

**Crowd-based Accountability:
Examining how Social Media Commentary Reconfigures Organizational Accountability**

Abstract

Organizational accountability is considered critical to organizations' sustained performance and survival. Prior research has examined the structural and rhetorical responses that organizations use to manage accountability pressures from different constituents. With the emergence of social media, accountability pressures shift from the relatively clear and well-specified demands of identifiable stakeholders to the unclear and unspecified concerns of a pseudonymous crowd. This is further exacerbated by the public visibility of social media, materializing as a stream of online commentary for a distributed audience. In such conditions, the established structural and rhetorical responses of organizations become less effective for addressing accountability pressures. We conducted a multi-sited comparative study to examine how organizations in two service sectors (emergency response and hospitality) respond to accountability pressures manifesting as social media commentary on two platforms (Twitter and TripAdvisor). We find organizations responding online to social media commentary while also enacting changes to their practices that recalibrate risk, redeploy resources, and redefine service. These changes produce a *diffractive reactivity* that reconfigures the meanings, activities, relations, and outcomes of service work as well as the boundaries of organizational accountability. We synthesize these findings in a model of *crowd-based accountability* and discuss the contributions of this study to research on accountability and organizing in the social media era.

Authors:

Arvind Karunakaran
Assistant Professor, Strategy and Organization
Desautels Faculty of Management
McGill University
arvind.karunakaran@mcgill.ca

Wanda J. Orlikowski
Alfred P. Sloan Professor of Information Technologies and Organization Studies
Sloan School of Management
Massachusetts Institute of Technology
wanda@mit.edu

Susan V. Scott
Professor of Information Systems and Innovation
Department of Management
The London School of Economics and Political Science
S.V.Scott@lse.ac.uk

Acknowledgements: We would like to sincerely thank the study participants for their valuable time and contributions to the fieldwork. We are also thankful to the constructive feedback and generative comments offered by the Special Issue Senior Editors and the three reviewers throughout the revision process. Finally, we thank the roundtable participants at the Organization Science Special Issue Workshop at the University of California, Santa Barbara and the participants of the Accountability Research Workshop, University of Sydney for their feedback on earlier versions of this paper.

Organizational accountability, defined as “how organizations conduct, implement, and monitor policies and practices in relation to the demands of various stakeholder groups” (Frink et al. 2008, p.186), is critical to organizations’ sustained performance and survival (Roberts 1991). Examining how organizations are held to account by various groups, how they in turn respond to such accountability pressures, and with what outcomes have become important areas of inquiry in organizational research (Espeland & Sauder 2016; Hallett 2010; Roberts 2009).

Existing literature on accountability has examined the response strategies that organizations have conventionally used to address accountability pressures from different constituents such as customers, regulators, advocacy groups, and intermediaries (Bundy & Pfarrer 2015; Chaney & Philipich 2002; Dubnick 2005). These include structural responses (e.g., establishing compliance structures, creating separate roles/departments) and rhetorical responses (e.g., use of framing tactics, communicating and explaining actions via press releases) to accountability pressures. These organizational responses produce a convergent reactivity (Espeland & Sauder 2007) to accountability pressures, whereby organizational actors attempt to align their behaviors with the evaluative criteria of their constituents (Chatterji & Toffel 2010; Espeland & Sauder 2016, Sharkey & Bromley, 2015).

With the rise and spread of social media platforms, organizations are pressured to account to various constituents in new ways (Jeacle & Carter 2011; Wang, Reger, & Pfarrer 2021). Such pressure has increased of late, heightening concern with how engagements with emerging technologies are redefining meanings, activities, and ways of organizing. If organizations do not meet service expectations, negative and emotionally-charged comments may be posted about them on social media platforms (Barnett, Henriques & Husted 2020; Etter, Ravasi & Colleoni 2019; Orlikowski & Scott 2014). Recent research suggests that organizations experience new dilemmas and difficulties in responding to concerns on social media (Albu & Etter 2016). In the pre-social media era, constituents’ demands tended to escalate when explicit breaches in organizational performance standards could be substantiated. In contrast, accountability pressures generated by social media are marked by open-ended, sometimes unsubstantiated, and often conflicting concerns that achieve widespread prominence and damage

organizational reputation. Many managers and workers feel pressured to respond (Etter et al. 2019), but find this challenging because of how accountability pressures manifest on social media.

While the enactment of accountability pressures on social media shares some similarities with prior forms of accountability pressures (e.g., organizational shaming, emotionally-charged language), they also differ in important ways. The constituents in prior forms of accountability are generally known and identifiable *stakeholders*, their evaluative criteria relatively clear, stable, and well-specified, entailing more-or-less defined issues that are used to hold organizations to account. The constituents on social media platforms manifest as a diverse, dispersed, and largely pseudonymous *crowd*. Their evaluative criteria are unclear, in-flux, and unspecified, imposing uncertain and variable demands on organizations.

