

# Communication management on social networking sites

## Stakeholder motives and usage types of corporate Facebook, Twitter and YouTube pages

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### Abstract

**Purpose** – Over the last years, many corporations have started to maintain profile pages on social networking sites (SNS), but research on how and why organizational stakeholders use these profile pages has not kept pace. The paper aims to discuss these issues.

**Design/methodology/approach** – The study applies a combined perspective of uses-and-gratifications (U&G) and social cognitive theory (SCT) to investigate the reasons why politicians and digital natives consume and interact with corporations on SNS. In total, 65 semi-structured interviews were conducted and analyzed using qualitative content analysis.

**Findings** – Results suggest that the two stakeholder groups differ in their motivations, as well as behavior to use corporate profile pages. Digital natives seem to prefer Facebook to interact with companies, politicians prefer Twitter. Corporate YouTube pages are almost not important to any of the groups.

**Research limitations/implications** – The qualitative nature of the study does not allow for generalizations of the findings to larger populations. Suggestions for further research are addressed in the discussion section.

**Practical implications** – The study results have numerous implications for the practice of communication management. Fans on SNS do not tend to interact with corporations to a large extent, but are loyal followers. Once a connection between an individual and a company is established, it is likely to last. This enables corporations to gain rich information from their networks to be included in customer service, product development, issues management and recruiting.

**Originality/value** – This is the first study in the field of communication management, which applies a micro-level approach to interviewing users of corporate communication; in order to reveal the reasons why and how they use corporate social networking profile pages.

**Keywords** Social networking sites, Communication management, Stakeholder analysis, Social media, Public relations, Corporate communications

**Paper type** Research paper

### 1. Introduction

The social web represents one of the determining factors through which the communication processes of our everyday life take place. The characteristics of social web applications, and their heavy adoption and use by individuals all over the world, has resulted in organizations' interest in these applications. As a result, many companies have started profile pages on various platforms to be used in communication management (Macnamara and Zerfass, 2012).

The term *social web* is largely synonymous with *web 2.0*. The two terms generally describe a second generation of internet technology featuring openness of participation, collaboration and interactivity (Boler, 2008). Social media has further been defined as a group of web 2.0-based applications which allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010). In addition, various types of social



media can be differentiated which enable users to build-up and maintain their own, personalized networks for information sharing and communication with other users (Boyd and Ellison, 2008). Among the most popular applications are *social networking sites* (SNS) such as Facebook, the micro-blogging service Twitter and content communities such as the video portal YouTube (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010).

Capriotti and Kuklinski (2012) argued that the interactivity and instantaneousness of web 2.0 applications change the way that organizations traditionally communicate with their stakeholders. Arguably, this process also works in reverse: various publics now have the opportunity to approach an organization online and compliment, critique or question its products, services and actions. In short, social media empowers stakeholders to raise their voice.

Put positively, this means that the characteristics of social web applications potentially allow organizations to move closer to their stakeholders, learn about their communicative needs and be able to serve those more immediately and effectively than before (Kelly *et al.*, 2010; Pookulangara and Koesler, 2011) – an aspect increasingly considered in crisis communication (Coombs and Holladay, 2012; Fischer Liu *et al.*, 2012). However, research on the recipients' side of communication management on social media applications in non-crisis situations is scarce. Most existing studies investigate the general adoption and use of SNS by organizations (Briones *et al.*, 2011; Capriotti and Kuklinski, 2012; Denyer *et al.*, 2011; Durkin *et al.*, 2013; Kim *et al.*, 2010, 2014; Macnamara and Zerfass, 2012; Nah and Sayton, 2012; Rybalko and Seltzer, 2010; Waters *et al.*, 2009) or public relations (PR) practitioners (Diga and Kelleher, 2009; DiStaso *et al.*, 2011; Eyrich *et al.*, 2008; Sweetser and Kelleher, 2011; Verhoeven *et al.*, 2012; Wright and Hinson, 2013), thereby providing valuable proof of the diffusion of social media applications in PR. However, most studies do not take the perceived relevance of such communication channels from the viewpoint of different organizational stakeholders into account. We argue that in order to be effective, social media PR needs to meet the communicative needs of its users. This is why we focus on the following research question:

*RQ1.* What motives do stakeholders have for using corporate profile pages on social web applications?

