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Leveraging Social Networking Sites for Executive Success

Research-in-Progress

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Abstract

The use of social networking sites (SNS) has become the major phenomena in social practice and a new platform for impression management. Traditional perspectives of impression management (IM) have focused on the use of IM on a targeted audience. Actors employing IM tactics in SNS must consider multiple audiences simultaneously. Further, these actors may hold different IM objectives for each audience. For example, top managers of corporations who act as spokesperson on behalf of their company and who act to further their personal interests. We are interested in understanding how top managers leverage SNS for personal career success. Specifically, we seek to answer two questions. Does the use of IM tactics in SNS affect a top manager's career success? If so, which tactics are effective? We will apply text mining and machine learning techniques on publicly available SNS posts of top managers to assess how IM tactics affects their careers.

Keywords

Social networking sites, impression management, top managers, text mining.

Introduction

Ever since social networking platforms have entered the communication realm at the turn of the millennium, social networking sites (SNS) have become a core part of social interactions (Boyd & Ellison, 2007). SNS such as Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn provide online platforms for users to interact with others, create social networks, and present a favorable image. Over one billion people use SNS as of 2013 which creates a vast web of interconnected relationships that has the ability to influence large audiences at once (Schniederjans et al, 2013).

Social media has started to draw the attention of information systems researchers. Miller & Tucker (2013) argued that management of social media activity in the firms should not be regarded as only a marketing strategy but also should be considered as an efficient tool for employee integration. Moreover, Wu (2013) showed the significant impact of adoption of a social networking tool on productivity and job security. At the corporate level, social media is also emphasized as one of the most influential tools of information technology on business (Aral et al., 2013). In this study, we investigate how top managers use social networking platforms to not only alter their network position but also help their career success.

While corporations leverage from SNS for corporate purposes and see these platforms as an efficient and cost effective means to attain broader audiences, individuals also utilize SNS for their own career success within the corporation. Ease of disseminating information through SNS lets actors reach target audiences in a short time and create a favorable image in the eye of stakeholders. Since organizations and individuals are using social media as a way to enhance, sustain and defend their

perceived image (Mangold & Faulds, 2009; Li & Shiu, 2012), impression management strategies in social media arise a potential question to examine.

Impression management (IM), also known as self-presentation, is defined as efforts of an actor to generate, defend or otherwise alter an image held by a target audience (Bolino et al., 2008; Bozeman & Kacmar, 1997). Jones and Pittman (1982) identified five tactics of IM: ingratiation, supplication, self-promotion, exemplification, and intimidation. Ingratiation involves individuals rendering favors, conforming in opinions, or using flattery to gain appreciation from the target audience (Wayne & Liden, 1995; Bolino & Turnley, 1999). Supplication refers the tactics of an actor who exploits his own weakness to invoke empathy from the audience (Jones and Pittman, 1982). Self-promotion defines the efforts of an actor who aims to be seen as competent and respected (Bolino & Turnley, 1999). Exemplification tactics are demonstrations of self-sacrifice for the company or community to portray moral worthiness (Bolino and Turnley, 1999). Finally, actors use intimidation to present themselves as powerful and dangerous figures that are capable of harming a target (Mohamed et al., 1999). Traditionally, individuals have engaged in IM tactics in not only a face-to-face media, but also print media, phone calls or mail to manage their impressions. In addition, corporations have conveyed their impression tactics through annual reports, mass media publicity, and special organizational programs (Elsbach et al., 1998; Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978).

Actors, who employ IM tactics in traditional media, use boundaries of separate audiences to customize their message. Boundaries segregate different audiences in the applied medium. For example, an individual using email can segregate audiences by addressing a specific individual or group. In SNS, the boundaries between audiences have become more permeable since the actor shares information with multiple audiences at the same time. Sharing information with multiple audiences simultaneously is called context collapse. Context collapse refers to the overlap of an individual's multiple audiences into one single platform (Boyd, 2008; Marwick & Boyd, 2010). Because of context collapse, actors have more difficulty managing separate impressions to their respective audiences in SNS than in offline settings (Marwick & Boyd, 2010). Hence, the question of how these "unbounded" platforms affect the individual usage of IM tactics requires further investigation.

Specifically, we attempt to examine the IM tactic usage of top managers in SNS. The chief executive officers (CEO's) and other top managers are the key individuals responsible for corporate direction (Chun, 2005; Davies & Miles, 1998). Maintaining characteristics that highly influence the corporate image, top managers are often perceived as the representatives of the company for both external and internal stakeholders. An impression management perspective would suggest that managers may be engaged in self-service bias and be motivated to act for both the environment and their actions so as to increase their own outcomes (Rosenfeld et al., 1995).

