

Enemy in the house? Antecedents of employees' company-related bad mouthing in social media

Full Paper

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Abstract

Given that company rating sites encourage employees to evaluate their company - which might lead to a loss of reputation -, this research focuses on identifying and quantifying the importance of antecedents of employees' company-related bad mouthing in social media. Data for this study was collected through a qualitative interview study (N = 33) and a quantitative online survey approach (N = 472). Drawing on social identity theory and using the job demands-resources model as a theoretical lens, we found that job demands are positively associated with turnover intention, which in turn increases company-related bad mouthing in social media of employees. This study enriches the understanding of employees' behavior in social media and provides implications for managers such that the strategy of reducing turnover intention is more successful to limit the amount of employees' bad mouthing than enhancing employees' commitment.

Keywords

Social media, employee behavior, company-related bad mouthing, job demands-resources model

Introduction

Social media is on the rise. Business press and academic research regularly feature articles how social media (e.g., Twitter, Facebook, Yelp, and many other services) helps people to voice opinions into the public domain (Kietzmann et al. 2011, Schaarschmidt et al. 2011), may influence political discussions (Bennett 2012), and is used as a marketing tool (Hyder 2016). For social media as a marketing tool, various authors have noted the double-edged character social media has (e.g., Gillian 2010, Van Meter et al. 2015). For example, customers can support products and services by giving favorable ratings that drive future sales, but simultaneously may spread their dissatisfaction with the company with the online world – leading to unwanted outcomes such as damaged reputation or brand equity and reduced profitability (Dellarocas 2000).

While the negative consequences of social media for companies have been acknowledged for customer activity, surprisingly little research addresses negative outcomes of social media use by own employees (Miles and Mangold 2014). However, employees especially are an important stakeholder group for companies as customers value employee opinions higher because they attribute more in-depth product and service knowledge to employees (Ivens and Schaarschmidt 2015). Two forms of inappropriate employee behavior in social media that potentially affect company reputations may be distinguished. On the one hand, there is the phenomenon of employees using social media in a way that aligns their unqualified postings with the company. For example, employees may use Facebook and Twitter privately, but they have listed the company they work in in their profile. Walsh et al. (2016) report on various cases where employees

that could be traced back to their company posted statements in social media that undermined the (online) image the company pursued. For example, a French soccer player used derogatory and homophobic language toward his coach in an interview he posted on Twitter. The player got suspended because the club did not tolerate such opinions to be attached to them. On the other hand, and even more dangerous in terms of reputation risks, are negative online ratings (along with detailed reports) of own employees at company review sites such as Glassdoor or Kununu. Here, employees post (often anonymously) about former and current employers. Company review sites are an important vehicle to attract new talents as they help to reduce information asymmetry inherent in job applications (Dabirian et al. 2016), and an unfavorable online reputation at these places put the acquisition of qualified personnel under risk. Thus, knowing why employees start to post negative comments or provide low ratings is important to managers because then they might find strategies to protect their online reputation better. Bad mouthing of employees on a company review site has a larger impact in comparison to regular bad mouthing in the area of friends, because it is longer available and more accessible for a numerous amount of fellow users.

We put both forms of reputation-damaging social media activity together and define employee behavior as described above as “employees' company-related bad mouthing in social media”. Given the lack of research focusing on antecedents on employees' postings, this research aims to 1) identify important antecedents and 2) quantify their relative importance. The remainder of the article is organized as follows. First, we review related literature and develop hypotheses that are based on the job demands/job resources model as well as social identification theory. Second, we report on our method, which involves a cross-sectional survey of 472 employees. Finally, we provide our results and discuss them in light of current social media discussions and potential managerial actions.