In our study, we apply the theoretic perspectives of uses-and-gratifications (U&G) and social cognitive theory (SCT) as a combined approach to investigate the motives of social media use. In addition, we address several web 2.0 usage types and connect them to stakeholders' interactional motives.

## 2. Theoretic perspectives

### 2.1 *Social cognitive approach to U&G*

The *U&G approach* (Blumler and Katz, 1974) is probably the oldest and most popular perspective for investigating patterns of media use. The basic assumption that the approach builds on suggests that peoples' use of any type of media is purposeful and goal-oriented. By turning to certain media offers, individuals seek to satisfy certain needs, which can be described as gratifications (Rosengren, 1974). These gratifications vary among individuals and can be further divided into two groups: gratifications sought (GS) and gratifications obtained (GO). Whereas GS are defined as the motives of individuals to consume certain media, GO represent the actual gratifications resulting from media consumption. The possibility of experiencing a discrepancy between what was sought and obtained indicates that media consumption does not necessarily lead to a satisfaction of the needs having driven media behavior (Greenberg, 1974). Therefore, individuals

will evaluate the perceived discrepancy between the GS and GO, i.e. how well certain media turned out to gratify one's individual needs. Over time, the result of this evaluation is cognitively processed as media knowledge and will be drawn upon in future situations of media choice (Palmgreen and Rayburn, 1982).

So far, most studies which employed the GS/GO differentiation to investigate the gratifications of internet use adopted gratification items retrieved from previous studies on motivations for traditional media use. However, the authors of these studies concluded that traditional media gratifications often seemed to inadequately represent the reasons driving internet use (Ferguson and Perse, 2000; Kaye, 1998; Papacharissi and Rubin, 2000; Parker and Plank, 2000). Thereupon, LaRose *et al.* (2001) argued for the theoretic advancement of U&G with SCT (Bandura, 1986) in order to explain more adequately the often-observed relationship between media gratifications and media use, and thus increase the explanatory power of the U&G paradigm.

Bandura's (1986) SCT posits a reciprocal effect between individuals, their behavior and the environment. Behavior is viewed as an observable act and the performance of a specific behavior is determined by the expected consequences resulting from that behavior, i.e. the expected outcomes. The latter are formed through cognitive processes, most importantly by observing and imitating the behavior of other individuals in one's environment (vicarious learning) or by learning from experience (enactive learning).

Within the socio-cognitive approach to U&G, media use is seen as overt media behavior that is determined by expected outcomes, which are assumed to follow consumption. Consequently, GS can be explained as expected outcomes of media behavior. The expected outcomes serve as motives for media behavior, which are called *incentives* in SCT terminology. Bandura (1986) differentiates six incentive dimensions, constituting broad categories in which to group motives for media use (LaRose and Eastin, 2004): *activity* incentives aim to satisfy the wish to take part in enjoyable activities and mainly include entertainment gratifications. *Monetary* incentives describe financial motives, especially money-generating motives for using certain media. Incentives to search for new information to acquire knowledge are called *novel* incentives, whereas *social* incentives relate to interactions with others to discuss or exchange opinion. Expected outcomes to regulate one's mood or emotional state can be subsumed under *self-reflective* incentives. Finally, *status* incentives point to motives of social power and image cultivation.

A recent study in Germany investigating the U&Gs of web 2.0 across different applications revealed two additional incentive categories specific to the social web (Jers, 2012). The author found *ideological* incentives which refer to behavior driven by an individual's personal ideals and values, as well as *practical* incentives. The latter can be described as meta-outcome expectations since they describe motives which catalyze outcome expectations, rather than posing as unique motives by themselves, i.e. laziness, comfort, organization or flexibility.

In research so far, the theoretic combination of U&G with SCT has yielded much higher explanation rates than most traditional U&G studies (Jers, 2012; LaRose and Eastin, 2004). This is why we argue that the perspective seems promising for investigating the expected outcomes of social media PR.

## 2.2 Web 2.0 usage types

In regard to traditional media, Levy and Windahl (1984) noted that people's media use is not stable and varies across different situations. Arguably, this also holds true for social media today. Consequently, different motivations (incentives) to use corporate social web profiles are likely to result in different types of social media use.