Top managers expect benefits for participation in social media for corporate goals as well as for their own career goals (Diga & Kelleher, 2009). While corporations are willing to see their top managers as effective storytellers in social media for corporate goals, top managers themselves find it interesting to share their thoughts, celebrity lifestyles, political views, etc. for their personal gains. Due to these competing goals, top managers' engagement in social media is different from typical users who only represent themselves. For example, Sir Richard Branson, chairman of Virgin Group, frequently releases information about his family, trips and political interests through SNS. Almost four million Twitter users currently follow Sir Richard Branson apparently not only to receive information about Virgin Group, but also learn more about his celebrity life style. This dual role of top managers generates an unprecedented audience for top managers such as friends, fans, employees, investors, shareholders, industry peers, news media, customers and even prospective employees. Consequently, context collapse presents a challenge for individuals trying to use the same impression management strategies in social media platforms as in traditional media.

At this point, we seek to answer following research questions. Do IM strategies in social media affect a top manager's career success? Which specific social media IM strategies do top managers employ to enhance their career outcomes? Investigation of these questions will contribute to the usage of social networking sites as a platform for optimizing the impact of IM strategies on career success.

Previous Literature

Previous literature has extensively examined individual and corporate level impression management (IM) tactics in traditional media, or methods of communication. In traditional media, individuals have engaged in IM tactics mainly in a face-to-face medium. Less saliently, they also rely on prints, phone calls or mail to manage their impressions. In addition, corporations have used IM tactics through annual reports, broadcast media and special organizational programs (Elsbach et al., 1998; Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978). However, the emergence of SNS accelerated interactive information sharing channels and collaborative online platforms, which initiated a variety of platforms useful to both individuals and corporations.

We have categorized IM research along two dimensions: type of media and unit of analysis to help define our research space. Figure 1 depicts our view of the IM literature.

	Traditional Media	Social Media
CORPORATE IM	☑	☑
INDIVIDUAL IM (Top Managers)	☑	Our Research

Figure 1 Impression management tactics usage at the individual and corporate level across different media platforms.

IM at the Individual Level in Traditional Media

At the individual level, researchers have examined IM seeking to understand the ways in which the behaviors of actors (e.g., employees) influence the assessments of “audiences” (e.g., supervisors). Researchers have studied the role of impression management in various professional concepts such as attitude measurement (Arnold & Feldman, 1981), employee selection (Kacmar et al., 1992), supervisor-subordinate relations (Fandt & Ferris, 1990; Yukl & Falbe, 1990), and performance evaluation (Wayne & Kacmar, 1991).

Top Managers, Impression Management and Career Success

As a subsection of the individual-level IM group, researchers have investigated the effects of top managers’ IM usage on their career success. For example, Westphal and Stern (2006, 2007) suggested that IM tactic usage help top managers to receive board appointments. Westphal and Stern (2006) found that top manager IM usage toward board members and peer directors accounts for the replacement of high-quality social and educational background in career success. In Westphal and Stern (2007), besides the finding of IM influences board appointments, the authors found that the gender and ethnicity moderate this relationship (Westphal and Stern, 2007). These tactics were found not only employed toward board members and peer directors but also a wider range of audiences including shareholders (Godfrey et al., 2003) and journalists (Westphal & Deephouse, 2011). Nevertheless, previous research has focused on IM usage of top managers in primarily traditional media platforms. No study to date, has investigated the outcome of IM tactics usage of top managers in social media.

IM at the Organizational Level in Traditional Media

Researchers have also begun to study impression management of corporations using traditional media (e.g. Yukl & Falbe, 1990; Gardner & Martinko, 1988; Bozeman & Kacmar, 1997; Bolino & Turnley 2003). Organizational impression management (OIM) research found that organizations employ IM tactics to enhance, maintain and defend a positive image with a variety of stakeholders outside and inside the organization (Elsbach et al., 1998; Bolino et al., 2008). For example, Ravasi and Schultz (2006) found

that corporations frequently employ IM tactics following to an identity crisis. In this study, authors showed the various ways of conveying impressions to the stakeholders such as using an effective slogan to enhance the corporate image appeared in annual reports and mass media. In addition, research on OIM during the era of traditional media, including print advertising and news media, concentrated on strategies, to retain the support of internal and external audiences which is critical of an organization's actions (Elsbach et al., 1998; Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978).