As the volume and visibility of social media commentary increase, the accountability pressures on organizations expand. The structural and rhetorical strategies typically used by organizations in response to accountability pressures are less effective in addressing social media criticisms, as vividly shown in recent public controversies involving United Airlines, Starbucks, and Dunkin' Donuts (Stevens 2018; Victor & Stevens 2017; Wang et al. 2021). In these cases, the organizations' structural and rhetorical responses backfired, generating a series of online tweetstorms and firestorms. The social media crowd viewed these organizational responses as intended to obfuscate and misdirect criticism (Aratani 2018; Goodman 2014; Reinstein 2018; Stevens 2018). Given that existing response strategies are not working effectively in the social media era, we sought to understand: *how do organizations respond to accountability pressures from social media commentary and with what consequences for organizing?*

To address this research question, we conducted a multi-sited comparative study (Bechky & O'Mahony 2015) to examine how organizations in two service sectors (emergency response, hospitality) respond to accountability pressures manifesting as social media commentary on two different platforms (Twitter, TripAdvisor). We find that as organizations engage with social media commentary, they enact changes to their practices that reconfigure their ways of organizing, shifting how risk is calibrated, how resources are deployed, and how service work is defined and performed.

We theorize that these dynamics produce a form of reactivity we term *diffractive reactivity*. Unlike convergent reactivity whereby organizational actors modify practices to conform or align with the

evaluative criteria of their stakeholders (Espeland & Sauder 2016), in diffractive reactivity, encounters with social media commentary produce scattered and equivocal organizational responses to the unclear and unspecified evaluative criteria of the pseudonymous crowd. These variable responses split attention and fragment processes as organizational actors (e.g., managers, front-line workers) shift focus to address immediate complaints and short-term demands, getting sidetracked from longer-term priorities (Chu, 2021). This is further exacerbated by the online visibility of social media, materializing a stream of commentary for a distributed audience. These shifts reconfigure the boundaries of organizational accountability, making organizational actors unsure about what they are held accountable for and uncertain about how, when, and to whom they are accountable. Building on these findings, we propose a model of crowd-based accountability that explains how accountability is reconfigured in the social media era, and the consequences for workers, managers, and organizing.

Organizational Responses to Accountability Pressures

The literature on organizational accountability spans multiple fields, ranging from political science to social psychology (Dubnick 2005; Frink et al. 2008; Tetlock et al. 2013; Power 1996). In organizational studies, scholars have examined how organizations are held to account by stakeholders such as regulators, customers, advocacy groups, news media, and valuation intermediaries (Bundy & Pfarrer 2015; Pollock & Rindova 2003; King 2008; Lerner & Tetlock 1999; McDonnell & Werner 2015; Rao 1998). Researchers have also studied how organizations respond to such pressures, and with what outcomes (Chaney & Philipich 2002; Espeland & Sauder 2016; Hallett 2010). Below we first consider the types of organizational responses that have been identified for stakeholder-based accountability pressures before turning to the implications of social media for accountability.

Organizational Responses to Stakeholder-based Accountability Pressures

We organize prior literature on organizational responses to accountability pressures by the type of response – *structural* and *rhetorical* – enacted by organizations. While both types may be enacted concurrently by organizations, we consider them separately here for analytic clarity.

Structural Responses to Accountability Pressures. Organizations facing accountability pressures commonly institute internal governance arrangements (Bergsteiner 2012; Chaney & Philipich 2002) such

as “compliance structures” (Dobbin & Kelly 2007), which designate roles or units to establish and enforce policies that manage constituents’ concerns. For example, Hallett (2010) describes the appointment of a finance professional as school CEO in response to accountability pressures for improved student test scores in the United States. The CEO enforced compliance with standardized curricula, set benchmarks, and threatened to close low-performing schools. Other research shows how organizations have instituted new roles and departments in response to pressures from constituents concerning environmental sustainability, workplace safety, equity, diversity, and inclusion (Augustine 2021; Huising 2015). While such changes may address constituents’ concerns, research has also found that some organizations use these merely as window dressing to comply ceremonially with constituents’ demands (Sandholtz 2012).

Organizations face additional accountability pressures from the global spread of what Power (1997) termed the “audit explosion,” which has increased demands for conformance to external standards and benchmarks (Espeland & Vannebo 2007; Strathern 2000; Porter 1995). This has led to an escalation of responses, including the emergence of “technologies of accountability” (Suchman 1993; Shore & Wright 1999; Treem 2015) that use multiple measures and reporting tools to render different parts of organizations “auditable” (Jeacle & Carter 2011). By instituting, tracking, and publicizing metrics, scorecards, ratings, and other performance indicators, organizations are held to account by known stakeholders such as auditors, regulators, and accreditation agencies (Pollock & Rindova 2003; Sauder & Espeland 2009). Research has also documented organizational attempts to gather additional information and game the metrics, and the ensuing negative consequences (Espeland 2019; Espeland & Sauder, 2016; Shore & Wright 2015; see Bryne 2021 on how a business school dean fabricated the numbers to game the metrics associated with the U.S. News Rankings).