Theoretical background and hypotheses

To explain employees' social media behavior, we draw upon the job demands-resources model (JD-R), which already has been used in relation to social media (Walsh et al. 2016). The JD-R model categorizes working conditions into two broad categories: job demands and job resources that both show specific effects on employees (Bakker and Demerouti 2007). Job demands are defined as “those physical, social, or organizational aspects of the job that require sustained physical or mental effort” (Demerouti et al. 2001, p. 501). They are “therefore associated with certain physiological and psychological costs (e.g., exhaustion)” (Demerouti et al. 2001, p. 501). Additionally, job resources are defined as “those physical, psychological, social, or organizational aspects of the job that [...] (a) be functional in achieving work goals; (b) reduce job demands [...]; (c) stimulate personal growth and development.” (Demerouti et al. 2001, p. 501). The original model postulates that a high level of job demands and a limited availability of job resources can lead to energy depletion and a lower level of work motivation (Demerouti et al. 2001). These low levels of work motivation, in turn, may affect behavioral outcomes, such as an increased turnover intention and less commitment (Schaufeli and Bakker 2004).

Based on the JD-R model and the above summarized definitions, we focus on job dissatisfaction and unfair treatment as organizational aspects of job demands which might negatively impact employees' attitudes at work (Essed 1991). Regarding job resources, we concentrate on perceived external reputation of the firm, supervisor support and organizational climate. Figure 1 depicts our conceptual model, which is based on the JD-R model. To derive our hypotheses, we draw on social identity theory, which uses individual's self-concept and their perceived membership in relevant social groups to predict intergroup behaviors. Social identity theory states that individuals are intrinsically motivated to achieve positive distinctiveness and strive for a positive self-concept (Tajfel and Turner 1976). Their social identity is built out of the comparison of relevant out-groups and strengthens their identity if they perceive that their group is more reputable than the comparison group. Otherwise, individuals tend to leave the group and try to join the more reputable group or the try to improve their groups' reputation, but this is mostly not possible or only with excessive effort.

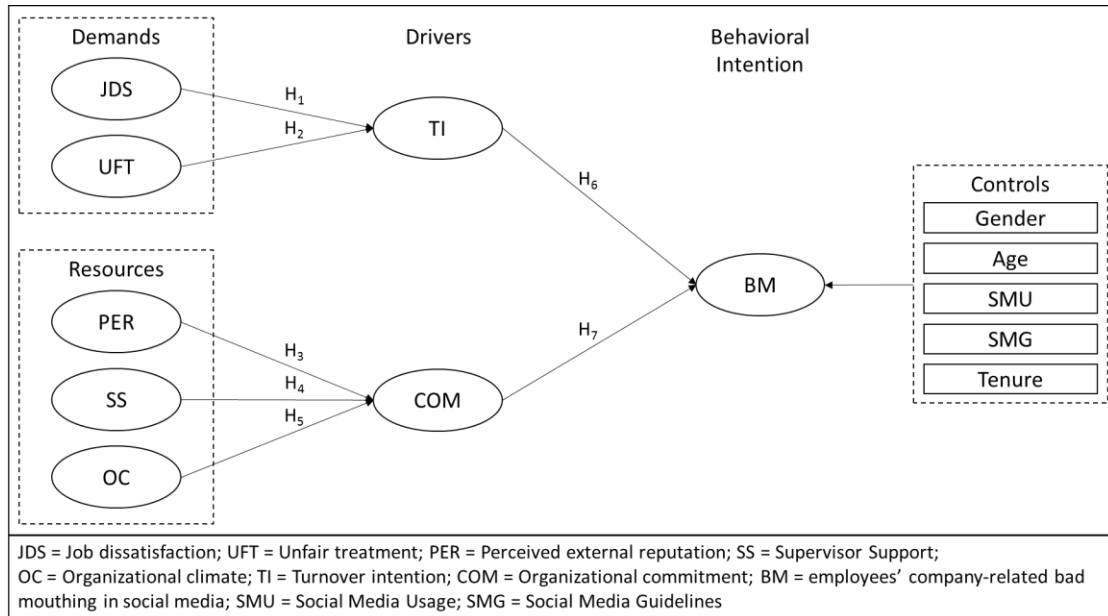


Figure 1 Conceptual Model

In line with social identity theory, job demands such as job dissatisfaction and employees' perception of unfair treatment decrease employees' self-concepts. In particular, job dissatisfaction, as is unfair treatment, is a state that deviates from the optimum impression that no other firm has a better workplace. Thus, as impressions arise that imply that out-groups might be more reputable, dissatisfaction might enhance employees quitting intentions. Nowadays this perception of a comparably unsatisfying workplace is fortified by company review sites such as Glassdoor or Kununu, where ratings of the own employer are shown next to other company ratings. As only few employees are able to increase their self-concept despite feelings of dissatisfaction, again increased turnover intention is the consequence, because an employee who perceives s/he is being treated unfair at work is not able to change this perception easily. Therefore, it seems to be unlikely that the employee choose the group-improving strategy mentioned above. This coherence it true for dissatisfied employees, too. Therefore, we postulate that job demands are positively related to employees' turnover intention (e.g. Schaufeli and Bakker 2004).