IM at the Organizational Level in Social Media

Recently, researchers are focusing on the corporate-level IM tactics in social networking sites (SNS). SNS such as Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn provide online platforms for corporations to interact with customers, suppliers, shareholders and other key stakeholders. The evolution of SNS accelerated interactive information sharing channels, which initiated a variety of platforms useful to OIM. It has become essential that organizations understand the dynamics of how it can be used as a platform to sustain a preferable image, as well as how it may increase the overall productivity. For instance, Luo et al. (2013) investigated the relationship between social media activity and firm equity value. Conlon & Murray (1996) explored defensive and assertive IM strategies to increase user satisfaction and repeat business. Recently, Schniederjans et al. (2013) found that IM tactics in social media has a positive association with a firm's financial performance. In comparison with analyses of the effects of IM tactic usage on corporate financial performance, career performance of individuals in social media has largely been ignored in the literature.

IM at the Individual Level in Social Media

At the individual-level, researchers have investigated the relationship between job-seeking behavior and SNS. Plummer et al. (2011) investigated trust and privacy concerns in using SNS for job searches. Negative images on social networking platforms were found to impact hiring decisions (Bohnert & Ross, 2010). We are interested in understanding how top managers, who speak for themselves and the corporations, use social media for personal career success.

Theory and Model

In our model, we use Jones and Pittman's (1982) IM taxonomy, validated by Bolino and Turnley (1999), which captures a large domain of IM behaviors and is applicable to both the individual and organizational level of analysis. Our study attempts to analyze the relationships between the dimensions of IM and career success. The relationships between constructs are depicted below in Figure 2. We will investigate the pitfalls and advantages of these tactics as they are employed in the SNS environment. Further, we consider IM tactics as visible not only to targeted audience but also to unimagined observers.

We propose that the display of IM tactics to a wide audience impacts the effectiveness of IM on career success. Previous research on this topic has generalized the five IM tactics as being employed to gain career success (e.g., Gordon, 1996; Wayne and Liden, 1995). However, we hypothesize that ingratiation and supplication will have negative effects because the audience composition will be different in the SNS environment. Each of the five IM tactics and career success construct will be covered in detail in the following paragraphs.

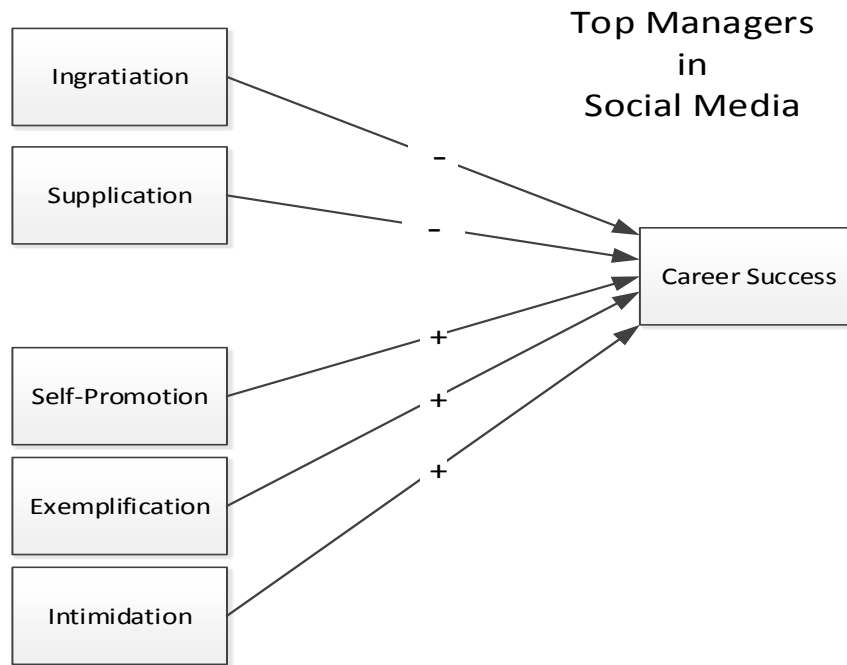


Figure 2 Social Media use in IM and its impact on career success

Career Success of Top Managers

Career success is described as the collected positive work and psychological outcomes resulting from one's work experiences (Seibert et al., 2001). While previous research manifests that human capital, organizational sponsorship, socio-demographic status and stable individual differences are most common variables used as predictors of career success, a great deal of research also investigated the relations among impression management and career success (Bolino et al., 2008; Wayne & Ferris, 1990; Wayne & Liden 1995). Moreover, various studies support the notion that skilful use of impression management can lead to an increase in the chances of top managers' career success (e.g., Singh & Vinnicombe, 2001).