A distinction of web 2.0 usage types which has become prominent in recent investigations into PR on SNS is the one between rather passive usage, such as consumption (Men and Tsai, 2013; Vorvoreanu, 2009), and rather active use such as contributing (Men and Tsai, 2013) or engaging activities (Vorvoreanu, 2009). However, it can be argued that a dichotomous distinction of user activity is not complex enough to uncover the diverse uses people make of web applications. Consequently, it seems more adequate to measure audience activity on a continuum of interaction from low to high.

Such an approach is offered by Shao (2009), who differentiated three usage types for user-generated media (UGM): consumption, participation and production. In his paper, he described media use which is limited to watching, reading or viewing behavior as *consuming* usage – the lowest level of interaction. *Participation* involves basic user-to-user interaction and user-to-content interaction, such as rating content (e.g. “like”) and sharing it with others. It can be argued that the establishment of a network connection on a social web application could also be described as participating usage, since this type of behavior includes a rather basic form of user-to-user interaction. The highest level of interaction is *production* which refers to the “creation and publication of one’s personal contents such as text, images, audio and video” (Shao, 2009, p. 7).

The first empirical applications of the above mentioned typology revealed that a clear distinction between participating and producing usage was hard to draw (Jers, 2012). This was assumed to be mainly due to Shao’s (2009) conceptualization of the participating usage type, which included a mixture of basic (rate and share content) and more interactive user-to-user/content interactions, such as the posting of comments on a web platform. To further increase the distinction between participating and producing usage, we classify all content-generating activities which result in the production of text (i.e. commenting on existing posts) under the production label. This classification seems suitable, since it allows us to tie people’s usage motives for corporate social web profiles on various platforms to distinct media behavior.

### 3. Literature review: usage motives of social web PR

Investigations into the micro-perspective, i.e. the motives for recipients turning to organizational messages on social media platforms, remain largely unexplored. In addition, studies using the combined perspective of U&G with SCT in the context of web 2.0 are rare (Jers, 2012; Lee and Ma, 2012). So far, most studies have been concerned with recipients’ motives for using social media platforms in general (Dunne and Rowley, 2010; Jers, 2012; Quan-Haase and Young, 2010; Subrahmanyam *et al.*, 2008; Wang *et al.*, 2012), or focus on certain applications, such as general Facebook use (Bicen and Cavus, 2011; Cheung *et al.*, 2011; McAndrew and Jeong, 2012; Nadkarni and Hofmann, 2012; Smock *et al.*, 2011; Tosun, 2012).

Among the pioneering studies to pursue a recipient-centered approach to social web PR are the researches by Vorvoreanu (2009) and Men and Tsai (2012, 2013). Vorvoreanu (2009) found that the majority of US students investigated had negative feelings about organizations being on Facebook and preferred the network to be exclusively for communication with friends and family. However, students were willing to accept corporations in return for rewards, i.e. coupons or discounts. Men and Tsai (2013) found that the primary reasons for people consuming messages on corporate SNS in China are to obtain product, promotional and corporate information, as well as for entertainment, to relax, pass the time and distract themselves from daily routines. US students were willing to indicate a network connection on their profile pages (“follow”) to serve their self-presentational needs. In addition, businesses were

befriended out of sympathy and support. The profile pages of corporates were checked for inventories and posts in order to inquire about company, product or service information (Vorvoreanu, 2009). Furthermore, after-sales and customer services feedback and inquiries were prominent motivations for use in both China and the USA. In the USA, Facebook was used to criticize or complain about the company and its products, whereas Chinese users also posted greetings to the company profile page (Men and Tsai, 2012; Vorvoreanu, 2009). In general, contributing activities on corporate pages, such as asking or commenting on questions from the community or uploading content, were pursued to a lesser extent (Men and Tsai, 2013). Vorvoreanu (2009) concluded that respondents, in general, had little interest in interacting with organizations on Facebook. They preferred other, more formal media, i.e. telephone and e-mail, to engage in dialogue with an organization.

The results of the above studies might allow us to infer trend toward an increased public acceptance of corporate social web PR during the last few years (Vorvoreanu, 2009; Men and Tsai, 2013). One could argue that the reasons for this shift in cognitive interest might be due to the continuous extension of technological and application features on various social media platforms over the last few years, features which have been used by organizations as well. These adaptations might have shifted individuals' usage patterns over time.

