users (a) interpret and define social situations where organizations participate with promotional messages, and (b) articulate evaluations of organizations and their communication, thus (de)legitimizing them in

these situations. Based on our theoretical framework and empirical analysis, we first identify and elaborate on three dimensions of legitimacy from the perspective of evaluative communication while discussing the role of definitions and interpretive frames and then develop a process model that depicts stages of the social construction of legitimacy through evaluative communication in online communities. The theoretical perspective that we build allows us to unpack the interactional process that shapes organizational legitimacy situation by situation; in particular, we identify and elaborate on the relevance and relations of interpretive frames, definitions of situations and evaluative communication.

Overall, the study offers two main contributions to existing literature on organizational legitimacy. First, we articulate a communicative perspective on legitimacy judgements that shifts analytical attention to the evaluative communication practices through which legitimacy is constructed in specific situations and for specific acts, actors and objects. Second, we offer an empirically and theoretically grounded model of legitimacy construction in social media, contexts which promote interaction and communal interpretive frames, causing legitimacy challenges for organizations.

Theoretical Framework

In building our communicative perspective on legitimacy judgments, we integrate theoretical ideas from symbolic interactionism (Blumer, 1969; Goffman, 1959) with basic ideas regarding legitimacy (Scott, 2014; Suchman, 1995) and its evaluation (Bitektine, 2011; Bitektine & Haack, 2015; Hoefler & Green Jr, 2016; Huy et al., 2014; Tost, 2011). In the following sections, we elaborate on the elements of this perspective.

Organizational legitimacy in neo-institutional theory

According to a widely accepted definition, coined by Suchman (1995, p. 574), *“legitimacy is a generalized perception or assumption that the actions of an entity are desirable, proper, or appropriate within some socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs, and definitions.”* In the field of management and organization studies, scholarly interest in questions of organizational legitimacy stem from the idea that organizations are not self-sufficient, they “depend for survival on the types of relations that they establish with the larger systems of which they are part” (Scott & Davis, 2007, p. 19). To survive and thrive in their social environments, organizations require legitimacy: they need “cultural support” from their institutional environment, as Deephouse and Suchman (2008) have argued.

According to Suchman (1995) the best way for organizations to gain this cultural support is often to conform to their institutional environments. Legitimacy can, then, be achieved by conforming to the prevailing “rules of the game”—the social norms that guide and constrain behavior and social interaction in the environment. From this perspective, as Scott (2014, p. 72) argues, “legitimacy is not a commodity to be possessed or exchanged but a condition

reflecting perceived consonance with relevant rules and laws or normative values, or alignment with cultural-cognitive frameworks”. These frameworks provide actors with particular models for interpreting reality and defining what constitutes desirable, proper, and appropriate action in a particular social and institutional context.

Legitimacy judgments

Evaluation plays a central part in legitimation (Hart, 2014; Suchman, 1995); although organizations pursue legitimacy through a variety of practices, fundamentally legitimacy is a social judgment made by constituents, its internal and external audiences (Ashforth & Gibbs, 1990; Bansal & Clelland, 2004; Bitektine & Haack, 2015; Deephouse & Suchman, 2008; Ruef & Scott, 1998). In fact, different stakeholders may perceive the same legitimation practices very differently (Lamin & Zaheer, 2011).

A key aspect of legitimacy judgments is the “content” that is being evaluated. Combining findings from institutional and social psychologist approaches to legitimacy, the general content categories of instrumental, relational and moral judgments have been identified (Tost, 2011). These can be understood as separate dimensions which can all influence legitimacy simultaneously (Tost, 2011). The moral and instrumental dimensions have been studied in institutional research; for example, Suchman (1995) identifies the three main grounds that legitimacy may be based on as pragmatic (corresponds to instrumental), moral and cognitive. Pragmatic and moral legitimacy are based on evaluations of value on self-interested or moral grounds, respectively (Suchman, 1995). Cognitive legitimacy, however, involves a taken-for-granted nature of the organization and is therefore not a dimension of the content based on which legitimacy is evaluated—it can, in fact, be understood as the absence of content (Tost, 2011). Unlike cognitive legitimacy, pragmatic and moral aspects—which have been collectively referred to as “evaluative” (Golant & Sillince, 2007; Suchman, 1995) or “sociopolitical” legitimacy (Aldrich & Fiol, 1994)—rest on discursive evaluation (Suchman, 1995) which is the focus of this paper. Cognitive and evaluative legitimacy could therefore be seen as different “modes” rather than different bases of judgment (Bitektine, 2011; Tost, 2011). In addition to instrumental and moral legitimacy, there is a further category of evaluative legitimacy called relational legitimacy; it refers to the assessment that an entity affirms the social identity and self-worth of individuals (Tost, 2011).

We argue that while the “content” that legitimacy judgments are based on is highly important, we also need to consider the interactional context, namely how the content becomes relevant in specific situations and cases, as well as communication, namely how evaluative language is used to actually express judgments and construct legitimacy. For this, we draw on symbolic interactionism to zoom in on the micro-level of social interaction through which legitimacy is constructed.

Symbolic interactionist approach to communicative legitimation

In this paper, we draw on symbolic interactionism to better understand the social and communicative processes through which members of online communities evaluate the legitimacy of organizations and their activities. Symbolic interactionism (SI) is a micro-sociological theory investigating human group life, based on the idea that meaning is created in interaction and through interpretation. The most well-known version of the theory was formulated by Blumer (1969), mainly influenced by George Herbert Mead (1934). The basic premises of SI refer to social interaction as a formative process in which both meanings and, through them, objects are being created, affirmed, transformed, and cast aside (Blumer, 1969). In the SI view, society consists of people engaging in action and interacting with each other in a “flow of situations” (Blumer, 1969, p. 16). The theory is, then, consistent with a communicative view of institutions as common understandings, emerging out of ongoing processes of communication between actors (Cornelissen et al., 2015).

Particularly relevant for SI is the concept “definition of the situation”, originally from Thomas who famously wrote that “[i]f men define [...] situations as real, they are real in their consequences” (1923, p. 189). To pass smoothly, an interaction situation should be similarly defined by all participants, and therefore the definition of the situation involves a negotiation and agreement as to “whose claims concerning what issues will be temporarily honored” during that interaction or set of interactions (Goffman, 1959, p. 21). Common definitions are necessary for people to act appropriately; they supply “each participant with decisive guidance in directing his own acts so as to fit in the acts of others” (Blumer, 1969, p. 71). In other words, a definition is implicitly agreed on in the beginning of an interaction situation and people act in the situation based on that definition, although the definition can at least to some extent also be revised during the interaction (Goffman, 1959). Goffman argues that the definitions of a situation are built up based on what he calls primary frameworks and (interpretive) frames: large-scale or more specific social schemata of interpretation or basic principles of organization that govern social events and people’s involvement in them (Goffman, 1986 [1974], pp. 10–11).

SI has sometimes been criticized for an over-emphasis on the micro-level, i.e. the agency of the individual in defining social situations, and lack of regard for the macro-level. The argument has been that there is a need to factor in different trans-individual practices and institutionalized forms of social action—social structures and practices (Dennis & Martin, 2005). However, Blumer affirmed that the “preponderant portion of social action in a human society, particularly in a settled society, exists in the form of recurrent patterns of joint action” (Blumer, 1969, p. 17). The notion of frame is also a “pattern” that persists from situation to the next. SI does not, then, imply a view where individuals are assumed to come to situations as equals and without a history, but rather there are certain recurrent patterns that are carried over from previous situations (Blumer, 1969). Therefore, while SI posits an active individual and emphasizes the agency of the individual in social situations, i.e. the individu-

al's capability to make a difference and, to some extent at least, shape social reality, an interactionist view also acknowledges that various cultural and ideological "structures" or "practices" create momentum for individuals to proceed towards certain directions in new situations.

Although legitimacy depends on both physical and symbolic (or communicative) practices (Ashforth & Gibbs, 1990), practices, from the SI perspective, do not influence perceptions of appropriateness directly. Instead, an interpretation and (usually) an interaction process is needed. Perceptions are jointly produced in each interaction situation, but a trace also carries over to influence future situations, thus eventually producing more generalized patterns of legitimacy. This is consistent with the view of Johnson, Dowd, and Ridgeway (2006) who state that for new actions to be legitimated, they must be locally accepted, after which they are adopted more readily also in other contexts.

Legitimacy has usually been seen as a "general", rather than a situation-specific right to exist (Suchman, 1995), arising from "alignment with universal principles, rather than from the idiosyncratic, culturally-specific maneuverings" of organizations (Deephouse & Suchman, 2008, p. 62). However, applying SI, we argue instead for a more situational, micro-level understanding of legitimacy as communicatively constituted for specific acts, actors and objects (and then possibly becoming generalized). Legitimacy evaluations vary according to the context and the interpretive frames that it brings with it for defining specific situations.

Empirical study

Empirical case and materials

The empirical case study on which we base this article focuses on interaction between organizations and users of Reddit, a participatory media site mainly focused on linking to and discussing content from other sites (sometimes called a social news or link-sharing site, e.g. Massanari, 2015; Schneider, Souza, & Lucas, 2014). The site consists of numerous subgroups known as subreddits that focus on different topics. A crucial feature of Reddit is that the users get to "up-vote" or "down-vote" posts, thus jointly influencing what can be seen on the site's front page (combining most popular posts from a user's subscribed set of subreddits), or at the top of the subreddits. The site users, referred to as Redditors, seem to share certain knowledge and cultural phenomena (Massanari, 2015), some of them more generally related to "internet culture" (memes etc.), some more specifically related to Reddit (e.g. bacon and narwhals have an iconic status). Users accumulate "karma", points which reflect "how much good the user has done for the reddit community" (Reddit FAQ). Norms are expressed in "reddiquette", an "an informal expression of the values of many redditors, as written by redditors themselves", and rules of Reddit which is a simplified version of what is acceptable and what is not.

Promotion on Reddit can take the form of sponsored posts and regular posts (some visual banner ads also exist, but these are not relevant from our interactional perspective). Regular posts may be "link posts" which share content

from an outside source, or “self posts” which merely initiate a discussion on Reddit without linking. One particular type of self post is AMA (“Ask Me Anything”). Many public figures and people connected to commercial enterprises—Barak Obama being one high profile example—have done AMAs on Reddit.

Interaction between Reddit users and organizations constitutes a particularly revealing case that allows us to shed light on communicative evaluation of legitimacy. Firstly, online communities such as Reddit, in particular, cast loudmouthed marketers as unwelcome gatecrashers and ignorant intruders: their presence is easily deemed disruptive and out of place (Fournier & Avery, 2011). Secondly, it can be argued that *evaluation* is a key feature of what people do on Reddit—as Redditors continuously vote on posts and comments, they are probably more likely to be in an “evaluative mode” (Tost, 2011) instead of merely in a “passive mode” of simply accepting presumed legitimacy. Finally, when Redditors engage in these evaluations, a written record is left behind, thus providing naturally occurring data from spontaneous discussions that would be difficult to record in ephemeral face-to-face interactions.

Data

The data collected for this study comprises field notes from general observation, an interview and informal discussions, and directly copied texts from 17 relevant regular posts and sponsored posts (including related discussions), as well as rules and instructions from Reddit wiki. Where discussion threads included more than 500 comments, only the most popular 500 were saved. See Table 1 for specifics on data types, sources and amounts.

Netnography (Kozinets, 2010), a type of online ethnography, was used in the data collection phase, particularly for gaining background information on the Reddit context. Therefore the stages of netnography referred to by Kozinets (2002, 2010) as *entrée* and data collection were relevant for our purposes. The *entrée* involves choosing specific research questions and suitable online forums, and learning as much as possible about these forums, groups, and participants (Kozinets, 2002). In the present study, this meant gaining a general understanding of Reddit through observation (including creating a user account and choosing a set of subreddits to follow). In addition, one contextualized interview and several informal discussions were conducted with one active Redditor to gain background information of the context and help to start the data collection.

Table 1. The data.

Category/Title	Pages	Source
Netnographic		
Field notes	9	Observation
Interview	11	Informant
Sponsored posts		
Love science? Study for free online - video lessons in biology, chemistry, genetics and physiology can lead to real college credit.	6	Sponsored link
Not Safe For Wallet.	55	Sponsored link
AMAs		
IAMA: We are members of the IE9 product team here to answer your questions. AMA	74	r/IAMA
[IAmA] We're on the Firefox development team, and yesterday we shipped the Firefox 4 Release Candidate.	58	r/IAMA
Hey Reddit, Join the Opera browser team for an IAmA. More engineers than marketers, we promise.	63	r/IAMA
I'm Woody Harrelson, AMA	24	r/IAMA
Hi Redditors, IAm Joy Behar and you can ask me anything (AMA)	31	r/IAMA
I am Markus Persson aka Notch, Creator of Minecraft - Ask me Anything!	45	r/Minecraft
Regular (link) posts		
Top Android dev discovers *190* different pirated versions of their games in China's app stores	1	r/androiddev
Best Cheap Eats in SF. Any to add?	4	r/sanfrancisco
We've just published the CBC Music app for Android featuring 40 radio streams + lots more. Please have at it!	9	r/canada
Metadiscussions		
Direct advertising by CBC Music. No attempts to downplay it. Over 500 upvotes	6	r/TheoryOfReddit
1 day old account, 8k+ karma, submits on average 1 link a minute.		
Why do people do this?	3	r/TheoryOfReddit
Why do people downvote every sponsored post?	6	r/TheoryOfReddit
Reddit's Changing View on Blogspam	8	r/TheoryOfReddit
Does the reddit community's behavior create a breeding ground for astroturfing?	4	r/HailCorporate
Let's talk a minute about the /r/Android spam policy	10	r/Android
Rules		
Reddiquette	4	Reddit wiki
FAQ	7	Reddit wiki
self-promotion on reddit	2	Reddit wiki
brandiquette	2	Reddit wiki
Sources: 22	Pages: 440	

Analysis

To explore and elaborate on the evaluative communication through which legitimacy is socially constructed in the data, we conducted a micro-level discourse analysis (e.g. Alvesson & Kärreman, 2000; Putnam & Fairhurst, 2001), with a focus on how situations, speakers, and content are jointly defined and evaluated. Our analytical focus was the evaluative language use that expresses the writer's appraisal of something as, broadly speaking, good or bad. We also considered how specific situations were defined in the data and how the legitimacy evaluations were influenced by these definitions. The research questions that guided our analysis are the following:

1. How are situations with promotional content defined on Reddit?
2. How are organizations and their actions evaluated in interaction?