H₁: Employees' job dissatisfaction positively influences their turnover intention.

H₂: Employees' perception of an unfair treatment is positively associated with their turnover intention.

Furthermore, to derive the link between job resources and the driving variable organizational commitment we draw on social identity theory again. Perceived external reputation is the impression of how outsiders evaluate the group and accrues through a recursive process of impressions of meta-stereotypes (Schaarschmidt 2016). It is a stereotype that members of the in-group (e.g. employees) believe to be perceived by members of relevant out-groups such as individuals who are external to the company (Vorauer et al. 1998). In accordance with social identity theory, employees who think that their ingroup is perceived as reputable by externals might create a positive self-concept. In turn, these employees tend to stay within the group and increase the their organizational commitment. Also supervisor support might be an indicator for employees to compare with out-groups. If employees find that their supervisor support is better than the supervisor support of relevant out-groups (e.g., again through comparison in company review sites), this might lead to an increased organizational commitment. In accordance with this argumentation, finally, organizational climate might become an indicator of employees' comparison process, too. Therefore, we hypothesize a positive effect between perceived external reputation, and the perceptions of supervisor support, and organizational culture on individuals' commitment.

H₃: Individuals' perceived external reputation of the firm is positively related to employees' organizational commitment.

H₄: Employees' perceived supervisor support is positively associated with their organizational commitment.

H₅: The perceived organizational climate of employees is positively related with their organizational commitment.

While we have detailed how commitment and turnover intentions are shaped by job demands and job resources, the main focus of this study is how commitment and turnover intentions shape employees' company-related bad mouthing. Employees' company-related bad mouthing in social media might be influenced both by individuals' turnover intention (positive relationship) as well as by individuals' organizational commitment (negative relationship). In line with social identity theory organizational commitment might encourage employees to defend their company in social media while turnover intention positively impacts negative bad mouthing behavior. Thus, we hypothesize a positive relation of turnover intention on bad mouthing and a negative association with organizational commitment.

H₆: Employees' company-related bad mouthing in social media is positively associated with their turnover intention.

H₇: Employees' company-related bad mouthing in social media is negatively associated with their organizational commitment.

Methodology

Sample and data collection

We used a survey-based approach to test the hypotheses. To ensure external validity, our subjects had to represent the target group of employees, this study uses employees from various organizations as respondents (Helm 2013). We used a snowball technique to distribute the questionnaire via social media such as Facebook and Twitter. Additionally, we asked master students of a research lecture to share the questionnaire within their personal networks. Our invitation referred to an academic study regarding "social media usage of employees," thus obscuring the real intention such that no potential self-selection bias would arise. Right after the invitation we asked the participants via radio button if they are employed or not. None of those who finished the questionnaire was unemployed. We did not offer an incentive to participate, which potentially reduces repeated participation. In addition, we ensured that the questionnaire could only be completed once from the same computer. The questionnaire was accessible for approximately three weeks. A total of 650 employees participated in our study of which 499¹ (76.8%) have completed the questionnaire. A number of nine employees completed the questionnaire with an interruption ranging from 35 minutes to 7 hours.

However, because we did not include a completeness check, we face data sets with missing values. Thirteen cases were dropped because of systematically missing values, revealed by analyzing missing values in SPSS 23. The same analysis yielded six cases which are affected by unsystematic missing values (i.e., not more than two missing values per subject). We handled these cases by imputing them with the mean replacement procedure, which leads to 501 cases without missing values. Our pre-test with 28 subjects pointed out that 11 minutes is the minimum time required to answer the questionnaire carefully. Thus, 21 employees were excluded because they answered the questionnaire within less than five minutes. Finally, we had to drop eight subjects because they did not pass the attention checks in the middle and at the end of the questionnaire (e.g., Answering a question about road traffic such as which color must be shown on a traffic light to grant a pedestrian to cross the road.). We were thus able to use the responses of 472 participants for our analysis: 36% of them were female²; on average, the employees were 31 years old; 70% of the respondents are full time employees and 33% have a university-entrance diploma. Additionally, 24% stated

¹ The vast majority (136 subjects) of those who did not complete the survey aborted the questionnaire on the welcome page where the intention of the study was explained.