#### 4. Method

Our study applies a mixed-method design of qualitative and quantitative methods to investigate organizational stakeholders' incentives to consume, participate and produce information on corporate profile pages on the SNS Facebook and Twitter, as well as the video portal YouTube. Following a qualitative approach, we conducted 65 semi-structured interviews with respondents from two organizational stakeholder groups, i.e. federal politicians ( $n_{pol}=29$ ) and digital natives ( $n_{dn}=36$ ), in June 2013. Each interview took approximately ten minutes.

Politicians and digital natives were chosen as organizational stakeholder groups since, arguably, they represent important reference groups whose actions can have effective impacts on corporations. Within the direct democratic political system of Switzerland, changes to the national and regional legislation, such as suggestions for new laws or alterations to existing law, are directly voted on by the population on four fixed days throughout the year. By promoting their arguments on whether a legislative initiative should be accepted or rejected, politicians play a major role in the public opinion forming process. Recent research has shown that the promotion of politicians' standpoints increasingly takes place on social media applications. Such applications, however, are also used as environmental monitoring tools, and as such, as source of news information by politicians (Grant *et al.*, 2010). Therefore, it can be argued that organizational social media profile pages function as one source of information in a politician's news mix. Since recent political votes in Switzerland had major effects on the determining factors under which corporations operate in this country, it can be argued that national politicians constitute a major stakeholder group for Swiss organizations.

The term *digital natives* describes a group of persons who were born and brought up in the digital age and, therefore, naturally acquired competences in dealing with computer technology from their early years and are often found to be heavy users of internet applications (Bennett *et al.*, 2008). These persons are classified as born from 1985 onwards. In an organizational context, digital natives are most likely to include customers and fans of a brand, but can also include employees, shareholders, etc. This group can impact an organization by avoiding or preferring a company's products and services, seeking or changing employment, etc.

Different sampling techniques were used for each group to arrive at our total sample: the politicians' sample was selected to be fully representative of all 246 members of the Swiss national government, i.e. the federal council and the council of state. First, a list of all members of the Swiss national government was pre-analyzed to reveal those politicians holding either a Facebook or Twitter account (or both). This resulted in 123 publicly accessible profile pages of the selected politicians across both applications. Second, we analyzed the profiles for network connections with corporations, such as "likes" or "follows" of corporate pages, resulting in 63 politicians. The sample group of digital natives was randomly selected by approaching young people on campus and asking them to participate in our study, with the prerequisite that they had a Facebook or Twitter account (or both) as well as an organizational network connection on at least one of the platforms ( $n_{dn} = 36$ ).

The interview guidelines were constructed in the German language, translated into French and then retranslated into German by two different multilingual researchers to ensure accuracy of question translation and meaning. The reason for preparing multilingual versions of the interview guidelines was to account for the country's multilingualism and to leave the choice of preferred interview language to each participant. A pre-test was conducted and slight changes were made in both versions (politicians and digital natives) of the interview guidelines.

In order to conduct the interviews with Swiss politicians, the authors were given access to the parliament hall during the government's summer session and approached the pre-selected politicians in person to ask them for participation in the study ( $n_{pol} = 29$ ).

As well as their Facebook and Twitter use, participants from both groups were asked about their use of corporate YouTube pages. Participants were encouraged to share all the reasons they could remember for visiting the profile pages of corporates on one or more platforms and to provide information about their resulting usage behavior in each case.

All interviews were transcribed, coded and analyzed using the qualitative data analysis software MAXQDA. This software allowed the performance of a qualitative content analysis, in which subjects' motives referring to consuming, participating or producing behavior on a corporate social media profile page were coded and categorized according to the incentive dimensions of SCT. In order to weigh equally the usage motives and resulting media behavior, each combination of one motive and one respective usage type was coded only once per interview.