In analyzing the data, we made use of linguistic appraisal theory developed by Martin (2000, 2004; Martin & White, 2005). He divides evaluative expressions of "attitude" into three groups: *affect* which amounts to sharing emotions, *judgment* which refers to assessing behavior based on normative principles, and *appreciation* which involves constructing subjective preferences, the value of things. Affective evaluation may be considered the basic system, as both judgment and appreciation are considered by Martin (2000) to stem from feeling, as institutionalized forms of it. Martin (2000) provides a large set of examples of words related to all these categories (of course they are also context dependent), which helped sensitize us to pinpoint various types of evaluative expressions. In addition to these categories of attitude, the appraisal framework includes useful analysis of speaker engagement, meaning expressed commitment to the evaluation, and graduation, namely adjusting the degree of an evaluation (how strong or weak it is) (Martin & White, 2005).

The analysis was an iterative process where we not only identified evaluative expressions (these could be called "first order codes", Van Maanen, 1979), but also assembled them into "second order themes" and grouped them into "aggregate dimensions" (see Figure 1 for the resulting data structure and the Appendix for additional quotes to further illustrate the second-order themes). For reasons of clarity, Figure 1 only includes the analysis of evaluative communication, but we also discuss the definitions of situations and interpretive frames.

The analytical process was informed by previous theory: the aggregate dimensions partly coincide with appreciation and judgment from appraisal theory, as well as instrumental, moral, and relational legitimacy types (Tost, 2011). Firstly, appreciation is based on norms about how products, performances and phenomena are valued (Martin, 2000, p. 159), and it is therefore evaluation of "objects" (what we call object-related legitimacy). These evaluations also tend to be based on instrumental (i.e. pragmatic) grounds, namely whether the "object" is good for the evaluator. Judgment, in contrast, is based on norms about how people should and should not behave (Martin, 2000, p. 155), and is therefore related to the character of the "subjects" being evaluated (we call this subject-related legitimacy) and also the relations those subjects have with others (relational legitimacy).

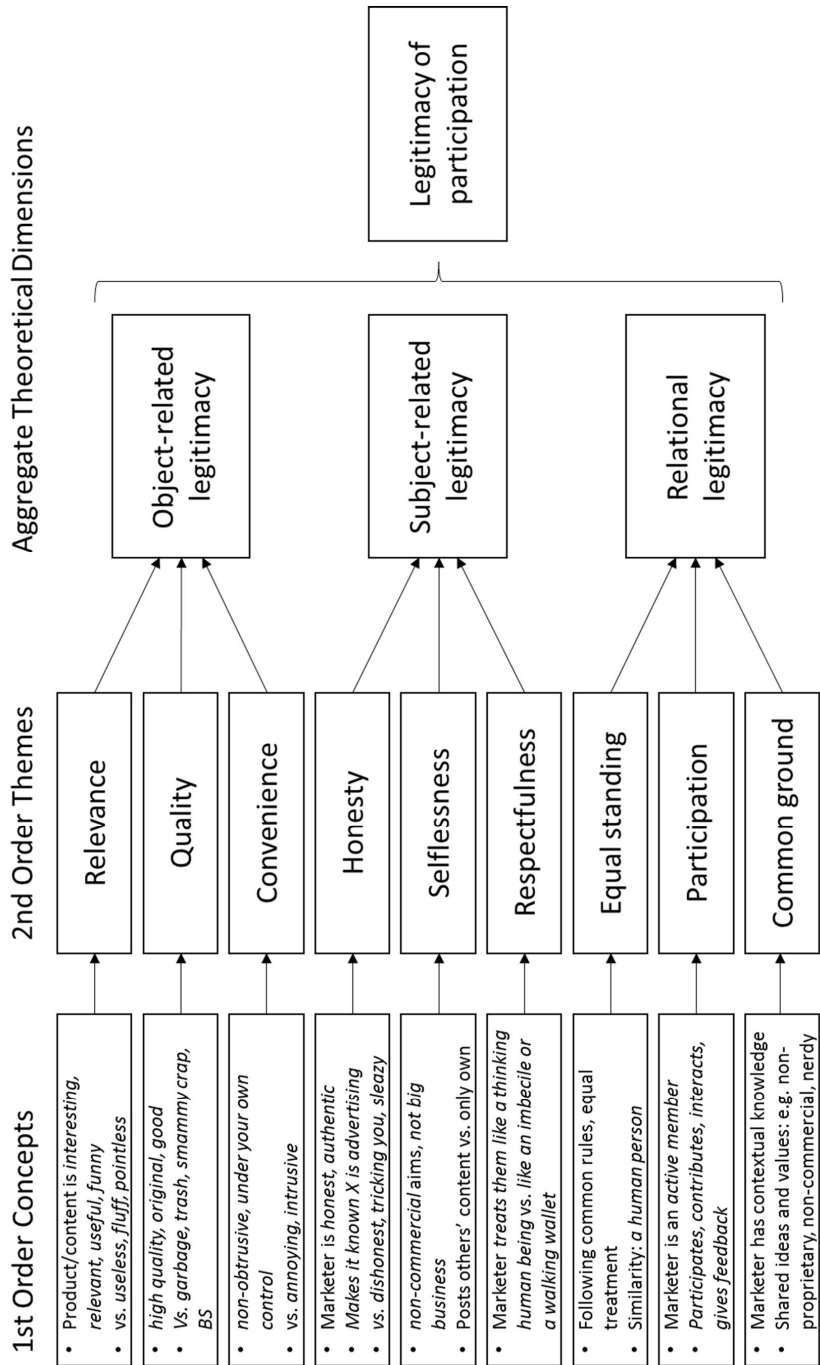


Figure 1. Data structure.

Findings

To begin presenting our findings, we first describe the overall frame that Redditors in our data used to interpret situations with promotional content. Then, we first identify and elaborate on three *dimensions of legitimacy evaluation*, expanding on the grounds on which promotional communication is evaluated as (il)legitimate, and then develop a process model that depicts stages of legitimacy formation, as it unfolds in keeping with the specific interpretive frames of the Reddit community.

Community frames and defining situations with promotional communication

The understanding that emerged from our data was that, on Reddit, a negative interpretive frame is common in situations that are defined as advertising. This inherent lack of legitimacy for promotional communication was described by users as *staunchly anti-ad tendencies*, *adblock mentality*, or an *"advertising is inherently evil" mindset*¹. Promotional communication is, then, often seen through an "exploitation" frame, which leads to defensive reactions. Someone, for example, commented that people then *feel morally superior for "beating the advertisers"*. In a discussion focusing on the reasons behind frequent down-voting of sponsored posts, one Redditor summarized this common sentiment and highlighted the negative affect using the word *hate*:

Extract 1

reddit **hates advertisements** and the feeling of being marketed to, even though they allow it to happen frequently when it is done more covertly

However, as Extract 1 also suggests, the strong negative affect is not always present. On the one hand, this might be the case when the promotional communication is less recognizable, and therefore the situation is not defined as advertising to begin with. This might make the users, as one of them pointed out, *susceptible to a different kind of advertising, in this case, viral marketing or astroturfing*; here the negative connotation of the word *susceptible* points again to the exploitation frame. The data also contained evidence of a paranoid attitude towards such covert advertisers (astroturfing refers to promotional communication that is indistinguishable from regular content). On the other hand, as pointed out by another user, in spite of being defined as advertising, *some ads, like that free eyeglasses ad, do quite well* on Reddit. This demonstrates that certain situations contain legitimating factors (such as the promoted product being free) that are able to switch the frame into a more positive one. In what follows, we take a closer look at these factors.

¹ Short quotes from the data are written in italics, longer ones appear in separate numbered paragraphs.

Object-related legitimacy

Object-related grounds for legitimacy in our context include (a) relevance, (b) quality, and (c) convenience for the Redditors.

Relevance

Promotional communication and the products advertised gain legitimacy when they are evaluated, for example, as *useful*, *appropriate*, *interesting* or *funny*; this is what we refer to as relevance. In our data, *marketing speak* was often evaluated through negative appreciation as *useless*, *fluff*, or *pointless*, or more implicitly for example as *talking a bit around his question*.

However, the common negative frame that promotional communication is seen through might sometimes even be helpful for organizations, as it means the level of expectation is low and might therefore be easily exceeded. For example, a sponsored post that advertised an online education platform was interpreted in relation to expectations that earlier experiences had given rise to—it was, the, presented as an exception to a general rule (that promotional communication is useless) and evaluated through positive appreciation:

Extract 2

And as far as advertising goes, *this one* is *actually pretty interesting and useful*.

This user places the post within a reference group of *advertising*, and construes the evaluation, *interesting and useful*, as contrary to expectation by using the word *actually*. The intensity of the evaluation is also graded (*pretty*) and limited to specifically to this case (*this one*).

It is noteworthy that this sponsored post was also introduced by the organization using argumentation where they pointed out benefits for users: the site was *free* and could *lead to real college credit*. There is, then, a good alignment between the discursive strategy used in the post and the positive evaluation seen in Extract 2.

Quality

Quality, the second category of object-related legitimacy, is related to relevance, as good quality products or communication tend to also be more useful. Positive evaluations of quality include words such as *high quality*, *original*, *good*, whereas posts or products deemed illegitimate might be described as *garbage*, *smammy crap*, or *BS*. The following extract is from a discussion concerning *blog spam*, i.e. bloggers or other content producers promoting their own content in regular, non-sponsored Reddit posts.

Extract 3

Users posting their own content is a great rule of thumb for detecting spam, but *occasionally* the content is **high quality enough** that the community won't mind.

Here too, it is implied that as a rule, promotional content is of low quality—which Redditors, of course, do not appreciate. The word *occasionally* is used here as a graduation resource to limit the applicability of the claim that there are high quality promotional posts, and *high quality* is also graded using *enough*. Conversely, it seems that low quality may also be a criterion for a post to be defined as advertising or blog spam.

Previous experiences may have an important role to play in shaping evaluations of specific promotional situations. A discussion concerning Internet Explorer (IE), for example, was shadowed by a pre-existing bias concerning the quality of this specific product. One Redditor, for example, expressed his negative affect by mentioning *the years of grief IE had caused him while he was working in web design*. This kind of evaluation was repeated time and time again in the discussion:

Extract 4

How do you feel about your company [...] creating *easily the most hated* piece of software *of all time by a large margin*, and what are you doing to fix that?

The graduation in this example is an extreme intensification using no less than four different graduation elements: *easily, the most, of all time, and by a large margin*. Repeated use of such intensification resources can strongly contribute to an overall impression of illegitimacy; we argue this is what happened in this IE case.

Convenience

Finally, by convenience we refer mainly to the idea that promotional communication, as a rule, is seen as *an intrusion* or *annoying*, and if it is in some case evaluated as *non-obtrusive*, this provides object-related legitimacy. Of course, in addition to the convenience of the communication, also the convenience of products may be evaluated, as in Extract 5 (also drawn from the above mentioned IE discussion):

Extract 5

However as IE9 has been limited not only to Windows, but to specific versions of Windows many people are not running, **I cannot easily test it** and will not bother.

Clearly this category is also related to perceived quality; as the product is *limited* in the platforms supported and therefore does not cater to all potential clients, this leads to a lack of convenience in testing it. In the case of the education platform mentioned above, in contrast, one argument for its legitimacy was that it had *no sign up*, increasing its convenience.

Subject-related legitimacy

Our analysis shows that promotional posts gain legitimacy on subject-related grounds, based on evaluation of the presence or absence of (a) honesty, (b) selflessness, and (c) respectfulness.

Honesty

Being evaluated as (dis)honest seems to be a crucial factor in the construction of subject-related legitimacy; this judgment was expressed using words such as *misleading*, *disingenuous*, *fake*, or *false pretenses*. One example was an evaluation of a sponsored post as *viral marketing bullshit*. This highly negative judgment refers to stealthy promotional communication (*viral marketing*) posing as regular content. However, this case was an interesting example of differing definitions of the situation; several other users intervened to point out that *it's not viral when it's a banner ad*, thereby supporting legitimacy in this case on the grounds of honesty.

Redditors' aversion to what they understand as dishonest advertising could also be seen in situations defined as "blog spam". This is the case in Extract 6 where a posted link is judged as being something other than what it is claimed to be:

Extract 6

It is an advert to use yodo1.com, just **disguised** as an article.

These kinds of posts that are interpreted as dishonest apparently get downvoted so effectively that *you almost never see those on the top few pages* (interview).

Also in cases where organizations were evaluated as legitimate participants, subject-related grounds were central. The following example is from a case where the Canadian Broadcasting Company (CBC) introduced, in a regular post, a mobile application they had developed, and the response was overwhelmingly positive.

Extract 7

This was **not a quietly nefarious viral ad or astroturfing**. It was **honest** promotion by one part of a public institution that's under death by a 1000 cuts, and probably trying to assert that they are still relevant for the Internet age.

One of the key elements discussed in this case was the CBC's honest approach, as seen in the judgment in Extract 7. Upfront promotion is contrasted with another option that is presented as worse, viral advertising or astroturfing.