Rhetorical Responses to Accountability Pressures. Organizations may also respond to accountability pressures with various rhetorical strategies. The premise for such approaches is that organizations must communicate the changes, whether substantive or ceremonial, that are aimed at addressing constituents’ concerns because the latter cannot truly verify internal governance arrangements or policy changes.

Rhetorical response strategies involve constructing and disseminating narratives of progress and remediation and sharing information about change initiatives implemented within the organization. These

narratives are often used in conjunction with impression management efforts (Pfarrer et al. 2008; Zavyalova et al. 2012) aimed at shaping, safeguarding, or repairing organizational reputation (Bundy & Pfarrer 2015; Rao 1998; Ravasi et al. 2019). Prior research has identified a number of impression management tactics such as promoting social responsibility initiatives, offering public apologies, deflecting, and disclaiming (Bolino & Turnley 2003; Busenbark, Lange & Certo 2017).

Scholars have also examined when, why, and how organizations respond rhetorically to minimize social disapproval and gain social legitimacy (Suddaby & Greenwood 2005). Research finds organizations managing stakeholder concerns with framing tactics (King 2008), using different messaging techniques and communication channels (McDonnell & King 2013), and disseminating information through news releases and press conferences (Bergsteiner 2012; Rao 1998; Zavyalova, Pfarrer & Reger 2017). While some rhetorical strategies, such as outright denial or blaming the accuser, are defensive, other strategies such as acknowledging culpability, are accommodative (Bundy & Pfarrer 2015). Recent research has found that although accommodative strategies are effective against capability violations (i.e., not meeting expectations about firms' ability to consistently deliver value), they are less effective against character violations (i.e., not evincing consistent trustworthiness and integrity) and for managing the organization's reputation in general (Bundy, Iqbal & Pfarrer 2021).

The overarching goal of these strategies is to manage concerns and controversies, minimize social disapproval, strengthen or repair organizational reputation damaged through the public exposure of misdeeds (e.g., corporate scandals, financial discrepancy) revealed by stakeholders (Nader 1965; Pfarrer et al. 2008; Zavyalova et al. 2012), and more importantly, communicate that the type of corrective changes espoused by the organization are suitably aligned with stakeholders' demands and expectations.

Convergent Reactivity to Accountability Pressures. Many of the structural and rhetorical responses to accountability pressures aim to modify organizational structures, roles, and communications in order to comport with stakeholders' evaluative criteria, both substantively and symbolically. These responses produce what has been referred to as *convergent reactivity*, the idea that organizational actors "change their behavior in reaction to being evaluated, observed, or measured" (Espeland & Sauder 2007, p. 1) in a way that pressures organizations to "conform and perform to the [evaluative] criteria" (Gioia & Corley

2002, p. 110). For example, Espeland and Sauder (2007) show how law schools changed structures and rhetoric (e.g., student admissions, staff hiring, pedagogy, graduate career counseling) to conform to and align with the evaluative criteria of the *US News and World Report*. Likewise, Cotter and Snyder (1998) describe how French restaurateurs respond to the Michelin rating system by changing their restaurants' structures, practices, and menus in their attempts to align with Michelin Guide's criteria.

Convergent reactivity is enacted through mechanisms of self-fulfilling prophecy (whereby reactions to measures confirm their expectations) and commensuration (whereby qualities are transformed into quantities that share a metric) (Espeland & Sauder 2007, 2016). Such mechanisms entail organizational actors gathering additional information about evaluative criteria, figuring out the parameters constituting those criteria, engaging in commensuration to simplify and integrate the criteria, and then changing their responses — whether structural or rhetorical — to address the criteria in a way that becomes self-fulfilling (Espeland & Sauder 2007, 2016; Espeland & Vannebo 2007; see also Rahman, 2021).

Organizational Responses to Accountability Pressures in the Social Media Era

The advent of social media has further complicated the organizational accountability landscape. Not only are organizations confronted by negative and emotionally-charged social media comments about their products and services (Barnett et al. 2020; Etter et al. 2019), the growing volume and influence of social media has increased accountability pressures, compelling organizations to respond (Wang et al. 2021). Many organizational actors find the complexity of platforms and the visibility of social media commentary to be particularly challenging (Ferrara & Yang 2015; Pfeffer, Zorbach & Carley 2014).