## 5. Results

In total, 65 persons participated in our study ( $n_{pol} = 29$ ,  $n_{dn} = 36$ ). The politicians' sample consisted of 20 male and nine female respondents, among whom the average age was 44 years old. The sample group of digital natives consisted of 11 male and 25 female respondents, their average age being 24 years. In general, usage numbers of corporate profiles across the three platforms differ for each group of respondents. Whereas all 36 digital natives said they had at least visited a corporate profile page on Facebook in the past, only slightly more than half of the interviewed politicians (17 persons, 59 percent) said they had done so. In regard to Twitter and YouTube these numbers decrease, respectively. Just six digital natives (14 percent), but nearly one in three politicians (nine persons, 31 percent) had visited corporations' pages on the micro-blogging service. The least visited application was YouTube with no use among politicians, and very little use among digital natives, with just two persons (6 percent).

In the following sections, we will present the absolute numbers of incentives mentioned by each respondent group under the dimensions of SCT, and in regard to

the three web 2.0 usage types, for each social web application investigated. In addition, we included one more dimension, which was discovered during our interviews: third-party motives, comprising the motives of other individuals or groups that lead to the build-up of a network connection. For a better overview of the results, the SCT inventive dimensions grouping respective motives to perform a behavior are formatted in bold, whereas the motives revealed during the qualitative content analysis are printed in italics.

### 5.1 *Motives for consuming corporate social media profile pages*

**Novel incentives** encompass the most important reasons for using a corporate profile page on any of the three platforms – Facebook, Twitter or YouTube – for all respondents. In particular, the *search for information about new products and services*, as well as *non-product or service-related information* about the company, dominates this incentive dimension in both respondent groups. **Novel motives** were mentioned 48 times by digital natives in regard to Facebook, only three times in regard to Twitter and twice in regard to YouTube. On Facebook and Twitter, this search is often connected to the *viewing of pictures of company products*, or videos in the case of YouTube. As one participant said, “I am interested in what they post on Facebook, especially pictures of new collections of clothes or shoes” (respondent L1). Another person “[...] heard a new [company] mobile phone was about to be launched soon. So I checked the [company’s] YouTube channel to find a product video and learn about the phone’s features” (respondent V5).

Politicians only mentioned novel motives for consuming information in regard to Twitter. Here, finding *non-product or service-related company information* is the most important reason for visiting corporate Twitter pages. One politician pointed out: “Their profile is like a newsfeed to me. I check their press releases and political statements on Twitter” (respondent P25).

Furthermore, digital natives use corporate pages on Facebook and Twitter for **self-reactive** reasons such as to *get inspiration, orientation* and to *form an opinion about a company and/or its products and services*. However, these motives apply more to Facebook (23 mentions) than Twitter (three mentions). To *relieve boredom* and *pass the time* are motives of this incentive dimension mentioned by digital natives and politicians (the latter only Facebook) alike. One parliamentarian admitted: “If I need a break from a session or if the discussion in a meeting is going in circles, I sometimes check Facebook and also the profiles of companies I am in touch with” (respondent P43).

The search for *discounts, competitions* or *employment possibilities* can be subsumed under the **monetary** incentive dimension and add up to a total of 15 mentions by digital natives resulting in Facebook consumption: “Once I checked the profile page [of a company] because I was looking for a job and thought they might have something” (respondent M3).

Likewise, entertainment and fun gratifications under the **activity** incentive dimension were sought only by digital natives, on both Facebook (ten mentions) and Twitter (four mentions) alike. In particular, *pictures* and *other photo material* not relating to novel information searches are of interest to the users: “Sometimes they post funny stuff, like a funny video or a picture, and you just need to burst out laughing” (respondent S3, Facebook) or “their profile is my personal fool-around zone. It’s just entertaining” (respondent M3, Twitter).

**Idealistic** motives play a role among digital natives, too. Respondents indicated six times that they had visited corporate profiles because their *products and services correspond to a person’s values* or because of *sympathy for a company*, as can be seen in the following interview quote: “Their drinks are divine” (respondent M2).

Unique to Twitter, the only **practical reason** for consuming information on corporate profile pages for digital natives was to *find instant company information without having to search on a variety of pages* or corporate web sites. This person wanted “to find information on a central platform without clicking through endless websites” (respondent L1).