Selflessness

The second category, selflessness, refers to cases where someone is seen to profit, or not, from their own post. This is evoked in cases defined as *blog*

spam or *self-promotion*, which are not only likely to be bad quality, but also immoral because of the underlying self-interested reasons.

This category can also be illustrated using the CBC case where, in addition to honesty, a central point was that the CBC was not interpreted as trying to exploit Reddit for its own profit. Extract 7 suggests a degree of sympathy for a struggling public institution, and many people further pointed out that the CBC was not aiming to make money with the application they were promoting:

Extract 8

- The CBC is **intending to lose money** with this app. To compare it to a **for-profit company** spamming Reddit is ridiculous.
- Public broadcasters are **not normal corporations**. So **if Comcast or some other private company had done this** I'd expect you would see a different reaction from the reddit community.

There is an implicitly positive judgment of losing money as compared to making money, and public organizations as compared to private ones. Being a public broadcaster, the CBC is cast as unselfish; it provides content for free, and therefore promoting that content can be seen to benefit the users more than it does the CBC itself. This lack of self-interest is explicitly contrasted to the case of *normal* or *for-profit companies*, which, by definition, lack the capacity for this type of moral behavior.

Respectfulness

The third category of subject-related legitimacy is respectfulness. This simply refers to organizations or promoters being interpreted as behaving in either a polite, respectful manner or in an insulting and arrogant way. One case where a lack of respectfulness was a key point in the evaluation of legitimacy was an AMA (“Ask Me Anything”) with actor Woody Harrelson. The Redditors that participated in the discussion were practically unanimous in their judgment that this was *probably the worst AMA* they had *ever read*. The star refused to answer questions not related to his latest movie, “Rampart”, explaining in a comment: *i consider my time valuable*. It is then perhaps not very surprising that Redditors took offense and voted that comment down by a landslide (a total of -1957 points, when average comments only get a few votes). They also expressed their negative evaluations verbally, as in Extract 9.

Extract 9

This AMA is **insulting**. We're being **treated as cogs**. Fuck celebrities using reddit as just another marketing platform. IMO everyone on reddit should boycott Rampart, but that's just me.

The judgment expressed in this extract captures an overwhelming sentiment that Harrelson's promotional attempt on Reddit was an obnoxious insult.

One way to understand the negative legitimacy outcome in this case is to consider the participants' definitions of the situation. In Extract 10 Harrelson

answers a user's inquiry on whether he had been aware of Reddit before the AMA.

Extract 10

- I know Oren Moverman did **an interview** here. I did just learn about it, so I'm trying.
- **'Interview'?** This **ain't no interview**, kid, this is an internet forum where the browsers will ask you anything they want because you told them to (AMA - Ask Me Anything). [...]

The response demonstrates that the participants had very different understandings concerning the nature of the interaction situation. Although Harrelson honestly admitted that he was not aware of Reddit before the attempt at promoting his movie there, this did not grant any legitimacy in this instance because the Redditor's attention was caught by Harrelson's definition of the situation as an *interview* and she focused on refuting it. This may have been influenced by an already emerging overall evaluation of Harrelson as an illegitimate participant in the situation.

Relational legitimacy

In our data, the main grounds that contribute to relational legitimacy are (a) equal standing, (b) participation, and (c) common ground.

Equal standing

The first category, equal standing, confers relational legitimacy by reference to interpersonal similarity, such as being *down-to-earth*, *human people*, as well as equal treatment of participants and following the same rules. It is for example sometimes considered illegitimate to override the normal, equal functioning of the site by paying; therefore using *ads that lack the ability to post comments* might lead to down-voting. Our findings suggest that promotional communication is often somewhat more positively evaluated in regular posts, perhaps because regular posts face the normal voting procedure. Sponsored posts merely appear similar to regular posts—users may vote on them—however, the votes do not affect the visibility of the post. It seems, therefore, that the perceived problem is not advertising in itself, but the design-related fact that advertising is not treated in the same way as other posts, which means that users lack their usual power to influence the visibility of the post through voting or to evaluate it in a comment section. However, the rules of Reddit require that promotional communication be done using the allocated system. In Extract 11 a user alludes to the negative affect connected with astroturfing activities:

Extract 11

If Coke paid Reddit to show a Coke ad **in the advertisement spaces provided**, I don't think *anyone* would be **angry** about that.

Therefore, between the cultural expectations and interpretation frames, rules, and technological affordances, organizations are placed in a paradoxical situation where both using the built-in system and not using it may be evaluated as illegitimate based on grounds of equal standing.

Participation

Our data suggests that participation is a taken-for-granted expectation in this social media context. AMAs concerning the web browsers IE, Opera, and Firefox illustrate this. The first of the AMAs, IE failed in the eyes of the Redditors and the AMA was evaluated as the *IE fiasco*. The main problem was a failure to meet expectations concerning the level of participation, as Extract 12 illustrates:

Extract 12

They had marketing people answering questions, so *pretty much every* response was **"great question! We'll forward it to our engineers! Remember that IE is the best!"** and then they *never got back around to responding*.

By giving examples of the type of answers the IE team gave, this Redditor implicitly suggests that the quality of the participation was bad. The quantity is also judged as unsatisfactory because the promised answers were not given. In the IE case, answers in a promotional style were considered insufficient in the context. The unfolding of the discussion, then, did not correspond to the initial definition of the situation as an AMA and the implications such a situation has within the relevant cultural frame (that questions will be answered openly). Such failing also puts in question object-related legitimacy (the discussion is not thought of as useful) and subject-related legitimacy (the organization is suspected of having manipulative intentions).

Common ground

By the category of common ground, we refer to the ability to be understood and socially acceptable due to the demonstration of contextual knowledge and shared ideas and values.

Knowledge of previous similar situations and their legitimacy outcomes enable organizations to adjust to social media users' expectations. For example, knowledge of IE's AMA provided the Opera and Firefox teams with valuable information and a point of comparison to do their own AMAs. The Opera team made it clear already in the title of their post that their AMA team had *[m]ore engineers than marketers, we promise*. This suggests that they were aware of the previous situation and did not intend to follow in IE's footsteps, instead alluding to a culturally acceptable frame. Demonstrating the importance of earlier situations in the definition and evaluation of the situation, both the Opera and Firefox AMAs were in fact very positively evaluated (e.g. *Team Opera's okay in my book* and *You guys are awesome!*), with recurring comparisons to the earlier disappointment with IE.

Another point that illustrates the power of common ground to grant relational legitimacy was Opera's anti-patent statement "Trying to protect everything stifles innovation", which one Redditor reacted to with this explicit expression of positive affect: "OMGWOW I love you". Demonstrating shared ideas, interests or values is, in fact, another way to gain relational legitimacy. An example is Markus Persson, or Notch, the creator of a popular video game called Minecraft. The following extract from an AMA with Persson shows implicit positive affect related to the interpretation that he belongs to the community:

Extract 13

- Hi Notch, I was wondering, what do you do at home when you're not working?
- I **refresh reddit** *over and over and over, in like four different windows.*
- **ONE OF US, ONE OF US.**

The extract suggests that Persson is seen as a Redditor like everyone else, he is not thought to be there to advertise the game. Spending a lot of time on Reddit (participation) therefore creates common ground, although that was not the only basis for common ground in Persson's case.

Process model of legitimacy in participatory media

To further elucidate the process of legitimacy formation in the participatory media context, we have constructed the model depicted in Figure 2. The process is divided into a definition stage and an evaluation stage, which lead to a legitimacy outcome for a specific situation.

Firstly, the users' definition of the situation is influenced by expectations formed by their culturally shared interpretive frames (e.g. Redditors' generally negative attitude to promotional communication) and previous experiences (e.g. with the organization, the product, or other organizations in similar situations) and also the organizations' initial approach, namely what they say in their post. As we have discussed in this paper, differing definitions of a situation may be highly problematic, because grounds for evaluations that may or may not lead to legitimacy are context-specific: a wrong definition can lead to unacceptable behavior. In the example with actor Woody Harrelson, the fact that he defined the situation as an interview, a type of situation that exists in a different context, probably set him and his marketing team on the wrong track when anticipating what kind of behavior might be deemed legitimate. The power dynamic between Hollywood actors and journalists might allow the star to refuse to answer certain questions, but in an AMA, Redditors have the upper hand and the basic premise is that all questions should be allowed.

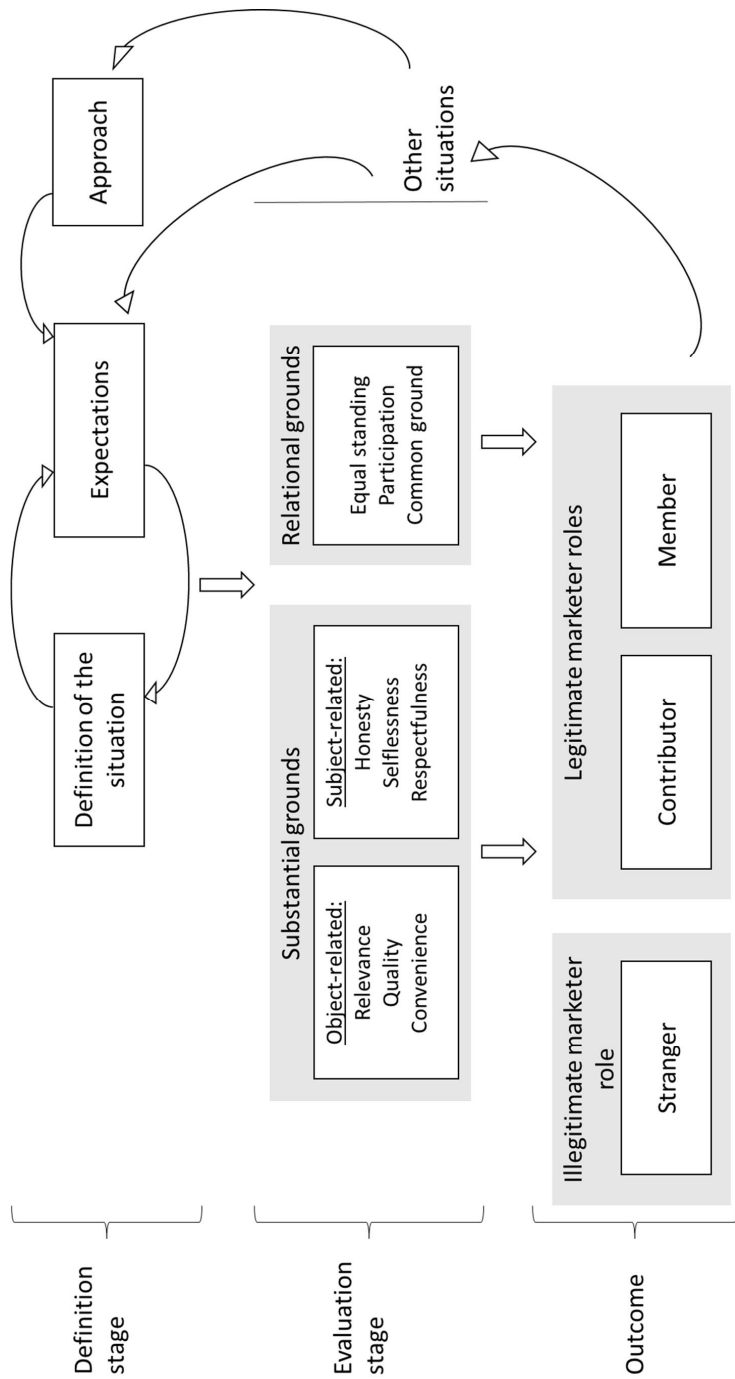


Figure 2. Model of the communicative formation of organizational legitimacy on Reddit. Arrows refer to relations of influence.

Secondly, the result of the definition stage will influence the evaluation stage. There are different types of situations within Reddit that may influence the legitimacy negotiations through the expectations of the participants. In AMAs, particularly, the expectation of membership (i.e., a history of participation) or common ground seems to be less strong (however, participation in the current situation is necessary) and in these situations non-members are often accepted, provided that there are sufficient substantial grounds to support their legitimacy. As the Woody Harrelson and IE cases demonstrate, this is open for negotiation in each individual situation.

In our empirical context, we identified nine categories of legitimacy evaluations. These could be divided into three dimensions: object-related, subject-related, and relational legitimacy. The main interpretive frame that Redditors share seems to incorporate anti-commercial and anti-advertising ideology; however, it seems that promotional communication on Reddit is particularly well tolerated when it is interpreted as containing enough grounds for relational legitimacy such as demonstrated shared values, knowledge, and interests. Where relational legitimacy is not established, promotional communication may be interpreted as an attempt by an outsider to manipulate or exploit the Redditors. However, object-related and subject-related legitimacy offer organizations a different route to legitimacy that is not so dependent on knowing or participating in the community. These two categories could be therefore called “substantial”: they focus more on a certain inherent “substance” than on a relation to the social media context and the specific online community the interaction takes place in.

Relational legitimacy differs from substantial legitimacy in the sense that it takes considerable time and investment to contribute actively and understand the community’s interpretive frames, based on commonly shared ideas and values. Those who manage to do this, however, may attain a nearly taken-for-granted position (e.g. the case of Markus Persson) and are likely to be more solidly legitimated than those whose legitimacy relies only on substantial grounds. Another key reason for conceptually separating substantial and relational grounds for legitimacy is that while a deep understanding of the relevant frames in the context will definitely help in determining how substantial legitimacy will be interpreted, substantial legitimacy is more universal: it is based on pragmatic and moral values such as usefulness, good quality, or honesty, which are less context-specific than the aspects included under relational legitimacy in our model, which in turn depend more on the interpretive frames specific to this participatory media context. Legitimacy may be based predominantly on these substantial, more easily attained grounds, but it is then more likely to be questioned, in need of more explicit negotiation and more easily shaken.