Career success is generally assumed to consist of objective (pay ascendancy, promotion) and subjective (job satisfaction, career satisfaction) elements (Hughes, 1937). Most research on career success typically has focused on objective success (e.g., Gutteridge, 1973) rather than individual assessments of their own success (Gattiker & Larwood, 1989). Objective career element may be defined by verifiable accomplishments such as pay and promotions. Some researchers, for instance investigated both elements together in a specific research in case of a negative correlation between objective elements and subjective elements (e.g., Judge et al., 1995). However, objective elements are widely considered as the hallmarks of career success and vast majority of researchers focused on objective perspectives while analyzing the nature of career success construct (Heslin, 2005). Thus, while examining IM tactics usage of top managers in social media, we will take objective elements of career success (e.g., compensation and promotion) into our research consideration.

Ingratiation

Ingratiation involves individuals rendering favors, conforming in opinions, or using flattery to gain appreciation from the target audience (Wayne & Liden, 1995; Bolino & Turnley, 1999). Most theorists

have reached a consensus that ingratiation is a common and often successful method of social influence (e.g. Leary & Kowalski, 1990; Rosenfeld et al., 1995; Bolino, 1999; Wayne & Liden 1995; Gordon, 1996). From the definition, ingratiation works on the basis that the target audience - who are flattered, agreed in ideas or gaining favors from the actor- are more likely to give credibility to the actor. For instance, by engaging in ingratiation, the employee limits the supervisor's choices to punish and control him (Rosenfeld et al., 1995).

Westphal and Stern (2006) suggested that top manager IM usage accounts for the replacement of high-quality social and educational background factors in career success. Further, IM tactic usage toward board members and peer directors help top managers receive board appointments. Moreover, gender and ethnicity moderate the relationship between IM tactic usage and career success of top managers (Westphal and Stern, 2007). In traditional media, these tactics were found employed toward not only board members and peer directors but also a wider range of audiences including shareholders (Godfrey et al., 2003) and journalists (Westphal & Deephouse, 2011).

Note that previous research shows that engagement in ingratiation by top managers is mostly applied toward a single specific target audience (e.g., board of directors, peers, shareholders and journalists). However, SNS, with their broad communication flow capacities, produce the problem of context collapse. Due to the wider audience composition in SNS, ingratiation usage will be visible to multiple audiences in a shorter time. Although the usage of ingratiation will be perceived as favorable by the targeted audience (e.g., board of directors) who are motivated by vanity (Vonk, 2002), other observers (e.g., peers, employees and shareholders) will judge this behavior as dislikeable and manipulative (Vonk, 1998). A cumulative dislike toward a top manager will also affect the firm's corporate image (Wade et al., 2006). Top managers' dual roles –both personal and corporate- cause them to have a wider range of audiences including friends, fans, and stakeholders. In this case, audience bystanders will outnumber the targeted audience. Therefore, we propose our first hypothesis as:

Hypothesis 1: Top managers' engagement in ingratiation on SNS has a negative association with their career success.

Supplication

When an actor engages in supplication, he exploits his own weakness to influence the audience (Jones and Pittman, 1982). By showing his incompetence, the actor is attempting to generate an image of being needy and dependent. From the definition, the goal of supplication is to receive help to complete a task or avoid additional assignments. Supplication may decrease the perceived level of competence and is often used within organizations only as a last resort (Turnley & Bolino, 2001). However, the supplication tactic may make supervisors feel superior to others (Jones and Pittman, 1982). Longenecker et al. (1987) likewise proposed that the supplication tactic may make supervisors feel pity which generates sympathy toward the employee. Further, Bolino and Turnley (2003) found that seeking assistance perpetuates the effectiveness of work among male employees.

To date, there is no research targeting supplication usage of top managers. However, previous findings show that at the corporate level, supplication is utilized by organizations to find solutions to cure their emerging problems (Mohamed et al., 1999). In addition, supplication helps organizations to remedy problems quickly because of the generation of word-of-mouth information spread in social media (Schniederjans et al., 2013). For example, American Red Cross posted this tweet: "Recent disasters have significantly disrupted national blood supply. Please donate ASAP!" This message can be regarded as a supplication tactic because it displays a needy image.