In summary, we find digital natives tend to have more consumption motives for corporate profiles than politicians. For digital natives, this holds true especially for novel information on Facebook, whereas Twitter and YouTube seem to play a more minor role. Politicians consume profiles on Twitter, above all to gather novel information. After that, self-reflective incentives follow in both sample groups. Among digital natives, monetary as well as activity incentives further drive consumption, with also some idealistic motives found.

### 5.2 Motives for participating use of social web company profiles

As we move toward more interactive usage types for corporate profiles, we find that participation motives limit themselves to Facebook and Twitter. None of the respondents indicated they had reasons to participate with companies on YouTube.

**Monetary** motives are the biggest drivers for digital natives' participation on Facebook (26 mentions). Taking part in a *competition* was found to be a major reason to “like” a corporate profile or post. “Last year, [the company] had a Christmas competition on their Facebook page. If you clicked ‘like profile’ you could win cosmetic products every day in December before Christmas. I thought that was a great idea, so I participated” (respondent L4). Also, the offer of *discounts* leads digital natives to network with companies on Facebook. To *have/had business/employment with a company* further constituted a unique monetary motive to network with or follow a company in both sample groups: “I’m a member of the executive board of [Swiss association]. That is why I network with companies active in the sector by putting my ‘like’ on their Facebook page. It’s for that professional reason I use their information” (respondent P26, politician).

Further, **idealistic** (25 mentions) and **novel** (19 mentions) motives lead digital natives to participate with companies on the same platform, presenting similar reasons to those which drove consumption, i.e. looking for *product and service information*. The main difference here between consuming and participating use lies in the consequences of networking or liking activities, e.g. to “keep up to date with the latest company products and services by having corporate posts appear in my news feed” (novel, respondent M5, Facebook) or “I network with the company and ‘like’ company posts because I simply like the products” (idealistic, respondent M3, Facebook). Likewise, the motive of *altruism* was found in the idealistic dimension: “I’d like to do the organization a favor by liking them” (respondent M1, Facebook).

Politicians' **novel** incentives match their consuming usage motives to a large extent. They mostly relate to *non-product and service-related information*, i.e. press releases and political statements by companies that are shared on Facebook or Twitter (respondent P5). Although politicians judged Facebook and Twitter network connections to be almost equally important for spreading corporate news (especially from Swiss companies or companies from their canton), these motives were not mentioned very often overall on Facebook (six mentions) or Twitter (five mentions).

Swiss and local companies were also befriended by almost one-third of politicians (ten mentions) to express their *sympathy and support for the organizations*: “That is the brewery from my canton. By following them, I’d like to support local enterprises” (respondent 29). These motives are indicative of **idealistic** reasons to participate both on Facebook and Twitter.



About one-third of respondents from the digital natives group (12 mentions) as well as the politicians' sample (eight mentions) indicated participatory use of Facebook because of **status** incentives. All status motives brought forward by both groups can be coded as *identity and impression management* (this also applies to one mention from a politician regarding Twitter). Some digital natives expressed that they “want to *appear smart and clever*” by befriending/following certain companies on Facebook (respondent S3) and Twitter (respondent M1), or that they like Facebook posts by the company because the “*organization's products represent their current lifestyle*” (respondent S5) or “*a lifestyle they wish to pursue one day*” (respondent F4). Politicians aim to *impress voters and show competency* by befriending and liking organizational posts on Facebook: “I want to let voters know that I know our country and therefore also the companies contributing to our society, for example [company names]. [...] It's about showing my national identity” (respondent P28).

Less distinctive motives were found when participants mentioned **activity** incentives, which are only apparent among digital natives on Facebook (four mentions) and Twitter (one mention) and again refer to *entertainment* gratifications. In addition, **practical** incentives are rarely mentioned by either digital natives (Facebook: four mentions) or politicians (Twitter: one mention). One of the latter described how he befriended a company because he wanted to “*receive instant company information without active seeking*” (respondent P27).

A few Facebook **social** incentives were also mentioned, including the sharing of information “to *inform one's own network* about corporate news” (respondent F4, digital native) and to *agree with a prior post* which critiqued the company. Among the **self-reactive** incentives of digital natives, we also discovered the motive to *unfriend the company* on Facebook. Although this behavior could be seen as rather non-participatory, it fulfills the criteria outlined above of simple interaction with a few clicks. Furthermore, *personal orientation* was a reason for one digital native on Facebook, and one politician on Facebook and Twitter to follow an organization's profile page.