Finally, we label three categories of different legitimacy outcomes: the roles of “strangers” (illegitimate) such as Woody Harrelson and IE, “contributors” (legitimate mainly on substantial grounds) such as the CBC and Opera, and “members” (legitimate mainly on relational grounds), for example Markus Persson. With these categories, we mean to illustrate that there are two broad

ways of approaching the legitimacy negotiation on Reddit: one is to be genuinely committed to being a community member, which might be too much to ask for most organizations, and the other is to have solid substantial legitimacy grounds and a sufficient understanding of the context.

Discussion and conclusion

In this paper, we set out to explore and better understand the evaluative communication processes that contribute to socially constructing organizational legitimacy in the continuously evolving participatory media environments. Organizational actors interpret and act in situations based on their commercial frames; they pursue their economic interests by instrumentally manipulating and deploying “evocative symbols in order to garner societal support” (Suchman, 1995, p. 572). However, in online communities members have collective cultural authority over legitimation, involving, for example, a focus on community belonging (Castelló et al., 2015)—they have their own interpretive frames that members’ evaluations of organizations’ communication draw on. To shed light on the evaluative side of legitimation under these conditions, we conducted an empirical study in which we analyzed how users of Reddit, a popular online community and content sharing site, evaluate promotional communication.

Our empirical analysis showed that the Reddit community’s interpretive frames value participation and usually discourage promotional “push” communication. However, the negative affect connected to promotional communication was not always present. When the organizations’ contributions were found legitimate, the grounds for legitimation included:

- (1) *Object-related legitimacy*, which contains the legitimizing aspects of products or communication, particularly the pragmatic benefits for users based on (a) relevance, (b) quality, and (c) convenience.
- (2) *Subject-related legitimacy*, namely the social acceptability of the organizations’ behavior, specifically (a) honesty, (b) selflessness, and (c) respectfulness.
- (3) *Relational legitimacy*, which is based on the quality of the relationship between the organizations and the online community, namely whether the organization has (a) an equal standing to the community members, whether (b) it participates sufficiently, and whether (c) it has common ground such as shared values with the members.

Overall, the study offers two main contributions to existing literature on organizational legitimacy. First, we articulate a theoretical perspective on organizational legitimacy focusing particularly on the communicative evaluation of legitimacy based on context-specific frames, definitions and interpretations. This perspective highlights the communicatively constituted, situational and fragmented nature of legitimacy. Legitimacy is always contingent upon perceived consonance with the specific cultural-cognitive frameworks that are

relevant in the social situation (Scott 2014, p. 72), and evaluations of legitimacy therefore vary from context to context. We suggest, therefore, that greater attention needs to be paid to how differences in communication contexts and situations impact legitimacy evaluations in online communication.

Second, we offer an empirically grounded account of a process of legitimation in participatory media. We show, in particular, that while the community's interpretive frames, and the norms and values contained in them, tend to discourage efforts at promotional communication, the legitimacy of such communication is jointly negotiated on an ongoing basis, situation by situation. As a result, organizations may well gain legitimacy on substantial grounds (for example by providing relevant, good quality content in a non-intrusive way, as well as acting in an honest and selfless manner) or on relational grounds (an equal standing, sustained participation, and common ground such as shared values). Our findings, of course, relate particularly to the Reddit case, but we believe further research will show commonalities within social media more generally. It seems clear that, by definition, participation is such an important aspect of any social media that its importance will likely be more widespread. Previous research also shows that communities easily form online (e.g. Cova & Pace, 2006; Rheingold, 2000; Yuan, 2012): such groups will undoubtedly appreciate any serious attempt to understand and respect their interests, needs, and values.

To conclude, we argue that there is a need to rethink some of the basic assumptions of organizational legitimacy. The new and more fragmented sites of social interaction, such as participatory media, call for a more contextualized and situation-specific view of legitimacy, and particularly a focus on the active users whose (evaluative) communication constructs legitimacy. As our study illustrates, for achieving legitimacy in these contexts, it is important for organizations to better understand the participatory nature of online communities as well as the interpretive frames and specific definitions of communication situations that guide behavior and evaluations of legitimacy in the community.

Appendix: Supporting quotes*

Object-related legitimacy	
Relevance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - I think if it's a useful ad, and not a trick, then it's fine. - It would be nice if they joined the community after but we still <i>all benefit</i> from seeing something interesting. - I don't think <i>anyone</i> would be angry about that. <i>Even less</i> so if it was a <i>really funny</i> advertisement. - It was an eyerollfest. - the <i>whole</i> post was an attempt to market a movie that <i>no one knew about</i> or was excited to begin with
Quality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - If the content is good, I'm happy the creator submitted it - <i>In regards to the marketing that has been done on reddit</i>, I have to say that it is absolutely perfect. - Does reddit have a "<i>worst of</i>" nomination? Because this is <i>easily the worst and most disappointing</i> AMA I've ever seen. - It's when companies try to trick me into interacting with their stupid marketing schemes that I get <i>pissed off</i>. - Are we gonna get more BS "answers" like we did yesterday - It's just silly marketing babble changing the topic.
Convenience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - It was non-obtrusive while making it known that Opera was advertising. - it may be perceived as an intrusion - <i>sometimes</i> you guys get over zealous in promoting your app to the point it becomes spam. - We complain about ads when they're giant must-click overlays on the screen, but we also complain when they're integrated into our content. - Another kind of annoying advertising is the subtle advertising of large recognizable brands.
Subject-related legitimacy	
Honesty	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - I <i>love</i> it when companies do it honestly like this. - it is more appropriate that they did it this way rather than under some false pretences - it feels very disingenuous. - seriously, <i>ALL</i> of the comments seem fake, <i>ALL OF THEM</i> - I've found that <i>sometimes</i> those sponsored posts have very misleading titles.
Selflessness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - People dislike when people link their own content - It appears <i>nearly all</i> your posts here on reddit are for self promotion. - in the past if you were the creator of the content, posting it to reddit was taboo. - looks like he's a blog spammer -- mostly dedicated to "travel ideas." (and probably attempting to monetize the information he gleans from Reddit) - Pretty sure it's <i>only</i> tolerated because they're a public broadcaster. - Their <i>sole aim</i> is to bring media to the public
Respectfulness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - This tldr <i>pretty accurately</i> sums up how your marketing team <i>completely gave</i> Reddit the "fuck you" yesterday. - People hate advertising generally because it <i>never treats them like a thinking human being</i> - It's insulting to my intelligence. - Hey Woody, the PR person doing your AMA is kinda obnoxious. - Importantly, it doesn't treat you like an imbecile or a walking wallet
Relational legitimacy	
Equal standing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - We've been upvoting "I made an indie game/app/whatever" for years. No reason why organizations that make decent things can't get the same treatment. - Because Karma's not for sale man. . . - Commercialism has <i>always</i> been on reddit. It's when such commercialism is trying to subvert community goodwill that's concerning. - I think that adds <i>one more level</i> to the hatred we feel, because it reminds us that this isn't just a group of friends who love cats and porn and socially inept antarctic wildlife, it's a business.
Participation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>maybe</i> the admins view him as an active member of the community - This <i>mainly</i> applies to people who have zero activity outside their own app promotion posts, who unfortunately exist around here. - What about interacting with the community instead of just posting your thoughts on your blog, and posting links to it here - If they do not contribute to reddit through comments, etc, they are spammers.
Common ground	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - I love that my public broadcaster is on Reddit - That is awesome, I wish other tech companies shared your philosophy. - People <i>really</i> don't like to concept of paying to be here - Developers are the life blood of the community. - CBC knows when the narwal bacons

* Appraisal elements are bolded, graduation elements italicized

References

- Aldrich, H. E., & Fiol, C. M. (1994). Fools Rush in? The Institutional Context of Industry Creation. *The Academy of Management Review*, 19(4), 645-670. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/258740>
- Alvesson, M., & Kärreman, D. (2000). Varieties of discourse: on the study of organizations through discourse analysis. *Human Relations*, 53(9), 1125-1149. doi:10.1177/0018726700539002
- Ashforth, B. E., & Gibbs, B. W. (1990). The double-edge of organizational legitimation. *Organization Science*, 1(2), 177-194. doi:10.1287/orsc.1.2.177
- Bansal, P., & Clelland, I. (2004). Talking Trash: Legitimacy, Impression Management, and Unsystematic Risk in the Context of the Natural Environment. *Academy of Management Journal*, 47(1), 93-103. doi:10.2307/20159562
- Barley, S. R. (2008). Coalface institutionalism. In R. Greenwood, C. Oliver, K. Sahlin, & R. Suddaby (Eds.), *The Sage handbook of organizational institutionalism* (pp. 491–518). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Barros, M. (2014). Tools of Legitimacy: The Case of the Petrobras Corporate Blog. *Organization Studies*, 35(8), 1211-1230. doi:10.1177/0170840614530914
- Bitektine, A. (2011). Toward a Theory of Social Judgments of Organizations: The Case of Legitimacy, Reputation, and Status. *Academy of Management Review*, 36(1), 151-179. Retrieved from <http://amr.aom.org/content/36/1/151.abstract>
- Bitektine, A., & Haack, P. (2015). The “Macro” and the “Micro” of Legitimacy: Toward a Multilevel Theory of the Legitimacy Process. *Academy of Management Review*, 40(1), 49-75. doi:10.5465/amr.2013.0318
- Blumer, H. (1969). *Symbolic interactionism. Perspective and method*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- Castelló, I., Etter, M., & Nielsen, F. Å. (2015). Strategies of legitimacy through social media: The networked strategy. *Journal of Management Studies*, n/a-n/a. doi:10.1111/joms.12145
- Cornelissen, J. P., Durand, R., Fiss, P. C., Lammers, J. C., & Vaara, E. (2015). Putting communication front and center in institutional theory and analysis. *Academy of Management Review*, 40(1), 10-27. doi:10.5465/amr.2014.0381
- Cova, B., & Pace, S. (2006). Brand community of convenience products: new forms of customer empowerment – the case “my Nutella The Community”. *European Journal of Marketing*, 40(9/10), 1087-1105. doi:10.1108/03090560610681023
- Deephouse, D. L., & Suchman, M. C. (2008). Legitimacy in organizational institutionalism. In R. Greenwood, C. Oliver, K. Sahlin, & R. Suddaby (Eds.), *The Sage handbook of organizational institutionalism* (pp. 49–77). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Dennis, A., & Martin, P. J. (2005). Symbolic interactionism and the concept of power. *British Journal of Management*, 56(2), 191-213.
- Erkama, N., & Vaara, E. (2010). Struggles Over Legitimacy in Global Organizational Restructuring: A Rhetorical Perspective on Legitimation Strategies and Dynamics in a Shutdown Case. *Organization Studies*, 31(7), 813-839. doi:10.1177/0170840609346924
- Fournier, S., & Avery, J. (2011). The uninvited brand. *Business Horizons*, 54(3), 193-207. doi:<http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.bushor.2011.01.001>
- Goffman, E. (1959). *The presentation of self in everyday life*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday.
- Goffman, E. (1986 [1974]). *Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience*. Boston: Northeastern University Press.
- Golant, B. D., & Sillince, J. A. A. (2007). The Constitution of Organizational Legitimacy: A Narrative Perspective. *Organization Studies*, 28(8), 1149-1167. doi:10.1177/0170840607075671
- Greenwood, R., Oliver, C., Sahlin, K., & Suddaby, R. (2008). Introduction. In R. Greenwood, C. Oliver, K. Sahlin, & R. Suddaby (Eds.), *The Sage handbook of organizational institutionalism*. London: SAGE Publications.
- Hallett, T., & Ventresca, M. J. (2006). Inhabited Institutions: Social Interactions and Organizational Forms in Gouldner’s Patterns of Industrial Bureaucracy. *Theory and Society*, 35(2), 213-236. doi:10.1007/s11186-006-9003-z
- Harmon, D. J., Green, S. E., & Goodnight, G. T. (2015). A model of rhetorical legitimation: The structure of communication and cognition underlying