However, in the context of top manager behaviors, we posit that the supplication tactic might create an undesired image as it is employed in the SNS environment. In contrast to displaying competent and powerful image which are favored by audiences (Yukl & Tracey, 1992; Lucero et al., 2009; Wayne & Ferris, 1990; Gaines-Ross, 2000), exhibition of weakness or vulnerability of a top manager may result in a confidence loss and a negative perception in the eye of stakeholders. For instance, the board of directors who play an important role in corporate governance and meticulously monitor the top management (Weisbach, 1988) will notice the weakness through SNS quickly. SNS platforms will likely aid in perpetuating negative impressions because of public visibility and information diffusion. As a result, we

predict that career benefits (e.g., compensation) of top managers will likely decline (Jensen & Murphy, 1990).

Hypothesis 2: Top managers' engagement in supplication on SNS has a negative association with their career success.

Self-Promotion

In contrast to ingratiation which focuses on being liked, the goal of self-promotion is to be seen as competent and respected (Bolino & Turnley, 1999). The actor focuses on general ability dimensions like intelligence or specific skills such as being able to play a musical instrument (Rosenfeld et al., 1995). Several researchers found that the use of self-promotion tactics have a positive effect on interviewee's evaluations (e.g., Gilmore & Ferris, 1989). Employees who utilize self-promotion tactics are more likely to be perceived as productive as opposed to employees not engaging in these tactics (Wayne & Ferris, 1990).

Within the context of top managers, promotion of accomplishments and demonstration of competencies would be anticipated tactics of business leaders. In addition, companies have an interest in presenting their top managers as competent to audiences such as employees, the press, and the financial community (Pollach & Kerbler, 2011). In the past, former CEO of Chrysler, Lee Iacocca and former CEO of General Electric, Jack Welch, exhibited competencies by means of traditional media channels with their book publications about leadership. However, today SNS are massive platforms for social influencers, such as top executives, in order to promote personal reputation. For instance, Sir Richard Branson, chairman of Virgin Group, has almost four million followers in his individual Twitter account as of Feb 2014, which demonstrates that SNS can reach tens of millions via information spread in a matter of seconds.

Top managers' self-images, highlighted accomplishments, and reputations in the public eye will be effectively enhanced and quickly disseminated to multiple audiences by means of social networking tools. While delivering featured information to their stakeholders with these efficient channels, expectations from managers will be met and in turn the firm and top management team will receive positive evaluations (Gaines-Ross et al., 2000). As a result, managers will gain benefits such as compensation increase (Murphy, 1999).

Hypothesis 3: Top managers' engagement in self-promotion on SNS has a positive association with their career success.

Exemplification

Exemplification can be described as demonstrations of self-sacrifice for the company or community to portray moral worthiness (Bolino and Turnley, 1999). Exemplifiers let others know that they work hard and engage in self-sacrifice (e.g., social responsibility activities). Turnley and Bolino (2001) found that exemplifiers are more likely to be seen as dedicated and are unlikely to be perceived as lazy by peers since exemplifiers work harder and are more committed when others pay attention to them.

Top managers are frequently seen in exemplification tactics due to their corporate and personal social responsibility roles. One recent example is the actions of Gregg Steinhafel, Target Inc. CEO. He addressed his opinions toward a better child education system and reducing plastic bag consumption which quickly spread via social media. Similarly, Tesla Motors top management team displayed their vision for a greener world. These behaviors are examples of social responsibility activities and can be regarded as an exemplification tactic (Mohamed et al., 1999).

SNS do not only provide a platform to share information about individual social activities, but also promote trust and help crisis management through greater information sharing capabilities (Oh et al., 2013). Thus, we expect that exemplification tactic usage of top managers on SNS will reach multiple audiences via ease and cost-efficient means. As a consequence, while pro-social managers maximize the market value of the firm (Mackey et al., 2007), they will likely also garner an increase in individual career benefits (Jensen & Murphy, 1990).

Hypothesis 4: Top managers' engagement in exemplification on SNS has a positive association with their career success.

Intimidation

Intimidation strategy is generally used by actors in order to present themselves as powerful and dangerous figures that are capable of harming a target audience (Mohamed et al., 1999). Intimidation is more likely to take place in non-voluntary relationships like the one between supervisors and employees. Within organizations, intimidation is usually a form of downward influence, from higher to lower power individuals (Rosenfeld et al., 1995).