The capabilities of social media platforms are markedly distinct from other communication technologies (Albu & Etter 2016; Kane et al. 2014; Majchrzak et al. 2013), enabling users to publicly and rapidly express their views about organizations to a distributed audience (Leonardi & Vaast 2017). For example, studies of enterprise social media technologies (e.g., corporate wikis) have identified various affordances of social media (Leonardi 2018; Treem & Leonardi 2012; Majchrzak et al. 2013), including visibility (observing conversations, behaviors, and preferences), persistence (accessing content across time), editability (crafting messages before the content is viewed by others), and metavoicing (reacting online to others' profiles, content, and activities). Researchers propose that material features of social

media, such as network articulation, social transparency, and user-generated content, have “the potential to bring about dramatic changes to the nature of work, time, boundaries, and practices of surveillance and control” (Leonardi & Vaast 2017, p. 179).

Scholars have suggested that social media technologies accelerate the spread of social disapproval (Wang et al. 2021), noting the crowd’s active role in denouncing organizations (Pfeffer et al. 2014; Tsugawa & Ohsaki 2017; Toubiana & Zietsma 2017). Others have shown how the social disapproval stemming from increased social media attention significantly shapes organizational reputation (Etter et al. 2019; Ravasi et al. 2019). Such intensified social media commentary poses important challenges to organizations attempting to be accountable to constituents’ concerns, demands, and expectations.

Recent social media controversies (e.g., Etter et al. 2019; Hill 2012; Reinstein 2018; Victor & Stevens 2017) suggest that prior accountability response strategies may be ineffective in the social media era. Indeed, controversies may escalate as firms’ existing structural and rhetorical responses backfire, creating further disruptive publicity and amplifying social disapproval (Adut 2019; Aratani 2018; Goodman 2014; Stevens 2018). Accountability pressures before and after social media thus need to be distinguished, as similarities (e.g., organizational shaming, emotional language) are outweighed by key differences.

Stakeholder-based accountability pressures are enacted by constituents who are generally known, identifiable, and often authorized (e.g., regulators, auditors). With the emergence of social media, different accountability pressures are produced, constituted by the diverse, dispersed, and pseudonymous social media crowd. The concerns and expectations of stakeholder-based accountability pressures tend to rely on relatively clear, stable, and well-specified evaluative criteria. In contrast, the concerns and expectations of a social media crowd are typically unclear, in-flux, and unspecified.

In stakeholder-based accountability, constituents’ scrutiny of organizational actors is performed largely off-line and in circumscribed spheres, characterized by bounded and situated visibility. With the emergence of social media, constituents’ scrutiny of organizational actors is performed online and in public, characterized by a continual and often persistent visibility. The widespread and relatively easy availability of social media platforms thus expands the visibility of organizational actors, subjecting them to the relentless gaze of the social media crowd and its often-provocative online commentary.

These key differences in accountability pressures are creating substantial challenges for organizations accustomed to responding with structural and rhetorical strategies designed in the pre-social media era (Jeacle & Carter 2011; Scott & Orlikowski 2012). Such challenging conditions raise a critical question about how organizations respond to accountability pressures materializing as dynamic and emerging social media commentary. We address this question in our research study.

Research Methods

Following prior work (e.g., Bechky & Okhuysen 2011), we use a multi-sited, comparative approach in this study. This approach is a particularly useful way to contrast findings from field studies examining organizations in different sectors, as it allows us to identify common (as well as divergent) processes and outcomes, and cumulatively synthesize our understanding about organizational accountability in the social media era.

Research Context and the Rationale for Comparative Site Selection

In line with our theoretical approach, we sought to understand organizational responses to accountability pressures from social media commentary by focusing on the practices that are enacted in and through platforms and organizations in different sectors. Our selection of field sites and social media platforms was not based on similarity criteria pertaining to common platform features, technological affordances, or organizational domains, but rather on how different organizations were managing accountability pressures from social media commentary. We thus adopted a “pooled” comparative sampling strategy (Bechky & O’Mahony 2015), whereby “data from multiple organizations are pooled to build theory on a common process” (p. 170). The common process we focus on is *organizational responses to accountability pressures from social media commentary*.

Our analysis draws on intensive fieldwork and online data collection conducted in two different service sectors (emergency response and hospitality) and on two social media platforms (Twitter and TripAdvisor). We integrated this data to produce an expanded dataset that allowed us to perform comparative analysis and develop theorizing about organizational responses to accountability pressures in the social media era. By observing commonalities and variations in organizational responses across diverse settings and platforms, we increase the analytic power of our findings and the robustness of the theory

generated from them (Shestakofsky & Kelkar 2020). Below we describe the specific settings, offline and online, in which our research was conducted.