- institutional maintenance and change. *Academy of Management Review*, 40(1), 76-95. doi:10.5465/amr.2013.0310
- Hart, C. (2014). *Discourse, grammar and ideology: Functional and cognitive perspectives*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing.
- Hoefler, R. L., & Green Jr, S. E. (2016). A Rhetorical Model of Institutional Decision Making: The Role of Rhetoric in the Formation and Change of Legitimacy Judgments. *Academy of Management Review*, 41(1), 130-150. doi:10.5465/amr.2014.0330
- Huy, Q. N., Corley, K. G., & Kraatz, M. S. (2014). From Support to Mutiny: Shifting Legitimacy Judgments and Emotional Reactions Impacting the Implementation of Radical Change. *Academy of Management Journal*, 57(6), 1650-1680. doi:10.5465/amj.2012.0074
- Johansson, J. (2004). *In Your Face: How American Marketing Excess Fuels Anti-Americanism*. Upper Saddle River: FT Prentice Hall.
- Johnson, C., Dowd, T. J., & Ridgeway, C. L. (2006). Legitimacy as a social process. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 32(1), 53-78. doi:10.1146/annurev.soc.32.061604.123101
- Kaplan, A. M., & Haenlein, M. (2010). Users of the world, unite! The challenges and opportunities of Social Media. *Business Horizons*, 53(1), 59-68. doi:10.1016/j.bushor.2009.09.003
- Kozinets, R. V. (2002). The field behind the screen: using netnography for marketing research in online communities. *Journal of Marketing Research*, 39, 61-72. doi:10.1509/jmkr.39.1.61.18935
- Kozinets, R. V. (2010). *Netnography: Doing ethnographic research online*. Los Angeles: Sage.
- Kozinets, R. V., de Valck, K., Wojnicki, A. C., & Wilner, S. J. S. (2010). Networked Narratives: Understanding Word-of-Mouth Marketing in Online Communities. *Journal of Marketing*, 74(2), 71-89. doi:10.1509/jmkg.74.2.71
- Lamin, A., & Zaheer, S. (2011). Wall Street vs. Main Street: Firm Strategies for Defending Legitimacy and Their Impact on Different Stakeholders. *Organization Science*, 23(1), 47-66. doi:10.1287/orsc.1100.0631
- Martin, J. R. (2000). Beyond exchange: Appraisal systems in english. In S. Hunston & G. Thompson (Eds.), *Evaluation in text: Authorial stance and the construction of discourse*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Martin, J. R. (2004). Mourning: how we get aligned. *Discourse & Society*, 15(2-3), 321-344. doi:10.1177/0957926504041022
- Martin, J. R., & White, P. R. R. (2005). *The Language of Evaluation: Appraisal in English*. Basingstoke Palgrave Macmillan.
- Massanari, A. L. (2015). *Participatory Culture, Community, and Play: Learning from Reddit*. New York: Peter Lang Publishing Incorporated.
- Mead, G. H. (1934). *Mind, self, and society: From the standpoint of a social behaviorist*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Ocasio, W., Loewenstein, J., & Nigam, A. (2015). How streams of communication reproduce and change institutional logics: The role of categories. *Academy of Management Review*, 40(1), 28-48.
- Putnam, L. L., & Fairhurst, G. T. (2001). Discourse analysis in organizations. Issues and concerns. In F. M. Jablin & L. L. Putnam (Eds.), *The New Handbook of Organizational Communication* (pp. 79-137). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Rheingold, H. (2000). *The virtual community: Homesteading on the electronic frontier*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Rheingold, H. (2008). Using participatory media and public voice to encourage civic engagement. In W. L. Bennett (Ed.), *Civic Life Online: Learning How Digital Media Can Engage Youth* (pp. 97-118). Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.
- Ruef, M., & Scott, W. R. (1998). A Multidimensional Model of Organizational Legitimacy: Hospital Survival in Changing Institutional Environments. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 43(4), 877-904. doi:10.2307/2393619
- Schneider, D., Souza, J. d., & Lucas, E. M. (2014, 5-8 Oct. 2014). *Towards a typology of social news apps from a Crowd Computing perspective*. Paper presented at the Systems, Man and Cybernetics (SMC), 2014 IEEE International Conference on.
- Scott, W. R. (2014). *Institutions and Organizations: Ideas, Interests, and Identities* (4th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

- Scott, W. R., & Davis, G. F. (2007). *Organizations and organizing: Rational, natural, and open system perspectives*. New York: Prentice Hall.
- Suchman, M. C. (1995). Managing legitimacy: Strategic and institutional approaches. *Academy of Management Review*, 20, 571-610.
- Thomas, W. I. (1923). *The unadjusted girl: with cases and standpoint for behavior analysis*. Boston, MA: Little, Brown, and Company.
- Tost, L. P. (2011). An integrative model of legitimacy judgments. *Academy of Management Review*, 36(4), 686-710. doi:10.5465/amr.2010.0227
- Vaara, E., & Monin, P. (2008). A Recursive Perspective on Discursive Legitimation and Organizational Action in Mergers and Acquisitions. *Organization Science*, 21(1), 3-22. doi:10.1287/orsc.1080.0394
- Vaara, E., & Tienari, J. (2002). Justification, Legitimization and Naturalization of Mergers and Acquisitions: A Critical Discourse Analysis of Media Texts. *Organization*, 9(2), 275-304. doi:10.1177/1350508402009002912
- Van Maanen, J. (1979). The fact of fiction in organizational ethnography. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 24(4), 539-550.
- Weber, M. (1978). *Economy and society: an outline of interpretive sociology*. University of Berkeley, CA: California Press.
- Yuan, E. J. (2012). A culturalist critique of 'online community' in new media studies. *New Media & Society*, 15(5), 665-679. doi:10.1177/1461444812462847

Essay 4

Lillqvist, Ella. Interpellative communicative constitution: Organizing through ideology and identification. Unpublished manuscript.

Interpellative communicative constitution: Organizing through ideology and identification

Ella Lillqvist

Abstract

This study contributes to our understanding of the communicative constitution of organizations by examining Nerdfighteria, a group that was formed around a YouTube channel and that can be characterized as a partial organization. Drawing from Althusser's notion of interpellation the study introduces the concept of "interpellative constitution" which sheds light on a specific type of organizational membership construction. In this process, ideological discourse creates a subject position that certain individuals recognize and identify with, drawing them in as members. The process results in an "insider-oriented" and "ideologically coherent", like-minded organization. Discursive resources used in the interpellative process are analyzed.

Keywords: discursive resources, interpellation, communicative constitution, online organizations, netnography, discourse analysis

Introduction

Currently, more and more people gather in various groups in what is often called "participatory" or "social" media (e.g. Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Rheingold, 2008). Some of these groups can be thought of as a "new type of organization where ideas, resources and members flow in and out and boundaries are highly permeable and dynamic" (Jarvenpaa & Lang, 2011, p. 441). Some are activist groups which advance a specific ideology, for example the Anonymous group (see Coleman, 2012; Dobusch & Schoeneborn, 2013), while others gather around another type of shared goal, such as writing Wikipedia articles (Kozica, Gebhardt, Müller-Seitz, & Kaiser, 2015).

The recent academic interest in these kinds of organizations can be situated within a wider trend of turning attention to organizational types that have pre-

viously received little scholarly attention (Ahrne & Brunsson, 2011; Parker, Cheney, Fournier, & Land, 2014). For example, Ahrne and Brunsson (2011) have argued that more research is needed on “partial” organizations which do not conform to all the usual criteria of organizations. The need for further study in this field is related to the proliferation of participatory media which changes communication and thereby can lead to changes also in organizing and organizations—assuming that “communication generates, not merely expresses, key organizational realities” (Ashcraft, Kuhn, & Cooren, 2009, p. 2) as argued by the research stream known as CCO (communicative constitution of organizations) (see also Cooren, Kuhn, Cornelissen, & Clark, 2011; Putnam & Nicotera, 2009; Taylor & Van Every, 2011).

For CCO theory, it is important not only to recognize that organizations are constituted in communication, but also to explain in more detail how this happens (e.g. Putnam, Nicotera, & McPhee, 2009). The present study contributes to the understanding of mechanisms of communicative constitution by introducing the idea of “interpellative constitution”, based on Althusser’s (2003, 2008) concept of interpellation. Althusser (2008) compares the idea of interpellation to a situation where a police officer hails someone in the street and the person turns around, recognizing that it was him who was meant. Similarly, ideological discourse also “calls” to individuals and they recognize the call and react to it. Discourse thus “recruits” certain individuals, “transforming” them into subjects. However, Althusser also claims that, in fact, ideology has “always-already interpellated individuals as subjects” (Althusser, 2008, p. 49). Thus, interpellative constitution recruits new members by calling to them as if they were already members.

The present study draws its data from an online group called Nerdfighteria. It encompasses in particular a YouTube channel called Vlogbrothers by John and Hank Green and a fan group formed around it. I argue that it is feasible to think of Nerdfighteria as a partial organization (see Ahrne & Brunsson, 2011) because it manifests some degree of coordination, boundaries and goals, which are often thought of as hallmarks of organization (Barnes, Fogg, Stephens, & Titman, 2013; McPhee & Zaig, 2000; Miles, Snow, Meyer, & Coleman, 1978). This case is particularly useful for examining how membership is communicatively constituted when there are no official membership criteria. Instead of explicit recruiting, Nerdfighteria focuses on communicating to insiders about shared values and ideas (ideological discourse), proposing a subject position they can identify with. Newcomers stumble upon this discourse through YouTube’s algorithmic filters or because of word of mouth, and people who get interpellated are self-selected as members. Regardless of a lack of explicit promotion, the Vlogbrothers channel has progressively gained a following of over two million people, which may be due to a cultural demand for its ideological message—acceptance for nerds (see also Quail, 2011).

Interpellative discourse therefore facilitates communicative constitution by promoting identification and membership. I argue that Nerdfighteria is an interesting example of interpellative constitution, and that this kind of constitution leads to specific characteristics in the resulting (partial) organization:

insider-orientedness (lack of explicit external communication) and ideological coherence, namely like-mindedness and scarcity of internal criticism.

The paper is organized as follows: first, I will take a look at CCO and membership, second, the process of interpellation. I then present the method which combines discourse analysis (e.g. Alvesson & Kärreman, 2000; Fairclough, 2003; Gee, 1999; Wodak & Meyer, 2009) and netnography (i.e., online ethnography) (e.g. Kozinets, 1997; 2002; 2010). Subsequently, findings are presented and discussed.

Communicative constitution and membership

The stream of literature known as CCO sees communication as the “ongoing, dynamic, interactive process of manipulating symbols toward the creation, maintenance, destruction, and/or transformation of meanings” (Ashcraft et al., 2009, p. 22; see also Cooren et al., 2011; Putnam & Nicotera, 2009). Organizations are therefore not seen as mere “containers” for communication; instead communication is vital to organizing and brings the organization into being (Ashcraft et al., 2009).

Within a structuration theory based strain of CCO research (e.g. McPhee & Zaig, 2000) it is argued that four processes or “flows” operate in the communicative constitution of organizations: membership negotiation (who is a member of an organization and who is not), self-structuring (active structuring of the organization, e.g. by managers), activity coordination (directing day to day activities), and institutional positioning (positioning the organization in relation to society and other organizations). As Browning, Greene, Sitkin, Sutcliffe, and Obstfeld (2009) point out, the four communication flows are not completely separate, but intersecting.

Ahrne and Brunsson (2011) argue that it is possible to organize through the use of just one or few of the elements they consider crucial for organizations—membership, hierarchy, rules, monitoring and sanctions—and although different from complete organizations, these partial organizations can still be distinguished from, for example, networks and institutions. This idea is relevant when thinking of online groups as organizations, because they often differ in many ways from “traditional” organizations. In this paper, I focus particularly on the aspect of *membership*: how membership is communicatively achieved in a case where no official membership is needed and therefore *identifying* as a member is sufficient.

McPhee and Zaig (2000, p. 28) present a definition of organization as “a social interaction system [...] including coordinated action and interaction within and across a socially constructed system boundary, manifestly directed toward a privileged set of outcomes”. Institutional positioning refers to communication across this system boundary and is therefore related to the conception of organizational boundaries as identity, as an “often unconscious mind-set that organizational members use to gain cognitive and emotional coherence about ‘who we are’” (Santos & Eisenhardt, 2005). In fact, although they choose to use the broader term “positioning”, McPhee and Zaig (2000) mention that “iden-

tity negotiation” would have been another possible term for institutional positioning. Membership negotiation is another crucial process because “[o]rganizations exist when they draw members in, and lead them to take part in and understand the interactional world unique to the organization” (McPhee & Zaug, 2000). Starting to identify with the organization is an important part of this process. The present study aims to shed further light on these communicative negotiations of membership. The argument is that ideological discourse enables identification that forms the basis for membership.

Ideology, interpellation and identification

Althusser’s metaphorical interpellation happens through ideology which in his definition represents the “imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence” (2008, p. 36). Ideology has also been described as general social beliefs that control and organize other shared beliefs (van Dijk, 2006). Interpellation refers to a process which Althusser (2008) describes using the example of a hail from a police officer followed by the hailed individual turning round. This physical conversion also converts the person into a self-conscious subject, as she recognizes that it actually was her who was hailed (Althusser, 2008). This subjectification also involves power effects and facilitates controlling people (Fleming & Spicer, 2007). Paradoxically, ideology is described as non-temporal, it has “always-already” interpellated individuals as subjects (Althusser, 2008). Therefore people in a sense become what they already were.

Interpellation involves two “stages”, recognition (I notice that I am being hailed), which leads to reaction (I turn around). Interpellation presupposes that the person is, so to speak, “tuned to the right frequency” to receive the message in question. As Althusser’s description of the always-already interpellated subject implies, the discourse that interpellates must contain something familiar that is recognized, but mere recognition is not sufficient—that something has to have an appeal that makes it relevant for the receiver. The recognition phase therefore involves grabbing someone’s attention *and* making them realize “this is meant for me”. As for the reaction phase, it involves the hailed person starting to identify with the ideological discourse and reproduce it.

Through a process of interpellation, ideology therefore draws people into subject positions or identities in which they can recognize themselves; it can be described as an identification process. Ideologies are, in fact, fundamental schemata which define the membership criteria of a group: “whenever a group has developed an ideology, such an ideology at the same time also defines the basis for the group’s identity” (van Dijk, 1998, p. 118). The current case more specifically involves organizational identification, the “process by and extent to which individual members align their personal notions of self with collective identities” (Alvesson, Ashcraft, & Thomas, 2008, p. 10). These collective identities are defined based on elements of a specific ideological constellation involving for example actions, goals, norms and values (Ashforth, Harrison, &

Corley, 2008; van Dijk, 2014). Currently, organizational identification is increasingly seen as a symbolic, rhetorical or discursive process (Kuhn, 2006, 2009; Scott, Corman, & Cheney, 1998); interpellation is one discursive process that can lead to identification. This process involves both insiders and outsiders (Coupland & Brown, 2004; Gioia, Price, Hamilton, & Thomas, 2010) (institutional positioning). In interpellative constitution it is particularly central that intergroup comparisons intensify people's commitment to their own groups (Haslam & Ellemers, 2006; Ren, Kraut, & Kiesler, 2007)—they make it apparent that others have very different ideologies. After all, “it is through the existence of out-groups that an in-group becomes salient to individual perception and attachment” (Alvesson et al., 2008, p. 10).