In a comprehensive study, Yukl and Tracey (1992) claim that intimidation might enhance the employee's ability to get the job done and may lead to the manager being perceived as hard-charging. In the eye of stakeholders (e.g., employees, investors, board members), this type of manager would be favorable especially when a situation requires immediate action (Gardner & Avolio, 1998). Further, stakeholders expect top managers to set up and exert instant decisions during times of crisis (Lucero et al., 2009).

SNS will not only enhance the speed of diffusion of this tactic among stakeholders, but also will provide an efficient delivery of the power signal over similar competitors. Although an intimidation strategy is not preferable by organizations especially when handling internal and external entities, Schniederjans et al., (2013) proposed that companies who are engaging in an intimidation tactic in social media increase their financial performances. Besides the corporate role, an impression management perspective would suggest that managers may be engaged in self-service bias and be motivated to act for their actions so as to increase personal career outcomes (Rosenfeld et al., 1995). Thus, we posit our hypothesis as:

Hypothesis 5: Top managers' engagement in intimidation on SNS has a positive association with their career success.

Methodology and Further Research Agenda

We plan to analyze historical posts of top managers (e.g. Fortune 500) from their individual Twitter accounts from a specific period. We will use supervised and unsupervised machine learning algorithms (e.g., Latent Dirichlet Allocation and Support Vector Machines) to identify keywords and topics (see Table 1 for the key word selection examples). To measure career success, our data source will be firms' proxy statement filings with the SEC (Form Def 14A) to extract shareholdings of selected top executives. In addition, total compensation of executives will be obtained from Compustat ExecuComp database which includes salary, bonus, annual awards, total value of restricted stock units (RSUs) granted, total value of stock options granted and all other remuneration. In order to enlighten the longitudinal effects of these tactics –independent variables-, we will apply appropriate regression models on a binary response dependent variable. As control variables; first, top managers' firm features such as sector, age, and size, second, top managers' tenure and finally the variable of whether top manager is the founder of the firm or not will be used in the analyses.

Behavior	Definition	Social Media Example
Ingratiation	Behaviors used by top managers to make them look more favorable to an audience	Opinion conformity, favor rendering and flattery towards stakeholders. Exp. Congrats to xxx (flattery), I agree to xxx (opinion conformity)

Supplication	Behavior to project an image of vulnerability and dependency to solicit assistance from others.	Personal posts to lobby for forms of help. Exp. We need to act together to overwhelm xxx policies.
Self-Promotion	Behaviors presenting the top managers as highly productive, successful, and competent.	Personal shares via social media to promote one's competency. Exp. Thanks to xxx for rewarding me as the...
Exemplification	Behaviors used by top managers to demonstrate their integrity, social responsibility and moral worthiness	Comments in social media to promote socially responsible activities. Exp. We reduced paper waste this year.
Intimidation	Behaviors displaying the powerful and intimidating side of personality to establish control on audience	Personal posts of top managers suggesting their power over similar competitors. Exp. cannot be tolerated in my team (exhibition of power over employees)

Table 1. Impression Management Tactics in Social Media (Schniederjans et al., 2013).

We believe our methodology is novel because of the following points; first, we do not use survey data, which might limit the comprehensiveness of information since entire coverage will be difficult and create a burden on both researcher and subject. In addition, survey data may be limited in the quality and quantity of the data. Moreover, subjects would need to recall their behaviors, thus it might result in missing observations. Finally, since impression management tactics can be used unintentionally (Liden & Mitchell, 1988), it is possible to capture unconscious tactics by collecting instant social media data.

Contribution

Although IM theory implies that individuals should act differently when facing multiple audiences, surprisingly little empirical research has explicitly tested this hypothesis. SNS provides members a connected platform to build and sustain various social connections (Parks, 2010; Marwick & Boyd, 2010), which can serve as a clue for comparing and inferring how individuals adjust their self-presentation in the presence of different audiences. We propose that the setting of SNS brings some new opportunities to present one-self toward others.

From a more practical perspective, no study to date, to the best of our knowledge, has investigated what IM strategies are used by top professionals in online settings. Interestingly, there are many anecdotal success stories, and even handbooks written on the usage of online IM tactics in job-related context, but little to no research has tried to quantify the online IM tactic usage of influential characters (e.g., CEO) while investigating IM effectiveness in social media. Consequently, the results of this study will contribute to the usage of social networking sites as a platform for optimizing the impact of IM strategies on career success.

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