Lastly, three politicians indicated that they had not established a network connection with a company on Facebook themselves, but had someone else do so for them (e.g. a social media manager). This case was coded as *third-party motive*, since the participatory behavior was not carried out by the politicians themselves.

In summary, the motives for participating with corporate profiles are spread broadly across all incentive dimensions of SCT. Monetary incentives in particular cause the participation of digital natives on Facebook. Idealistic and status incentives are present in both sample groups, followed by novel incentives. Participation motives on Facebook exceed those on Twitter in both groups. Politicians predominantly use SNS to obtain novelties and support organizations due to idealistic incentives. No incentives for YouTube participation were found.

### 5.3 Motives for producing in social web company profile usage

Motives for actively producing content were mentioned fewest. Most production motives can be found within the **social** incentive dimension among both politicians (Facebook: one mention, Twitter: two mentions) and digital natives (Facebook: six mentions, Twitter: two mentions), i.e. to *exchange opinion/engage in discussions about the company and/or its products/services* and to *ask and answer questions about the company and/or its products/services*, as well as to *critique a company*. A combination of the latter two motives was brought up by one digital native who said: “I was standing

once at the train station but the train wouldn't arrive. So I posted on the railway company's Facebook wall to ask them what the problem was and they got back to me quite soon" (respondent M3). Likewise, the motivation to critique a company was further mentioned by one politician and one digital native each for content production on Facebook and Twitter. One politician said they once had problems with their mail delivery at the office: "So I posted my frustration on the [mail company] Twitter page and complained about the status quo – and they got back to me" (respondent P39). Further unique motives among the social dimension for Twitter include the wish to *compliment a company for its products and services* (digital native) as well as to *publicly get in touch with the organization* (politician). Likewise, one politician mentioned that she once posted to an organizational profile to ask for a public statement by the organization, which constitutes a motive under the **novel** dimension.

In conclusion, only a few motives which lead to the production of content on corporate profile pages were found. Most of them belong to the social dimension category and relate to Facebook among digital natives or Twitter among politicians. Again, we could not find production motives relating to YouTube among either sample group.

## 6. Discussion

In this study, we investigated the motives of politicians and digital natives in Switzerland for using company profile pages on social media applications by conducting semi-structured interviews and analyzing the data using qualitative content analysis software. Respondents' reasons to use companies' profile pages on Facebook, Twitter and YouTube were tied to their resulting media behavior, i.e. consumption, participation and production, using Shao's (2009) typology of UGM use. In addition, the motives were analyzed under the incentive dimensions of SCT (Bandura, 1986; Jers, 2012) to account for U&G's recent further theoretical development. In general, our results suggest that most motives for using a company's profile page result in the consumption of that page and decrease with more interactive usage types. This holds true for all applications investigated.

### 6.1 Implications for communication management

The results point to a number of implications that social media have for corporate communication management. First, social media applications seem to be accepted, and are therefore relevant channels of online PR. However, the applications seem to differ in their potential suitability for managing the relationships with different stakeholder groups. Whereas Facebook is shown to be an appropriate channel to communicate with digital natives, politicians are more likely to use Twitter. The video platform YouTube only seems to play a minor role in communication management so far.

For communication management, the results imply that SNS offer new outlets to provide product, service and other corporate-related information (consumption of novel information) in new and attractive formats, which satisfy the stakeholders' needs for personal orientation and the passing of time (self-reactive incentives). This seems especially promising for new product and service releases to be promoted through (audio-) visual, entertainment content such as teasers (activity incentives). Likewise, digital natives' need for orientation might be served by integrating interactive services, e.g. audio-visual user manuals for products. Furthermore, social media seems promising for recruitment activities, especially the recruitment of young professionals (monetary incentives). Twitter offers a good opportunity to inform politicians about corporate events and the latest press releases (novel incentives). However, the above

suggestions also imply the conflation of communication management with other business areas, such as product communication, advertising/marketing, human resources and event management. Consequently, increased co-ordination among the different areas arises.

Since novel incentives posit reasons to network with a company profile, one might expect a combination of the above elements to positively affect stakeholders' participation with the site as well. In turn, this can lead to a growth of the fan/follower community on the platforms and amplify the spread (sharing) of company information across social media.