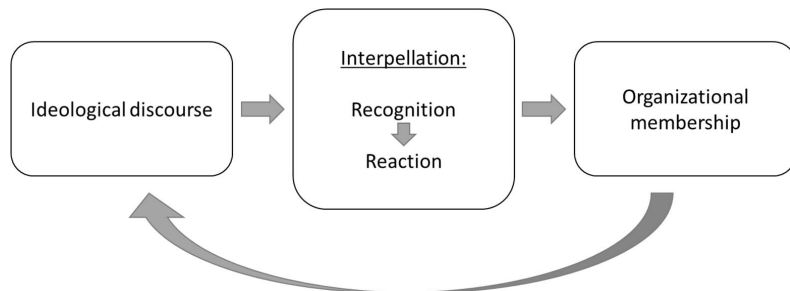


Figure 1. Interpellative constitution.

Figure 1 provides an overview of the process I call interpellative constitution. Ideological discourse leads to interpellation which involves recognition (requires familiarity and appeal) and reaction (involves identification with and reproduction of the discourse). In an informal partial organization, being interpellated can be a sufficient criteria for membership. The process is cyclical as new members start spreading the ideological discourse and providing opportunities for more people to be interpellated.

Method and data

I study Nerdfighteria as an illustrative case of interpellative constitution and set out to examine 1) what discursive resources can be identified in the interpellative process, and 2) what features the resulting organization has. The methodology of the study combines discourse analysis (e.g., Alvesson & Kärreman, 2000; Fairclough, 2003; Gee, 1999; Wodak & Meyer, 2009) and online ethnography, i.e. netnography (Kozinets, 1997, 2002, 2010).

The case

Vlogbrothers is a YouTube channel started in 2007 by two American brothers, John Green (novelist) and Hank Green (online entrepreneur, musician) as an experiment to keep in touch without text-based communication for one year. During that first year the project was known as “Brotherhood 2.0”. John Green invented the term *Nerdfighter* during the first year of the channel’s existence.

The rapidly growing group of enthusiasts became known as *Nerdfighteria* and spread to several other specifically created online sites such as discussion forums, blogs, a wiki, a subreddit, etc. Offline meetings have also been organized in many countries.

The Vlogbrothers channel had in October 2015 over 2.5 million subscribers and the videos had been viewed altogether over 560 million times. The authors also have several other YouTube channels that have specific themes, including Crashcourse (educational) and SciShow (science news). Vlogbrothers, however, is informal and covers a broad range of topics from politics to jokes and relationship advice, also promotion for their own music, t-shirts, and other products. John Green's books, in particular, have reached enormous popularity in recent years, with also a movie adaptation of his best-selling novel *The Fault in Our Stars* released in 2014. There are, then, also economic aspects to Nerdfighteria.

Nerdfighteria includes two parts, the "hearth", led by the Green brothers, which has become progressively more like a traditional business organization (employing 25 people, according to one of the news articles in the data), and the surrounding fan group. Together, these parts make up a larger organization which lacks official status, traditional form, and clear boundaries. It has however become progressively more organization-like, with more organized activities and goals, and reached an audience/membership of millions. Activities and goals include social activism such as an annual charity initiative "Project for Awesome" (P4A). Nerdfighteria could therefore be characterized as a social movement or fan activist organization (Kligler-Vilenchik, 2013; Kligler-Vilenchik, McVeigh-Schultz, Weitbrecht, & Tokuhama, 2012). According to the 2014 Nerdfighteria census, approximately 23 % of respondents had somehow participated in P4A. Another example of this kind of activity is lending money as part of the Nerdfighters lending team on the micro loan provider Kiva.org (13 % had done this).

Netnographic data collection

Netnography is a specialized form of ethnography which explores the culture and behavior of online groups through prolonged observation (Garcia, Standlee, Bechhoff, & Cui, 2009; Kozinets, 1997, 2002, 2010; Murthy, 2008). In this study, a netnographic approach was used mainly in the data collection phase and to gain a general level understanding of the material. Netnographic observation helps to form a big picture of the data and to understand it from the perspective of the participants, i.e., gaining an understanding of the participants own "context models", involving their knowledge, attitudes and ideologies (van Dijk, 2009).

I chose the case of Nerdfighteria because after it came to my attention by chance (YouTube suggested some Vlogbrothers videos to me), I thought it was an interesting example of the new kind of activity that the participatory media context enables. In the beginning, the approach was largely exploratory. First, following Kozinets (2002), as much as possible was learnt about the chosen group and its forums in order to gain a sufficient understanding of its culture.

Second, the data were collected, guided by the aims of the study (as they started to crystallize) (see Kozinets, 2002; Kozinets, 2010). In the present study, the data include field notes, collected videos and their transcripts, comments relating to these videos (a sample collected using the web service InfoExtractor), newspaper articles, and other relevant online texts such as material related to Nerdfighter charity projects and wiki and blog texts about Nerdfighteria (see Table 1 for details). The data collection involved an observation period of approximately 18 months. As the online context permits this, observation was conducted both in real time and taking “trips” to older materials.

Data type	Sources	Items	Pages (total)
Videos & transcripts	YouTube channels: vlogbrothers, hankschannel, Kristina Horner	11	29
Sample of comments (to each video)	YouTube channels: vlogbrothers, hankschannel, Kristina Horner	11	99
News articles	The New Yorker, The Wall Street Journal, Mashable, Huffington Post, The Diamondback	6	23
Other online documents	effyeahnerdfighters.com, wikihow.com (How to be a Nerdfighter), nerdfighteria.info (dictionary), nerdfighteria.com (NF lexicon), project-forawesome.com, indiegogo.com (Project for awesome), kiva.org (Nerdfighters lending team), tswgo.org, surveymonkey.com (2014 census questions), subbable.com	12	55
Field notes	Observation	1	12
Total		41	218

Table 1. The data.

Kozinets (2010) argues that regular, real time following of the studied group can be considered as the minimal level of netnographic participation. This is the level that was used in this study; the method involved immersing myself in the environment under study, subscribing to the Vlogbrothers channel and related other channels, regularly following the videos and discussions, as well as reflecting on how I personally felt the interpellative call.

Similarly to ethnography, netnography poses certain ethical questions, notably because people are not always fully aware of which online spaces are private and which are public (Garcia et al., 2009; Kozinets, 2010). However, due to the large amount of participants and the fact that videos and comments are visible without registration and signing in, it is unlikely that anyone would consider YouTube comments a private area, and indeed, no such interpretations were detected during observation. Further, as the topic does not seem to be sensitive (see also Kozinets & Handelman, 1998) nor the group vulnerable (see discussion in Murthy, 2008), “minimum cloaking” (Kozinets, 2010, p. 154) is used: the group under study is identified but no usernames are reproduced, and case-by-case consideration was given to reproducing verbatim quotes as they could enable identifying the real names of writers.

Discourse analysis

As discourse is a central way in which ideologies and identities are acquired, expressed, and reproduced (e.g., van Dijk, 1998) analyzing discourse helps shed light on how certain subject positions are socially constructed in interaction and what (often taken-for-granted) meanings are connected to them, thus providing insight to the functioning of the interpellation process. In this study, I am particularly interested in the discursive resources for expressing identification and membership. These resources support expressing the content of the ideology, such as norms, values, actions and goals (van Dijk, 2014).

The collected data were analyzed using an approach to discourse analysis which focuses on discursive resources. The notion of discursive resource can be seen as operating “at a ‘meso’ level in that it simultaneously incorporates elements of situated practice and is conditioned by prevailing institutionalized discourses” (Kuhn, 2009). Thus the method combines the analysis of macro level cultural “Discourses with a capital D” and micro level, linguistic level analysis of “discourses with a small d” (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2000; Fairclough, 2003; Gee, 1999) in order to gain an understanding of ideology as it is represented and constructed in interaction. This approach enables connecting the communication in the specific research context to larger cultural discourses which underlie and shape the micro level interaction and are used as resources in it (Kuhn, 2006, 2009).

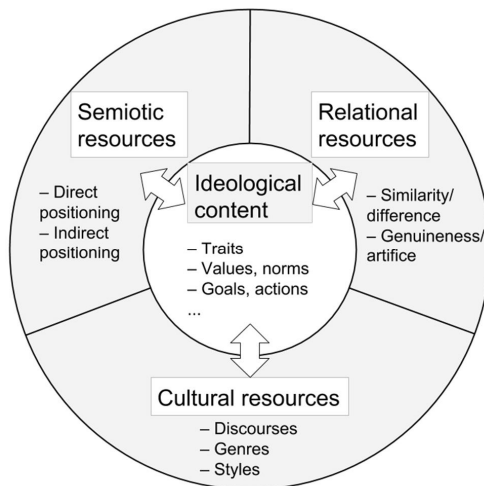


Figure 2. Discursive resources in overview.

More specifically, in addition to a basic qualitative approach of careful observation and iteratively going back and forth between data and theory, as well as utilizing the contextual information gained during the observation phase, the analysis drew form previous discursive and linguistic research to construct an analytical framework of discursive resources for identification and membership (see Figure 2 for an overview). In particular, Bucholtz and Hall (2005)

have reviewed language-centered research on identity and identified various micro level discursive resources which allow speakers to continuously position themselves and others as particular kinds of people. This set of resources is not meant as exhaustive, and the categories are not mutually exclusive, but interconnected.

Firstly, there are semiotic (e.g. linguistic, visual) resources which include (a) direct references to group membership using specific labels and (b) indirect references using for example conversational implicatures (Grice, 1975), which require cultural or contextual knowledge to be correctly interpreted, or interactional stances, which are evaluative, affective or epistemic orientations displayed in interaction (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005; Johnstone, 2007). Secondly, there are relational resources such as (a) accentuating similarity or difference to other groups or ideologies (Fairclough, 2003) and thus constructing membership, and (b) focusing on genuineness/artifice (constructing a difference between a “real” and “fake” member) (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005). In addition, broader cultural practices can also be used and modified as discursive resources—such practices can take the form of (a) discourses (“big D” discourses) which are ways of representing, (b) genres, i.e. ways of acting, and (c) styles which can be described as ways of being (Fairclough, 2003). These form the final, broadest layer of the analytical framework.

Findings

Interpellation of Nerdfighter subjects

In terms of interpellation and creation of subject positions, direct references to membership categories, using the labels *Nerdfighter(s)* and *Nerdfighteria*, played a key role in the case. A common name, in fact, helps carve out the group as something particular, relatively durable and significant instead of merely a fleeting gathering, as it allows categorization and separation from outsiders. According to a survey from 2014, “Nerdfighter census”, 73 % of respondents had referred to themselves as a Nerdfighter, suggesting a relatively high level of identification with the label.

The origin of the term Nerdfighter can be found in one of the early videos, where John Green misreads the name of a game, “Aero Fighters”, and says: *This game seems to be called Nerd Fighters. That’s my favorite kind of fighters!* At first, then, the label did not refer to anything in particular; it was an incomplete symbol, a signifier without a signified (Saussure, 1967). However, the Green brothers and the fans then started to develop the signified and the word caught on in the sense of a nerd that fights for (or against) something. Although they did not at first specifically use the term to refer to themselves, the usage soon became consistently self-referential. The derivative *Nerdfighteria*, often metaphorically understood as a place: island, town etc., was created later.

Existing cultural discourses related to nerds played a vital role in the creation of these new labels that could be used as direct references to membership. The recognition phase of interpellation is based on this familiarity, but it also re-

quires an additional layer of appeal. As defined by Kendall (2000), nerds are often male, intelligent, valuing knowledge and interested in for example math, science, and science fiction; however, they are also associated with being socially inept, dressing badly and even having poor personal hygiene. With the negative connotations contained in the existing cultural discourses, the stereotype of the nerd required creative appropriation. The Nerdfighters and particularly the Green brothers therefore proceeded to rid the term of its negative connotations (see Extract 1).

Extract 1

I know that right now, the flamers are all flexing their little flame fingers, preparing to write “u r a nurd” [appears written in the video]. Hank, I have a serious question. Why is being a nerd bad? Saying “I notice you’re a nerd” is like saying “Hey, I notice that you’d rather be intelligent than stupid, that you’d rather be thoughtful than vapid, that you believe there are things that matter more than the arrest record of Lindsay Lohan.” Why is that?
(John Green)

In this quote, the positive features of the pre-existing cultural discourse, intelligence and interest in knowledge and learning, appear as elements of ideology required for the proposed subject position of Nerdfighter. An indirect reference, namely stance, is used here in the form of the repeated critical *why*-questions. At the same time, the relational discursive resource of similarity/difference is also mobilized; outsiders, specifically people who use the word *nerd* as an insult, are ridiculed as shallow, stupid and ignorant (this is emphasized by the misspelling in the quotation).

Always already Nerd(fighter)s

Many Nerdfighters interpret identification with the new subject position as life-changing:

Extract 2

[Person A] Nerd girls are a scarcity sadly

[Person B] We’re not really a scarcity but...even more so [than] for guys, it’s been a bad thing for girls to be nerds. Some of us try to act like non-nerds (i did ‘til I became a nerdfighter). Quiet girls tend to be nerds, so you may not realize some of us are nerds. [...] The scarcity is a facade.

(YouTube comments)

Referring to a discriminating cultural discourse connected particularly to female nerds, person B in Extract 2 expresses that becoming a Nerdfighter allowed her to be more open about who she felt she (already) was. She uses a relational genuineness resource, emphasizing the authenticity of her identity and that of other female nerds by stating that before becoming a Nerdfighter she *tried* to act like a *non-nerd*; this implies that the effort was unsuccessful, merely a false *facade*. She, then, “always-already” was a Nerdfighter subject,

and the interpellation of the Nerdfighter ideology allowed her to recognize this. At the same time, however, she is actively participating in the reinterpretation of the nerd label by questioning the strongly gendered cultural connotations associated with it.