Emergency Response. We focused our data collection on emergency response in DEMO (Delta Emergency Management Organization), the organization responsible for emergency management in Delta City (pseudonym), a major city in the United States. The primary work of emergency management organizations (EMOs) is to coordinate police, fire, and medical services during emergency response. These organizations employ 911 call-takers and 911 dispatchers. The former answer 911 calls from the public, gather critical information about an incident, and evaluate whether the incident is a valid emergency or not, while the latter assigns the emergency incidents to the relevant available first-responder (e.g., police, fire) nearest to the scene of the emergency. Today, over 240 million calls are made annually to 911 in the United States. With the rise of social media, DEMO's responses to 911 calls have become subject to social media commentary, particularly on Twitter.

Hospitality. Our investigation of hospitality studied a strategic sample of hotels as well as the organizations that assess them. We focused on small to mid-sized hotels, representing 80% of accommodation services within the hospitality industry, as this is where the influence of social media commentary is manifesting more strongly. Given the large number of online reviews available, we selected ten hotels located in a single region of the UK for detailed examination. We also studied services within the hospitality sector that were focused on accrediting or evaluating these hotels. Our particular focus was on how the social media commentary on TripAdvisor, the largest and most influential online review platform for hospitality, is changing hotel accountability practices.

Rationale for Comparative Site Selection. Although emergency response and hospitality operate in their own distinctive contexts and undertake different kinds of work, they share some salient and analytically valuable commonalities. Both sites are within the domain of service work, and both are directly affected by the intense and ongoing commentary rendered on social media platforms (Pugh, Brady & Hopkins 2018). Within both sites, front-line workers and managers have considerable discretion in the decisions they make and the tasks they perform in the process of their service provision. Both sites are also subject to stakeholder-based processes of accountability that produce convergent reactivity as the

organizations attempt to conform to known and identifiable metrics. The EMOs are formally held to account by external bodies (e.g., city government, advocacy groups) by metrics such as call wait-time, call dispatch-time, and overall response time. EMOs are mandated to track these metrics, report them periodically, and justify any significant increases in response time. Hotels are held to account by national tourist boards and hotel industry associations. In the UK, the most influential formal body is the Automobile Association (AA), which annually inspects hotels' facilities and services based on explicit criteria defined in the AA's 65-page Quality Standards guidebook. Hotels then base their improvement strategies on the details of their annual AA report in order to comply with the AA criteria and remain within the purview of its accreditation scheme.

In addition to the similarities, there are also valuable differences across the two sites that can be productively leveraged for theory building on accountability. A salient difference is that EMOs are in the public sector while hotels are typically in the private sector. EMO staff are thus government employees, while those employed in hotels are private-sector employees. By and large, service expectations and accountability pressures vary across the two research settings. In the case of emergency response, there are tiers of service expectations and acceptable levels of response time that are proportionate to the type and severity of emergency calls. In the case of hospitality, service expectations are proportionate to the type (e.g., bed & breakfast, luxury hotel) and rating of the hotel (e.g., 3-star, 4-star). All of these have implications for how accountability is understood and enacted on the ground across the two settings.

Social Media Commentary. Our treatment of social media commentary enacted on two social media platforms recognizes the necessarily entangled nature of this relation. That is, social media commentary only exists through its distinctive materialization on digital platforms. As Milan (2015, p. 56) notes, in social media “content and infrastructure are utterly linked,” with content being incapable of manifesting “in the same form outside the specific structure of a given social media platform (e.g., the tweet, the hashtag, the shortened link).” We thus view every social media post as a discursive materialization, constitutively shaped by the particular social media platform through which it is produced. Our description and analysis of tweets and TripAdvisor reviews presuppose that such commentary only exists through its materialization on digital platforms. Given this, we propose that it is the *practices* enacting

online commentary through the specific structure of a social media platform that make them analytically valuable. In this regard, we see both similarities and differences across Twitter and TripAdvisor.

With Twitter, social media commentary develops as tweets are directed at a Twitter account (e.g., @account-name), using hashtags within tweets (e.g., #911isAJoke), replying to tweets, liking, retweeting, and adding commentary to tweets by other users. Tweets may be brief due to the character limitations set by Twitter, but given the possibility of retweeting and hashtagging, any tweet can diffuse widely and potentially go viral. The service-providing organizations that use Twitter have the option of responding publicly to a tweet, responding privately through DM (Direct Messaging), or choosing not to engage online. With TripAdvisor, social media engagement involves searching, reviewing, and rating on the website. TripAdvisor enables users to search for reviews of hotels, book hotel reservations, and then rate and review hotels based on their experiences. In addition to rating hotels on such criteria as cleanliness, rooms, and value, users can write narrative accounts of their hotel experiences, ranging in length from a sentence to multiple paragraphs, and include images (O'Connor 2010; Xie, Zhang & Zhang 2014).