² We measured gender on a 7-point Likert scale where 1 was female and 7 was male to account for the increasing unwillingness in the LGBT community to position themselves as either male or female. However, the high number (10%) of respondents that did not fully relate themselves to either male or female gender surprised us.

that they use social media up to 12 hours a week. 55% of the employees respond that their company do not use social media guidelines. Table 1 illustrates a more detailed overview about the sample. We also investigated the potential for non-response bias by comparing the earliest 25% and the latest 25% of the respondents with regard to our conceptual variables (Armstrong and Overton 1977). The *t*-test of the group means for aggregated measures revealed no significant difference. For this reason, non-response bias was not established and was thus not a major concern in this study.

Sample Characteristic (n=472)		Number	Percentage
Gender	Female	169	36
	Male	257	54
	other	46	10
Age	<=20	14	3
	21-25	186	39
	26-30	131	28
	31-35	45	10
	36-40	19	4
	41-45	9	2
	>=46	68	14
Education	Lower secondary education	22	5
	Middle school degree	76	16
	Technical high school degree	71	15
	High school degree	134	28
	College graduate	155	33
	other	14	3
Income	< 1,000 € (\$1,100)	102	22
	1,000 – 2,000 €	182	39
	2,001 – 3,000 €	100	21
	3,001 – 4,000 €	33	7
	> 4,000 €	20	4
	n/a	35	7

Table 1 Sample Description

Measures

The questionnaire contained multi-item measures of the important variables. The items we used were translated from a bi-lingual speaker into German for the final questionnaire. The authors relied on well-established conceptualizations and measurements and developed variables for this research. We measured most of the variables on seven-point Likert scales ranging from 1 = 'strongly disagree', to 7 = 'strongly agree'. Our literature review revealed that no adequate items for employees' company-related bad mouthing fit to our social media context. Therefore, we performed a qualitative pre-study and interviewed 33 employees for an average of 15 minutes. We recorded and transcribed the interviews. Afterwards, we started by conducting an open coding, including *in vivo* coding, descriptive coding and attribute coding, to identify meaningful parts, followed by a pattern coding to cluster and aggregate the results. We could identify four clusters and found, that the majority of the respondents (30 employees) said, that anonymity must be ensured. We build an item for each cluster. Those items are "I use social media to report anonymously on bad experience that I have made in my working life," "I rate my employer anonymously as "poor" on a company rating platform," "I use social media to comment on grievances within my company anonymously," "I publicly express my displeasure about my employer when I am anonymous." Finally, we validated the items by performing an explorative factor analysis, while using a maximum likelihood extraction method in combination with a Promax rotation. We were able to extract distinct factors and found no cross loadings greater than .2.

Further, we adopted the three-item conceptualization of job satisfaction from Cammann et al. (1983) to measure dissatisfaction and enriched it while adding the item "I am dissatisfied with my job." To assess unfair treatment, the authors enriched the three-item operationalization of Essed (1991) while adding the following items based on the interview pre-study. "I get a disproportionate number of tasks," "I am getting less privileges than colleagues," "I have a poorer working environment (e.g., office) or equipment (e.g.,