The following comment to a Vlogbrothers' thanksgiving video is another example of the "always-already" quality of the Nerdfighter subject position, becoming who they already are:

Extract 3

I'm thankful for you and John for making a safe place for nerds to be themselves.

Here, the writer indirectly positions him/herself as a Nerdfighter and a nerd by communicating a positive stance particularly through the word thankful. The example also suggests that at least some members feel that there is social discrimination against them in the wider cultural context, requiring a safe place. Nerdfighter ideology is, then, portrayed as a kind of activism, fighting for their right to be who they are.

Joining Nerdfighteria is often made sound very easy: *if you've seen more than one episode of Brotherhood 2.0, you're not really a NiT ["Nerdfighter in Training"] any more, you're a Nerdfighter* (Hank Green). Although a relational resource is used here to construct a difference between genuine members, Nerdfighters, and not (yet) genuine members, NiTs, this difference is simultaneously contradicted by defining a Nerdfighter as basically anyone watching Vlogbrothers videos. In other contexts, the ease of becoming Nerdfighter is taken to the extreme:

Extract 4

What is a Nerdfighter, you ask? Well, if you're wondering that, you probably are one. (Tumblr: Eff Yeah Nerdfighters)

This, again, points to the idea that the interpellated people somehow already are Nerdfighters when they become aware of Nerdfighteria. The same idea is present also in Extract 5, which is from a video filmed in a library by two ordinary Nerdfighters: one can be a Nerdfighter without realizing it:

Extract 5

There are a lot of people here who are most definitely Nerdfighters, who don't know they are Nerdfighters. So we decided we would help them out by putting "secret memorandums" inside places where Nerdfighters are most likely to look. Where would Nerdfighters find these notes? Books, of course.

These broad-brush definitions of *Nerdfighter* and of *nerd* as anyone who is intelligent and interested in learning, make it possible for very different people to be interpellated by the discourse, and thus partly explain the rapid growth of Nerdfighteria.

Nerdfighter ideology

Ideological content is expressed for example in norms, values, goals and specific actions to promote those goals; these shed further light on membership criteria.

In Extract 6, person C expresses a doubt concerning how easy it really is to become a Nerdfighter: Is it really enough to just be interpellated?

Extract 6

[Person C] Hmm.. Becoming a nerdfighter is that easy? Because I want to be part of your nerd community. :p but I feel like I need to be baptized or something. Plus I need some self-improvement, such as: not being so pessimistic about the world [...] I feel this could make me into a better person. :3
[Person D] Naaaah! Just hang with us. Be Awesome, share cool stuff, in general be nice: s'all good.

The extract suggests that person C has understood Nerdfighter values as including optimism and being a good person, but with the reference to the need of *self-improvement* s/he constructs a difference between her/himself and the available Nerdfighter subject position. The person probably bases this understanding of Nerdfighters on a period of observation, because newcomers to online communities typically “lurk” for long periods before becoming active members (Rafaëli, Ravid, & Soroka, 2004; Ren et al., 2007). Person D, while dismissing the apparent worries of the member candidate, simultaneously confirms C’s overall understanding: a Nerdfighter should be *awesome* and *nice*. The example suggests that a portrayal of Nerdfighters as very good, kind and optimistic may limit interpellation and membership, as some people might not feel they can identify with such an idealized picture. Overall, however, it seems that members understand the ideal not as an entry requirement but as an appealing vision to strive for, and they welcome people who express interest in becoming Nerdfighters.

Extract 7, from a video Hank Green filmed at an educational YouTube video makers’ conference, also illustrates some of the values that underlies Nerdfighter discourse.

Extract 7

Smarter Every Day is going to do a whole video on that memory spring thing, and I’m looking forward to it, so you should subscribe to his channel [...]—and MinutePhysics and all of Brady’s channels—so many channels! [...] I’m really happy to be here, I’m really happy to see that old industries can have innovations, but having seen the perspective of all these innovators and educators, there’s nothing that excites me more than revolutionizing how we teach and also what we teach. John, I honestly think that we are part of that innovation [...] we are lucky to have a community of people that support that, so thank you to everyone who does.

The ideological content reflected in Extract 7 includes appreciation of community and a belief in progress through science, intelligence, and learning. Appreciation for being part of something bigger, a community, is seen in the fact that other YouTube authors (*Smarter Every Day*, *Brady's channels*) are not depicted as outsiders, competitors, but as members of the same community, and in the explicit mention of *supportive community* in the end of the extract. It is easy for a viewer to identify with *everyone who supports that*, as support is not defined in more concrete terms. The other YouTube authors mentioned specifically make science related content (the *memory spring thing* refers to a physics phenomenon) that nerds are thought to be interested in. Connected both to science and to the idea of optimism (see also Extract 6), there is also an idea of progress and changing the world (*innovation, innovators, revolutionizing*).

The communication of these elements of ideological content is supported by style resources. Although this is of course not visible in the transcript, Vlog-brothers' videos, including the one in extract 7, are usually presented in an enthusiastic tone supported by a very fast speaking tempo. Here, enthusiasm is also evident in the extreme positivity of the language, expressions such as *nothing that excites me more*, or the repeated use of the *really happy* and *lucky*. The fast speaking tempo is also connected to a particular vlog genre (a way of acting in participatory media), and therefore contributes to the construction of a larger community within YouTube.

Goals are also an important part of ideological content. Nerdfighteria has the above-mentioned overall purpose of "fighting for nerds", but also an explicitly expressed, but perhaps even vaguer goal of "increasing awesome" and "decreasing suck" in the world (here too, one can see an optimist belief in progress). Keeping such statements of organizational purpose very general may promote interpellation; this level of generality allows members to make their own interpretations of awesomeness, and thus also allows for almost anyone to become a member.

As soon as concrete interpretations of the general goals are offered, however, restrictions to membership also appear. A major example of an interpretation of awesomeness is the annual charity campaign *Project for awesome* (P4A) where John and Hank Green direct Nerdfighters to become active contributors and "*Upload a video about a nonprofit organization or cause you believe in*". Extract 8 shows how that expectation can weigh on some members who feel unable to act according to the instructions:

Extract 8

I feel terrible about about [sic] not participating in P4A. Every time I try to make a video, I just end up sitting there and not knowing what to say.

Similarly to the ideal Nerdfighter traits and values (see Extract 6), depictions of ideal actions may lead to feelings of inadequacy and hamper identification as a Nerdfighter for the individual in question.

Results of interpellative constitution

There are two main consequences of interpellative constitution for the resulting organization. I call these insider-orientedness and ideological coherence. By insider-orientedness I mean that there is little need for explicit “external” communication. The online context enables all communication to be simultaneously public and “internal”—directed at people who “always-already” are Nerdfighters. Nerdfighteria is not actively promoted and traditional media are to some extent avoided: according to one of the news articles in the data, the Green brothers decided they did not wish to appear on television, because, as John Green commented in the article, the aim is not to be as widely known as possible and to become a *mainstream cultural phenomenon*. This would lead to traditional features of organizational communication, such as having a *brand*, which are not seen as welcome:

Extract 9

I worry that mainstream cultural phenomena need, like, Message Singularity and A Brand and an Institutional Voice and stuff. That kind of thing does not interest us at all. We just want to make cool stuff with people we like.

This suggests that after the emergent beginnings, strategic decisions were made to continue in the insider-oriented mode, using interpellative communication—attracting new members mainly through a shared understanding of *cool stuff*.

Insider-oriented communication can also be seen in the “secret memorandums” of Extract 5 and, in particular, in a widespread use of indirect references. There are several group symbols that are used for these indirect references; their connection to Nerdfighteria is clear only to those who possess the necessary cultural-contextual knowledge to interpret them. Such symbols include a hand sign derived from the Vulcan Salute in Star Trek—unlike the original, this one is performed using both hands, with palms facing inwards. The reference to science fiction is another example of creative reinterpretation of cultural discourses related to nerds. A logo, in turn derived from the hand sign, also exists. Some versions of the logo also refer to the United Nations emblem (again, a cultural resource) by incorporating a similar wreath. This makes an ideological comparison: Nerdfighteria unites nerds internationally. However, the most prominent indirect references are implicatures in insider sayings and jokes. One example is the abbreviation *DFTBA* which literally means “don’t forget to be awesome”, but also functions as a salute and as an indirect way of positioning oneself as a Nerdfighter. The word *awesome* contained in the salute is also used in many other contexts; for example, Nerdfighters are sometimes defined as people who are *made of awesome*.

By the consequence of ideological coherence I mean that the logical implication of interpellative constitution is that the resulting organization has a uniform mind-set because of the ideology-based member self-selection. In the data, this can be seen in the fact that it is rare to find criticism of Nerdfighteria and Nerdfighter ideology, except by people who position themselves as outsid-

ers. Compared to other YouTube channels, the discussion in Vlogbrothers' comment sections tends to be very amicable and like-minded. It could be argued that this boosts the authority of the Green brothers and allows them to influence the devoted fan-members, for example, to participate in charity initiatives, to act in certain ways in their personal life or to buy Nerdfighter-related products. For example, in the "Nerdfighter census" survey, active participation in Nerdfighteria was framed not only as participation in initiatives such as P4A, but also as holding paid subscriptions to Nerdfighteria-related YouTube channels (10 % had them) or as buying products on dftba.com (30 % had done this).

Discussion and conclusion

This study has explored an online organization formed on YouTube, Nerdfighteria. For this "partial" organization (Ahrne & Brunsson, 2011) that lacks formal membership criteria, membership negotiation and institutional positioning (McPhee & Zaug, 2000) are particularly relevant communication flows. The present study therefore set out to explore particularly the communicative constitution of membership in this group, including member selection (membership negotiation) and how insiders are set apart from outsiders (institutional positioning). Netnography and discourse analysis were applied in the analysis of this case in order to explore the communicative constitution of a partial organization in a participatory media context.

By drawing on the concept of interpellative discourse (Althusser, 2003, 2008) the study contributes to a more nuanced understanding of the processes of communicative constitution of organizations (CCO), particularly membership construction, by introducing and empirically illustrating the concept of "interpellative constitution". The paper explores, firstly, discursive resources identified in this process and, secondly, features of the resulting organization. In addition, the study illustrates the potential of participatory media to enable new kinds of communicative constitution.

The findings show how organizational membership is constructed and upheld by disseminating ideological discourse imbued with specific ideas, values and goals. This discourse attracts those who already feel close to the proposed subject position, leading them to identify with the ideology and group.

Figure 3 provides an illustration of the interpellative constitution process with key discursive resources of the Nerdfighteria case. In the first phase of interpellation, ideology is communicated by some and recognized by others (recognition phase). This involves communicating ideological content by referring to general cultural resources, particularly discourses (Discourses with a "D"), and by proposing specific ideological content, namely a particular constellation of elements such as traits, beliefs, values and goals which are used to construct the specific subject position of a Nerdfighter. The deployment of these resources together allows recognition and identification which leads to the second phase in which people become members and communicate their membership (reaction phase). In the reaction phase, individuals start to re-

produce ideological communication themselves and to position themselves as members. This positioning involves the additional discursive resources of direct and indirect references to membership (semiotic resources) and relational resources, particularly focusing on similarity and difference relative to outsiders. The reaction phase also encompasses the resources used for ideological discourse. Interpellation to a Nerdfighter subject position involves connecting ideological content in the form of wider cultural and case-specific ideological elements to the labels (direct semiotic references) for a member (Nerdfighter) and the collective (Nerdfighteria). Similarly, the group is constructed as separate from outsiders (relational resource; similarity/difference) by referring to Nerdfighter values and goals, such as progress and community, being a good person and aiming to “increase awesome”, in comparison to less awesome others.

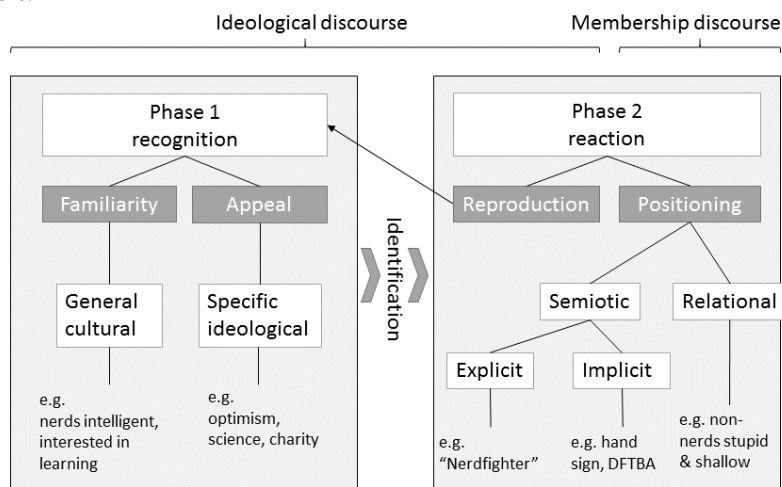


Figure 3. Illustration of interpellative constitution with key discursive resources.

In this paper, I have argued that interpellative constitution leads to an organization that is insider-oriented, meaning that relevant audiences are positioned as insiders, and therefore there is little need for explicit external communication. Key discursive resources related to the insider-oriented mode include the use of indirect references such as signs, abbreviations, sayings and jokes which are only understandable to insiders. There is an apparent contradiction between insider-orientedness and interpellative constitution: The second phase of the interpellative process relies heavily on resources that construct a difference between insiders and outsiders, as well as “real” and “fake” members, and on semiotic resources allowing indirect references, which are difficult for outsiders to understand. This kind of strong in-group construction might in other circumstances form a barrier to new members joining the group; however, the apparent contradiction is resolved by keeping entry criteria loose and portraying “nerdfighterness” as a quality someone can possess without even being aware of it; using Althusser’s expression they are “always-

already” Nerdfighters. The key to interpellation is that potential new members are not positioned in the category of outsiders, but are instead made to feel as if they already were Nerdfighters. Specifically in this case, this inclusiveness relies on drawing from and modifying the wider cultural category of “nerd”.