Like Twitter, TripAdvisor offers service providing organizations (i.e., hoteliers) the option of responding publicly to reviews, responding privately through sending a direct message, or choosing not to engage online. Unlike social media engagement on Twitter which is polyphonic (i.e., multiple users can like, retweet, and add their commentary to a tweet by another user), social media engagement on TripAdvisor is dyadic (i.e., interactions are solely between the service user/reviewer and the service providing organization/hotelier). The potential for a particular review to diffuse widely and go viral is limited, but other users can click on a 'this review was helpful' button, thus adding weight to the review. The click-button ratings and sentiments expressed in the reviews are aggregated by TripAdvisor's ranking algorithm (the Popularity Index) that determines hotels' standings as displayed in search results.

Given these similarities and differences, we believe the two service sectors and two distinct social media platforms serve as particularly useful strategic research sites for our investigation of organizational responses to the accountability pressures manifesting as social media commentary.

Data Collection

Emergency Response. The primary source of data includes longitudinal and embedded observations and interviews at DEMO, conducted by the first author. These were supplemented with qualitative analysis of archival materials about the history of accountability processes in emergency management. Observations took place over a 2-year period (between May 2015 – May 2017), and involved following the 911 call-taking, call-dispatching, and shift supervising practices. This includes observing the call-taking practices by sitting next to a 911 call-taker and listening in to 911 calls via headphones, observing the call-dispatching and shift supervision practices, and documenting the 911 call-takers' and 911 managers' responses to Twitter postings. During this process, short-hand notations were jotted down, particularly those that pertained to changes in practices. Within a 24 to 48-hour time period, these hand-written notes were then transcribed and elaborated in a Word document.

During and immediately after the observation process, 142 ethnographic interviews were conducted to obtain a deeper understanding of practices. This was complemented by semi-structured interviews ranging from 40 to 90 minutes (65 with 911 call-takers and 911 dispatchers; 18 with DEMO supervisors, shift managers, and senior managers) most of which were recorded and transcribed. The first author also had access to DEMO's Twitter feeds, with tweets posted about the 911 emergency service and DEMO's responses to those posts. We compiled further data on Twitter commentary about 911 emergency services provided by DEMO (1,138 tweets in total) and the organizational response to such posts (438 comments).

Hospitality. The second and third authors collected data from multiple research sites: hotels, hotel accreditation agencies (e.g., the AA), TripAdvisor, and the hospitality industry more generally. For hotels, 140 hours of field observations of hotel work practices were conducted over a two-year period (between April 2009 and June 2011), with ongoing interaction to date. Observations included the guest check-out and check-in process at the reception desk, focusing on how the hotel staff managed guest arrivals and departures, and how they addressed issues and complaints raised by guests (including paper-based comments cards). In addition to observations at hotels, industry and academic conferences on hospitality were attended, as well as trade events where popup talks at the TripAdvisor booth were given by TripAdvisor employees on topics such as review responses and Q&A with hoteliers. For all these observations, written notes were captured in a field work journal, and then elaborated later the same day

in a Word document. Observations of TripAdvisor involved accessing its English-language websites and gathering online content on policy statements, guidelines, and press releases, as well as hundreds of posted reviews on hotels. We also participated as users and contributors on the TripAdvisor website.

We conducted 55 semi-structured interviews within the hospitality industry. Interviews ranged from 45 minutes to 2 hours, and nearly all were recorded and transcribed. We interviewed 21 hoteliers (12 hotel owners and 9 hotel managers) probing about their hotel management and accountability practices, and how their engagement with hospitality assessments (by the AA and on TripAdvisor) shaped those practices. Questions included “What are your experiences as a hotelier with formal valuation schemes?” and “What are your experiences as a hotelier with online review websites?” Interviews with 14 TripAdvisor employees in the US and UK (3 executives, 5 directors, and 6 managers) focused on the company’s history, strategy, and operations, the rationale for the social media platform, its development over time, reviewing policies, rating criteria, and the design of ranking algorithms. For the UK-based Automobile Association, interviews with 11 employees (2 executives, 4 editors, and 5 inspectors) sought to understand the history, organization, and operation of the AA star-rating scheme. Questions enquired about everyday activities of grading, inspection, and editing. Finally, we sought insights about online hospitality reviews and their influence on accountability within the industry by interviewing 9 professionals from UK Hospitality associations, travel magazines, and national tourist boards.