computer) than colleagues,” and “I was exposed in front of colleagues.” To assess employees’ perceived reputation, we asked the subjects “How do you feel people outside your company would rate it on the following attributes?” as suggested by Helm (2013). This allowed us to assess employees’ perceptions of their companies’ reputation and reducing the probability of a social desirability bias. For supervisor support, we relied on the five-item operationalization of Eisenberger et al. (1986). Organizational climate is known as a multi-dimensional conceptualization, which is why we used the dimension friendly team spirit, which fit best to our context (Johannesson 1973). To assess employees’ turnover intention, we adapted three items from Helm (2013) and two items from Lum et al. (1998). For organizational commitment, we used Allen and Meyer’s (1990) eight-item operationalization including the reverse coded items. Our analysis revealed, that the cronbachs alphas were greater than .90 for all variables except job dissatisfaction (.83) and organizational climate (.87). Furthermore, we asked for additional controls, which are not listed in Table 1. Those are employees’ social media usage in hours per week, the presence of social media guidelines within the company, and employees’ tenure in years. Finally, we measured employees’ honesty on the three-item scale (Katz et al. 1994) to use it as a marker variable for common method bias tests.

Results

Measurement model evaluation

The measurement model was assessed by a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) using AMOS 23 and a maximum likelihood estimator. The fit indexes for assessing the model fit include chi-square (χ^2), degrees of freedom (*df*), root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA), standardized root mean square residual (SRMR), comparative fit index (CFI) and parsimony-adjusted normed fit index (PNFI), as recommended by Kline (2005). The analysis of the measured variables job dissatisfaction, unfair treatment, turnover intention, perceived external reputation, supervisor support, organizational climate, organizational commitment and employees’ company-related bad mouthing in social media revealed a good model fit with $\chi^2/df = 1.73$. Accordingly, the requested threshold for χ^2/df of ≤ 2 is not exceeded (Byrne 1989) We discovered a close fit regarding RMSEA of .039 with a 90% confidence interval ranging from .036 to .043, and a PCLOSE of 1.000. Our RMSEA-value fit perfectly within the range from 0.00 to 0.05 recommended by Brown and Cudeck (1993). With 0.04 the model did not exceed the suggested threshold for SRMR of .05 (Diamantopoulos and Siguaaw 2000). Additionally, we established good CFI of .95 and a tolerable PNFI of .83 (Mulaik et al. 1989). Finally, the CFA revealed that all of the standardized factor loadings were greater than 0.60 except one item of organizational commit that has a loading of 0.54.

To ensure discriminant and convergent validity of the measurement model, additional quality criteria must be satisfied. Those criteria are indicator reliability expressed by factor loadings greater than .5, construct reliability measured by composite reliability (CR) which should exceed .7, convergent validity which is represented by average variance extracted (AVE) which should be higher than .5. Finally, discriminant validity is an important quality criteria which is calculated by the square root of AVE. This square root must be greater than inter-construct correlations (Bagozzi and Yi 2012, Fornell and Larcker 1981). The presented measurement model passes all the quality criteria and thus the model revealed good reliability and validity (Table 2). Table 2 also shows high correlations between the variables of the measurement model. Especially the high correlation values above .6 draw our attention, because those might be an indicator for multicollinearity issues. Therefore, we calculated the variance inflation factor recommended by O’Brian (2007) and Hair et al. (2010). The highest variance inflation factor revealed by our test was 2.2, which is below the recommended threshold. Thus, multi-collinearity is no problem for our hypotheses tests.

We analyzed the measurement model for common method bias because we used the same source and method for our independent and dependent variables (Podsakoff et al. 2003). Therefore, three methods were used: (1) Harman’s single factor test in SPSS 23, (2) a common unmeasured latent factor analysis, and (3) a common measured latent factor analysis in AMOS 23 (Lindell and Whitney 2001). The first test showed that a single factor with the highest explanatory power explains only 37.3% of the variance, which is less than the suggested threshold of 50%. Second, we compared standardized regression weights for models with an unmeasured common latent factor, a comparison between regression weights for models with and without common latent factors revealed deltas much less than .20, which is a commonly used threshold (Chin et al. 2012). Therefore, we performed the third test while using a measure common latent

factor (e.g. honesty, measured with four items, see Katz et al. 1994). This test supported the results of the Harman's single factor test and the unmeasured common latent factor analysis and found that the variables might not be affected by common method bias.