A central role in the interpellative constitution process of Nerdfighteria was in fact played by cultural resources, particularly drawing on pre-existing cultural discourses concerning nerds, such as intelligence and a love of books. Reinventing these discourses—erasing negative connotations and boosting self-confidence by focusing on positive aspects—provides appeal which causes people to not only recognize the ideological discourse but also to feel it is relevant for them. In recent years, Nerdfighteria has been growing at an astonishing rate; the popularity may be partly due to the relation of the Nerdfighter ideology to a wider cultural phenomenon; it has been suggested that “pockets of popular discourse are arguing that nerdy is the new ‘cool’” (Quail, 2011, p. 466). The appropriation of the nerd label is in fact not unique to Nerdfighters; for example, Bucholtz (1999, p. 214) has noted that “many positive identity practices in which nerds engage contribute to the display of intelligence”. This shows that the “appeal factor” in interpellative constitution does not need to be unique.

I have also argued that ideological coherence is a logical implication of interpellative constitution. This raises questions about the power relations within the organization. Interpellative discourse leads to a certain kind of control by selecting members who share a way of thinking, and in consequence, might easily accept organizational practices. As Althusser states, “the individual is interpellated as a (free) subject in order that [...] he shall (freely) accept his subjection” (2008, p. 56). Although in the Nerdfighter case there hardly are any insidious consequences for the members (or they are limited to the possibility that they may be inadvertently marketed to), interpellative constitution and the resulting ideological coherence that discourages criticism and variety of views could be more problematic in other cases. Religious sects, pyramid schemes, and some direct selling organizations (see e.g. Pratt, 2000) might be relevant examples and could be examined from the perspective of interpellative constitution in future research.

As for online cases, it is feasible that hacktivist groups and open source or other peer production organizations (such as Wikipedia) have some characteristics similar to Nerdfighteria in terms of relative insider-orientedness and ideological coherence. Participatory media have features that enable this type of communicative constitution: not only do they allow for wide participation and rapid communication, but they are also very fragmented which means that it is possible to communicate publicly but simultaneously in a relatively insider-oriented manner. People tend to gather in online spaces based on interests, and they find their ways to these spaces through specific searches, personalized algorithms and word-of-mouth recommendations from their networks; YouTube, for example, has a suggestion algorithm which enables stumbling on content that one is not specifically looking for, but which is in some way similar to content already watched. These factors create opportune conditions for

interpellation through preselection of audiences that are potentially susceptible to interpellation.

References

- Ahrne, G., & Brunsson, N. (2011). Organization outside organizations: the significance of partial organization. *Organization*, 18(1), 83-104. doi: 10.1177/1350508410376256
- Althusser, L. (2003). Three notes on the theory of discourses. In F. Matheron (Ed.), *The Humanist Controversy and Other Writings (1966-67)* (pp. 33-84). London: Verso.
- Althusser, L. (2008). Ideology and ideological state apparatuses. In L. Althusser (Ed.), *On ideology* (pp. 1-60). London: Verso.
- Alvesson, M., Ashcraft, K. L., & Thomas, R. (2008). Identity matters: reflections on the construction of identity scholarship in organization studies. *Organization*, 15(1), 5-28. doi: 10.1177/1350508407084426
- Alvesson, M., & Karreman, D. (2000). Varieties of discourse: on the study of organizations through discourse analysis. *Human Relations*, 53(9), 1125-1149. doi: 10.1177/0018726700539002
- Ashcraft, K. L., Kuhn, T. R., & Cooren, F. (2009). Constitutional amendments: "materializing" organizational communication. *The Academy of Management Annals*, 3(1), 1-64. doi: 10.1080/19416520903047186
- Ashforth, B. E., Harrison, S. H., & Corley, K. G. (2008). Identification in organizations: An examination of four fundamental questions. *Journal of Management*, 34(3), 325-374. doi: 10.1177/0149206308316059
- Barnes, M. C., Fogg, A. H., Stephens, C. N., & Titman, L. G. (2013). *Company organization*. London: Routledge.
- Browning, L. D., Greene, R. W., Sitkin, S. B., Sutcliffe, K. M., & Obstfeld, D. (2009). Constitutive complexity: Military entrepreneurs and the synthetic character of communication flows. In L. L. Putnam & A. M. Nicotera (Eds.), *Building theories of organization: The constitutive role of communication* (pp. 89-116). New York: Routledge.
- Bucholtz, M. (1999). "Why be normal?" Language and identity practices in a community of nerd girls. *Language in Society*, 28, 203-223.
- Bucholtz, M., & Hall, K. (2005). Identity and interaction: a sociocultural linguistic approach. *Discourse Studies*, 7(4-5), 585-614. doi: 10.1177/1461445605054407
- Coleman, G. (Producer). (2012). Our weirdness is free: the logic of Anonymous—online army, agent of chaos, and seeker of justice. *Triple Canopy*. Retrieved from http://canopycanopycanopy.com/issues/15/contents/our_weirdness_is_free
- Cooren, F., Kuhn, T., Cornelissen, J. P., & Clark, T. (2011). Communication, organizing and organization: An overview and introduction to the special issue. *Organization Studies*, 32(9), 1149-1170. doi: 10.1177/0170840611410836
- Coupland, C., & Brown, A. D. (2004). Constructing organizational identities on the web: A case of Royal Dutch/Shell. *Journal of Management Studies*, 41, 1325-1347.
- Dobusch, L., & Schoeneborn, D. (2013). Lessons in fluidity: Anonymous and the communicative formation of organizational identity. *UZH Business Working Paper No. 335*. Zürich: Department of Business Administration, University of Zürich.
- Fairclough, N. (2003). *Analysing discourse: Textual analysis for social research*. London & New York: Routledge.
- Fleming, P., & Spicer, S. (2007). *Contesting the corporation: Struggle, power and resistance in organizations*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Garcia, A. C., Standlee, A. I., Bechkoff, J., & Cui, Y. (2009). Ethnographic approaches to the Internet and computer-mediated communication. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, 38, 52-84.
- Gee, J. P. (1999). *An introduction to discourse analysis: Theory and method*. London & New York, NY: Routledge.
- Gioia, D. A., Price, K. N., Hamilton, A. L., & Thomas, J. B. (2010). Forging an identity: an insider-outsider study of processes involved in the formation of organizational identity. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 55(1), 1-46. doi: 10.2189/asqu.2010.55.1.1
- Grice, H. P. (1975). Logic and conversation. In P. Cole & J. L. Morgan (Eds.), *Syntax and Semantics, Vol. 3, Speech Acts* (pp. 41-58). New York: Academic Press.

- Haslam, S. A., & Ellemers, N. (2006). Social identity in industrial and organizational psychology: concepts, controversies and contributions. *International Review of Industrial and Organizational Psychology*, 20, 39-118. doi: 10.1002/0470029307.ch2
- Jarvenpaa, S. L., & Lang, K. R. (2011). Boundary management in online communities: case studies of the Nine Inch Nails and ccMixer music remix sites. *Long Range Planning*, 44(5-6), 440-457. doi: 10.1016/j.lrp.2011.09.002
- Johnstone, B. (2007). Linking identity and dialect through stancetaking. In R. Englebretson (Ed.), *Stancetaking in Discourse: Subjectivity, Evaluation, Interaction* (pp. 49-68). Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company.
- Kaplan, A. M., & Haenlein, M. (2010). Users of the world, unite! The challenges and opportunities of Social Media. *Business Horizons*, 53(1), 59-68. doi: 10.1016/j.bushor.2009.09.003
- Kligler-Vilenchik, N. (2013). "Decreasing world suck": Fan communities, mechanisms of translation, and participatory politics. *A Case Study Report Working Paper, Media, Activism and Participatory Politics Project*. Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism, University of Southern California.
- Kligler-Vilenchik, N., McVeigh-Schultz, J., Weitbrecht, C., & Tokuhama, C. (2012). Experiencing fan activism: Understanding the power of fan activist organizations through members' narratives. *Transformative Works and Cultures*, 10.
- Kozica, A. M. F., Gebhardt, C., Müller-Seitz, G., & Kaiser, S. (2015). Organizational Identity and Paradox: An Analysis of the "Stable State of Instability" of Wikipedia's Identity. *Journal of Management Inquiry*, 24(2), 186-203. doi: 10.1177/1056492614553275
- Kozinets, R. V. (1997). "I want to believe": A netnography of the X-Philes' subculture of consumption. In M. Brucks & D. J. MacInnis (Eds.), *Advances in Consumer Research*, 24 (pp. 470-475).
- Kozinets, R. V. (2002). The field behind the screen: using netnography for marketing research in online communities. *Journal of Marketing Research*, 39, 61-72. doi: 10.1509/jmkr.39.1.61.18935
- Kozinets, R. V. (2010). *Netnography: Doing ethnographic research online*. Los Angeles: Sage.
- Kozinets, R. V., & Handelman, J. (1998). Ensouling consumption: a netnographic exploration of the meaning of boycotting behavior. In J. W. Alba & J. W. Hutchinson (Eds.), *Advances in Consumer Research* (Vol. 25, pp. 475-480). Provo, UT: Association for Consumer Research.
- Kuhn, T. (2006). A 'demented work ethic' and a 'lifestyle firm': discourse, identity, and workplace time commitments. *Organization Studies*, 27(9), 1339-1358. doi: 10.1177/0170840606067249
- Kuhn, T. (2009). Positioning lawyers: discursive resources, professional ethics and identification. *Organization*, 16(5), 681-704. doi: 10.1177/1350508409338886
- McPhee, R. D., & Zaug, P. (2000). The communicative constitution of organizations: A framework for explanation. *Electronic Journal of Communication*, 10(1-2).
- Miles, R. E., Snow, C. C., Meyer, A. D., & Coleman, H. J., Jr. (1978). Organizational strategy, structure, and process. *The Academy of Management Review*, 3(3), 546-562. doi: 10.2307/257544
- Murthy, D. (2008). Digital ethnography: An examination of the use of new technologies for social research. *Sociology*, 42(5), 837-855. doi: 10.1177/0038038508094565
- Parker, M., Cheney, G., Fournier, V., & Land, C. (Eds.). (2014). *The Routledge companion to alternative organization*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Pratt, M. G. (2000). The good, the bad, and the ambivalent: Managing identification among Amway distributors. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 45(3), 456-493. doi: 10.2307/2667106
- Putnam, L. L., Nicotera, A. M., & McPhee, R. D. (2009). Introduction: Communication constitutes organization. In L. L. Putnam & A. M. Nicotera (Eds.), *Building theories of organization: The constitutive role of communication* (pp. 1-20). New York: Routledge.
- Putnam, L. L., & Nicotera, A. M. E. (2009). *Building theories of organization: The constitutive role of communication*. New York: Routledge.
- Quail, C. (2011). Nerds, geeks, and the hip/square dialectic in contemporary television. *Television & New Media*, 12(5), 460-482. doi: 10.1177/1527476410385476

- Rafaeli, S., Ravid, G., & Soroka, V. (2004). *De-lurking in virtual communities: A social communication network approach to measuring the effects of social and cultural capital*. Paper presented at the Proceedings of the Proceedings of the 37th Annual Hawaii International Conference on System Sciences (HICSS'04) - Track 7 - Volume 7.
- Ren, Y., Kraut, R., & Kiesler, S. (2007). Applying common identity and bond theory to design of online communities. *Organization Studies*, 28(3), 377-408. doi: 10.1177/0170840607076007
- Rheingold, H. (2008). Using participatory media and public voice to encourage civic engagement. In W. L. Bennett (Ed.), *Civic Life Online: Learning How Digital Media Can Engage Youth* (pp. 97-118). Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.
- Santos, F. M., & Eisenhardt, K. M. (2005). Organizational Boundaries and Theories of Organization. *Organization Science*, 16(5), 491-508. doi: 10.1287/orsc.1050.0152
- Saussure, F. (1967). *Cours de linguistique générale*. Paris: Payot.
- Scott, C. R., Corman, S. R., & Cheney, G. (1998). Development of a structural model of identification in the organization. *Communication Theory*, 8(3), 298-336.
- Taylor, J. R., & Van Every, E. (2011). *The situated organization: Case studies in the pragmatics of communication*. London & New York: Routledge.
- van Dijk, T. A. (1998). *Ideology: a multidisciplinary approach*. London: Sage.
- van Dijk, T. A. (2006). Ideology and discourse analysis. *Journal of Political Ideologies*, 11(2), 115-140.
- van Dijk, T. A. (2009). Critical discourse studies: a sociocognitive approach. In R. Wodak & M. Meyer (Eds.), *Methods of critical discourse analysis* (pp. 62-86). London: Sage.
- van Dijk, T. A. (2014). Discourse-cognition-society. Current state and prospects of the socio-cognitive approach to discourse. In C. Hart & P. Cap (Eds.), *Contemporary critical discourse studies*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing.
- Wodak, R., & Meyer, M. (Eds.). (2009). *Methods of critical discourse analysis*. London: Sage.



ISBN 978-952-60-6745-2 (printed)
ISBN 978-952-60-6746-9 (pdf)
ISSN-L 1799-4934
ISSN 1799-4934 (printed)
ISSN 1799-4942 (pdf)

Aalto University
School of Business
Department of Management Studies
www.aalto.fi

**BUSINESS +
ECONOMY**

**ART +
DESIGN +
ARCHITECTURE**

**SCIENCE +
TECHNOLOGY**

CROSSOVER

**DOCTORAL
DISSERTATIONS**