Furthermore, it seems worthwhile to communicate corporate values in the context of corporate identity on social media, since idealistic incentives were found to drive participation with a profile. Arguably, by contributing to one's own (digital) corporate profile formation, the information offered will be reviewed by stakeholders and compared to their own values and norms, which can result in increased following/ "liking" of company pages, as well as posts to the Facebook wall and the sharing of corporate posts among individuals' private networks.

Personal values and norms also play a role within status incentives, especially in regard to Facebook. The impression management motive points to the fact that both sample groups use the image of a company to construct their self-image in social media. Therefore we can expect that a positive corporate reputation, as well as identification with the company due to similar personal values (Einwiller and Johar, 2013), will positively affect the number of followers, and might even drive participation and production on a corporate profile. The fact that digital natives were found to network with companies because their products and services represent the subject's lifestyle or a lifestyle they would aspire to one day seems particularly promising for the luxury and lifestyle goods sector. Once a network connection was established, it was hardly ever canceled. Consequently, established network connections might offer good opportunities for long-term customer retention and customer loyalty programs. In addition, competitions seem an effective way to sustainably enlarge the number of followers (digital natives) on an application.

The greatest potential for communication management can be identified in regard to the enhancement of dialogue on a profile, i.e. producing usage. The results of our study show that both sample groups look for social interaction with companies, mainly about customer service topics and complaints. Structurally, this implies additional information exchange and management between these two business units within a corporation.

But SNS also offer great opportunities in terms of market research. Monitoring the opinion exchange taking place on a corporate profile will allow organizations to receive direct feedback on their activities, as well as products and services, which can be used for further development. Likewise, corporations can stimulate feedback through moderation and opinion polls, for example to receive information about the (likely) market acceptance of new products and services.

Knowledge about stakeholder opinions and complaints also becomes important in regard to issues management. The monitoring of discussions on corporate profiles can help to identify potentially critical issues at an early stage and influence their development. Thereby, preventable crises (Coombs, 2007) in particular, as well as other major reputational threats, might be avoidable. In crisis communication, the immediacy and spatiotemporal independence of SNS communication further necessitates the continuous management of corporate profile pages to be able to adequately deal with different situations promptly.

In summary, social media management in corporations can be described as an intersection of communication management with other different business areas. Social

media management, therefore, needs to generate information from different business areas to be used in social media on the one side, while on the other it needs to feed and spread information extracted from social media back into the relevant organizational business units. This process can be described as the dialogic integration function of social media management.

### 6.2 Limitations and further research

Shao (2009) pointed to the fact that the three usage types – consumption, participation and production – are analytically separate, but in reality interdependent. Even though we tried, in regard to the existing research, to broaden the distinctiveness of different user types, research on communication processes in social media remains challenging. Due to the characteristics of the social media applications investigated, users who visit an organizational profile for the first time and network with the organization are very likely to subsequently become consumers of corporate communication, since corporate posts will automatically become visible on the user's page feed once a network connection is established. Motives arising from consumption following initial participation were not differentiated in our study.

It can also be argued that our sub-sample of digital natives was rather small and therefore limited in its ability to account for all kinds of relationships which can exist between the members of a group and a corporation (i.e. customer, employee, shareholder, etc.). Future research should try to specify the roles and relationships that respondents have with corporations.

Reflecting on our literature review, our study results point to a highly increased public acceptance toward organizations on SNS within the last few years. Whereas Vorvoreanu (2009) noted that college students in the USA only accepted the presence of small corporations on Facebook for their own benefit (i.e. rewards, discounts), our results are in line with the findings of Men and Tsai (2012, 2013) who pointed toward a general acceptance of corporations on SNS. In addition, social motives for interaction seem to have become more frequent in the last three years, however, remain on a low level.

In conclusion, the investigation of usage motives of social media PR use should be continued and broadened to many different cultural areas of the world. It can be argued that certain cultural factors are likely to have an influence on respondents' motives for using corporate social media profile pages. In the future, more research should be devoted to the analysis of cultural factors that shape the usage incentives in different societies. The results of such research will greatly inform the management of international PR and help develop international social media strategy building.

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### Further reading

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