	Mean	SD	CR	AVE	JDS	UFT	PER	SS	OC	TI	COM	BM
JDS	2.65	1.43	0.83	0.55	0.74							
UFT	2.22	1.33	0.91	0.60	0.71	0.77						
PER	4.78	1.09	0.89	0.51	-0.43	-0.45	0.72					
SS	5.10	1.44	0.91	0.66	-0.60	-0.55	0.55	0.81				
OC	5.10	1.19	0.86	0.55	-0.66	-0.61	0.60	0.70	0.74			
TI	3.06	1.78	0.91	0.66	0.74	0.67	-0.38	-0.46	-0.52	0.81		
COM	4.26	1.41	0.90	0.53	-0.65	-0.51	0.53	0.54	0.64	-0.63	0.73	
BM	1.87	1.39	0.94	0.80	0.60	0.66	-0.32	-0.42	-0.46	0.67	-0.44	0.90

Notes: JDS: Job dissatisfaction; UFT: Unfair treatment; PER: Perceived external reputation; SS: Supervisor support; OC: Organizational climate; TI: Turnover intention; COM: Organizational Commitment; BM: company-related bad mouthing in social media; the diagonal (bold) displays the square root of AVE.

Table 2 Convergent Validity, Discriminant Validity and Correlations

Hypotheses testing

To assess the hypothesized direct effects, the authors again used structural equation modeling in AMOS 23 and a maximum likelihood estimator. The model reveals an adequate fit with the data ($\chi^2/df = 2.42$, RMSEA = 0.05, SRMR = 0.20, CFI = 0.89, PNFI = 0.78). The variances of the endogenous variables are all explained to a substantial amount, all R^2 values are of considerable size ($R^2(TI) = 0.61$, $R^2(COM) = 0.38$, $R^2(BM) = 0.46$). In support of H_1 , the effect of job dissatisfaction on turnover intention revealed positive ($\beta = 0.52$, $p < 0.001$). Additionally, we found support for H_2 ($\beta = 0.32$, $p < 0.001$) unfair treatment is positively associated with turnover intention. The positive effect of perceived external reputation on organizational commitment hypothesized in H_3 can be supported ($\beta = 0.22$, $p < 0.001$), too. Supervisor support is positively associated with organizational commitment ($\beta = 0.16$, $p < 0.01$), in support of H_4 . We were able to find support for H_5 , organizational climate is positively related to organizational commitment ($\beta = 0.41$, $p < 0.001$). The driving variable turnover intention is positively associated with the employees' company-related bad mouthing in social media ($\beta = 0.65$, $p < 0.001$), as hypothesized in H_6 . Furthermore, we claim that organizational commitment is negatively related to employees' company-related bad mouthing a, but we did not find support for H_7 in our sample ($\beta = -0.06$, $p > 0.5$).

Path	Finding	Hypothesis	
JDS → TI	0.52***	H ₁	supported
UFT → TI	0.32***	H ₂	supported
PER → COM	0.22***	H ₃	supported
SS → COM	0.16**	H ₄	supported
OC → COM	0.41***	H ₅	supported
TI → BM	0.65***	H ₆	supported
COM → BM	-0.06 ^{n.s.}	H ₇	not supported

Note: JDS = Job dissatisfaction; UFT = Unfair treatment; PER = Perceived external reputation; SS = Supervisor Support; OC = Organizational climate; TI = Turnover intention; COM = Organizational commitment; BM = company-related bad mouthing; *** $p < 0.001$; ** $p < 0.01$; * $p < 0.05$

Table 3 Results of Structural Equation Modeling

We included the control variables to test their effect on our dependent variable employees' company-related bad mouthing in social media. Surprisingly, we found that employees with higher social media usage seem

to be more willing to report badly in social media ($\beta = 0.10, p < 0.01$). Our analysis show, that company's social media guidelines do not affect company-related bad mouthing in social media of employees ($\beta = 0.01, p > 0.5$). Another unexpected finding of our study is that employees with a high level of tenure are more willing to report badly than those employees who are employed for a short time. Additionally, we found that elderly employees are less willing to report badly in social media ($\beta = -0.09, p < 0.05$). Employees' gender ($\beta = 0.04, p > 0.5$) seems not to be associated with employees' company-related bad mouthing in social media. Table 3 summarizes the findings of this research.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to investigate the links between job demands and job resources on driving variables such as turnover intention and organizational commitment on employees' company-related bad mouthing in social media about their employer. Drawing on previous research and social identification theory, this research found support for the association of job demands and job resources on the antecedence of employees' company-related bad mouthing in social media. In particular, job dissatisfaction and unfair treatment are associated positively with turnover intention. This in turn is positively associated with employees' company-related bad mouthing. Furthermore, support is found for the positive relation of job resources such as perceived external reputation, supervisor support and organizational climate on organizational commitment. However, this research did not find support that employees' commitment has a dampening effect on their company-related bad mouthing in social media.