We also examined the TripAdvisor commentary associated with 10 specific hotels, focusing on the online reviews received by hotels, and the online responses they posted. These hotels had been receiving TripAdvisor reviews for an average of 10 years, accumulating a total of 11,021 reviews. We selected the top 10 hotels within a single region of the UK so as to reduce variability in industry opportunities, location, and type of tourism. As small to mid-sized hotels, they were experiencing the accountability pressures of social media commentary more acutely and were thus particularly salient to our study. We parsed and downloaded all TripAdvisor ratings and reviews for these ten hotels, along with hotel responses (if any) to those reviews. Having collected a total of 11,021 reviews, we conducted in-depth analysis of 2,413 hotel reviews rated 3 and below. TripAdvisor has a 5-point rating scheme (i.e., 5 is Excellent, 4 is Very Good, 3 is Average, 2 is Poor, and 1 is Terrible) with a rating of 3 defined as “average.” Close examination of

comments rated 3 revealed that most are negative, albeit milder in tone than those rated 2 or 1. We thus included them in our sample of reviews on the grounds that they generated accountability pressure for hotels making them central to our research focus on accountability. We also conducted in-depth analysis of the 1,385 online responses to the negative reviews posted by the ten hotels.

These multiple sources of data across the two settings enabled us to generate an understanding of social media commentary and organizational accountability from multiple vantage points (see Appendix A1 for further details of data collected across the settings).

Data Analysis

Data analysis unfolded in an iterative manner over three phases. First, we analyzed the field data in our two settings using qualitative analysis methods (Charmaz 2006; Miles & Huberman 1994), cycling through multiple readings of field notes, interview transcripts, online postings, and archival documents alongside our reading of relevant literature on accountability. At this stage, we wrote descriptive memos focusing on the shifts in everyday work practices associated with experiences of accountability pressures from social media including online responses to those accountability pressures. In parallel, we started coding the data using a combination of software (Atlas.ti and Word for the EMO study, and Word for the hospitality study) and manual tools (data tables and color-coding in both studies). This step generated multiple lists of codes (such as “bullshit calls,” “unfair criticism,” “lack of recourse,” and “diverting attention”) and helped us identify specific organizational practices that the service-providing organizations were performing in response to the social media commentary. For instance, in DEMO, the front-line workers (911 call-takers) referred to their fear of “getting called out” and “publicly shamed” for “just doing my job well” as a significant consequence of social media commentary. Likewise, within hospitality, hoteliers described their frustration at the development of an unjust “he said this, I said that” dynamic on social media and focused on ways in which their service practices were being altered by idiosyncratic “reviewers walking through the door.” We then wrote distinct descriptive memos for the separate settings detailing the response practices identified in each organization.

Second, we coded both the social media commentary posted by service users as well as the service organizations’ responses to the negative commentary. Our coding scheme was informed by our analysis

of the field data as well as multiple readings of Twitter and TripAdvisor posts. The scheme included codes for tone (e.g., aggressive, friendly, courteous) and content (e.g., complaint, compliment, confrontation) of the social media commentary (see Appendix A2 for our coding scheme across the two settings). Independent coders were hired and trained to code the social media data (tweets and EMO responses on Twitter, reviews and hotel responses on TripAdvisor). The coders first coded a subset of the data. As new observations and anomalies emerged in this coding process, we revised our scheme, which was then used to code the entire dataset. As part of this process, we also wrote analytical memos about emerging themes on accountability reconfigurations, specifically focusing on accountability pressures via social media and organizational responses to those accountability pressures across the two settings

Third, we built on the prior phase of data analysis and performed a comparative analysis of our findings (Bechky & O'Mahony 2015) to identify commonalities, variations, and cross-cutting themes. The research team had regular meetings during this process to discuss overarching patterns in how accountability pressures from social media commentary and organizational responses to them were manifesting in our respective settings. We articulated themes related to negative social media commentary across both platforms, noting similarities (e.g., complaint, disappointment) as well as differences (e.g., update request) in the postings about emergency response and hotels on Twitter and TripAdvisor. We also found similarities as well as differences when we compared how the service providing organizations responded to social media commentary through their online posts. For instance, while both hoteliers and 911 emergency managers provided justifications for organizational actions, only hoteliers confronted online reviewers and disputed the authenticity of their comments; the 911 managers never publicly challenged the authenticity of Twitter complaints.

We then returned to our field settings' offline response practices that we had analyzed in previous phases. We abstracted the codes we had earlier identified to higher-order analytical categories. For instance, in the emergency response case, we abstracted codes such as "play it safe" and "cover your ass" to "recalibrating risk"; for the hospitality case, we abstracted codes such as "diverting attention" and "compulsion to act" to "redeployment of resources." Comparing the separate findings evident in our respective analytical memos, we identified interesting parallels and contrasts across the two settings. For

example, within DEMO we had coded for managerial attention being refocused, while in hotels we had coded for the redefinition of hotel management. Our pooled data pointed to common motivations among the responses and similar practices even if the kind of enactment varied across settings (e.g., DEMO managers focused on protecting staff, while hoteliers on providing staff feedback).