Theoretical implications

First, our research indicates the applicability of the JD-R model in the context of social media and employee voice. However, while we found support for an effect of turnover intention on bad mouthing, we found no effect for organizational commitment. An explanation for this finding might be that organizational commitment is not able to reduce employees' company-related bad mouthing in social media because situational aspects. Commitment is a state that holds over time while quitting intentions are more short-term focused. Further research therefore might find support for the dampening effect of organizational commitment when shedding light on employees' company-related bad mouthing in relation to a specific incident. This incident could be related to personal experiences such as a job termination or a missed promotion. In addition, we identified unexpected findings, for example, that companies' social media guidelines seem not to be associated with employees' company-related bad mouthing in social media. This is surprising, because those guidelines were explicitly built to prevent reputational incidents (Ivens and Schaarschmidt 2015). An explanation might be that employees are not aware of the social media guidelines of their company, or that existing guidelines do not treat employees' company-related bad mouthing. Furthermore, we found that employees with a higher level of tenure are more willing to report badly in social media. This finding is surprising because we expected that employees with a higher-level von tenure feel more commitment for the company, which would decrease the company-related bad mouthing in social media. The well-established informal networks of employees with a higher level of tenure might be an explanation. Employees who just joined a company may fear more consequences in comparison, to those with a higher level of tenure. We encourage other researchers to shed light on those issues. Additionally, we were able to apply the job demands-resources framework successfully to our social media context. Furthermore, our research provides core implications for the understanding of employees' behavior in social media. This research extends our knowledge of the driving forces of employees' organizational harming behavior. Finally, researchers should investigate other kinds of job demands and job resources and their effect on antecedence of employees' company-related bad mouthing in social media.

Managerial implications

With regard to our findings, we encourage managers to reduce employees' dissatisfaction. They have to find ways to identify reasons for employees' dissatisfaction and find ways to remove or dampen the effect of job dissatisfaction as suggested by Helm (2013) and Schaarschmidt et al. (2015). Additionally, we recommend to reduce employees' unfair treatment or the perception of unfair treatment while explaining task and actions more detailed. These approaches tie employees to the organization and enable them to comprehend management decisions better. Both recommendations might lead to a decrease in turnover intention, which in turn help to reduce bad evaluations in social media. Thus, managers should be aware of the fact that the

effects of states of dissatisfaction are no longer narrowed to organizational boundaries; they also affect the company's image in the public domain.

This research also highlighted that of the two possible strategies, namely enhancing commitment versus reducing turnover intention, only one is suitable to affect employees' company-related bad mouthing. As commitment is not correlated with the final outcome variable, only the strategy of reducing turnover intention is potentially successful to limit the amount of employees' bad mouthing. Finally, we derive managerial implications out of the effects provided by the control variables. For example, our results indicate that the presence of social media guidelines (i.e. verbal or textual descriptions of appropriate social media usage) are ineffective. We postulate that these guidelines have to be enriched by social media trainings to unfold its power.

Limitations

As with any research, this one is not free of limitations. First, we employed a cross-sectional approach to capture a wider set of perceived external reputation and organizational climate – data from one firm might have low variance in these two aspects. On the other hand, cross-sectional survey data need a larger amount of control variables. While we have accounted for many of them, other important control variables were not included (e.g., position in organization). Another limitation pertains to the use of self-reported data. Future research could find other measurement instruments for employees' company-related bad mouthing in social media, for example, by using observations from real Twitter accounts. Finally, we noted that several ways exist to damage the employer's reputation, but our measure of bad mouthing grouped many of them into one construct. For example, there might be a difference in drivers when the posting is anonymous versus non-anonymous. Future research could use a more fine-grained version of our measurement approach.

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