During this process, we also engaged more deeply with relevant literature, particularly on organizational accountability (Espeland & Sauder 2016; Miller & Rose 2008; Power 1996; Roberts 1991) and social media (Etter et al. 2019; Leonardi & Vaast 2017; Treem 2015; Wang et al. 2021). We wrote theoretical memos to highlight the significance of our findings, identifying further convergences and divergences. This helped us organize our insights into types of accountability pressures, organizational responses to accountability pressures, and consequences for organizing. This iterative process of data collection and analysis allowed us to theorize how organizational responses to social media commentary are reconfiguring organizational accountability, with significant consequences for organizing.

Findings

In discussing our findings, we first consider the kinds of accountability pressures that are manifesting online as social media commentary. We then examine the organizational responses enacted in practice within emergency response and hospitality.

Accountability Pressures from Social Media

Across both emergency response and hospitality settings, formal bodies continue to hold EMOs and hotels accountable for their performance. As we described earlier, city governments require EMOs to maintain a defined level of emergency response times, while accreditation agencies such as the AA ensure that hotels uphold specified quality standards based on their grade of hospitality. Alongside these accountability pressures, both EMOs and hotels are now also subject to a stream of online comments posted on various social media platforms. These are experienced as adding distinctive kinds of accountability pressures for organizations with significant outcomes.

Within emergency response, the nature of 911 calls is changing due to rising levels of digital connectivity among the public (via mobile devices and social media platforms). For example, 911 calls reporting “neighbors playing loud music” and “power outage” have become more common, and news

media have noted the rise of 911 calls about issues such as “running out of toilet paper” (Kim 2020). These types of calls — informally referred to as “bullshit calls” by the 911 call-takers — may be of urgent personal importance to callers, but are not considered 911-level emergencies by established criteria of the city’s administrative agencies. The frequency and variety of non-emergency calls have increased substantially with the growing use of cellphones. Currently, non-emergency calls constitute over half of the daily 911 call volume, creating challenges for workers dealing with higher-priority calls reporting incidents such as accidents and cardiac arrests. Based on our findings, we suggest that what the public defines as an “emergency” has shifted and expanded over time.

A critical aspect of the 911 call-takers’ work is to sort and separate non-emergency calls from valid emergencies, while also diagnosing and initiating a response appropriate to the type and severity of the emergency. This sorting work has become considerably harder with the rise in non-emergency calls. It has also become more stressful as 911 callers share their grievances to a growing online social media audience. Social media platforms such as Twitter enable callers to complain about their interactions with 911 call-takers, to name-and-shame those call-takers (e.g., criticizing a call-taker for refusing to categorize a reported incident as a valid 911 emergency), and even to post private recordings of 911 calls.

Our analysis of the 1,138 tweets (96% of which were negative) relating to DEMO (and emergency response in Delta City, more broadly) identified four specific types of online comments: *complaint* (48%), *disappointment* (45%), *compliment* (4%), and *update request* (3%). The tweets range from criticizing the tone, voice, or fact-seeking interactions of 911 call-takers, to outrage over their incident not being treated as an emergency. Many tweets also expressed dissatisfaction with specific aspects of emergency response encounters, including wait time for their 911 call to be picked up or acted on. Two examples are provided below with more illustrations of each comment type provided in Appendix B.¹

Just saw an accident and tried calling 911. Took them a minute to answer my call and then they asked 8 questions. Yeah, that’s rite. EIGHT fuckin questions to get some lame ass info. #Delta911

¹ Names and locations mentioned in the tweets are anonymized for confidentiality. Some of the tweets are threaded and multi-part, but for the purpose of readability we have consolidated and presented them as a single tweet.

@DEMO My 6-old old developed an allergy, I called 911 and spoke to [call-taker name], she was so rude and dismissive. Never let me finish, kept interrupting, and then told me she couldn't send anyone for this. THIS IS SO FUCKED UP.

Within hospitality, we observed similar accountability pressures, although the sources and timeline of pressures varied. A substantial shift in accountability pressure for hotels emerged in the early-2000s, with the rise of social media travel websites, the most prominent of which is TripAdvisor. Since 2001, when TripAdvisor first allowed reviews on its platform, the volume, volatility, and visibility of social media postings on this platform have grown rapidly. TripAdvisor currently lists over 8.7 million global venues that have received almost 900 million pseudonymous comments, with nearly 500 million monthly visitors to the platform. The growth and significance of social media commentary for hotels is immense, as the CEO of the Institute of Hospitality observed, “The online world has changed pretty much every industry, but hospitality beyond recognition” (Kinstler 2018).

The hotels we studied were reasonably well-rated on TripAdvisor (overall ratings ranged from 3.5 to 4.5), but as the hoteliers told us, it is the negative comments (evident in reviews rated 3 and below) that are more concerning as these carry the greatest risk to reputation, consuming much of their time and attention. These comments offer detailed descriptions of how hotel facilities, services, or staff members fail to meet guest expectations. Review titles often highlight one or more issues, which are explicated in the (often dramatic) narration that follows. In our analysis of 2,413 TripAdvisor reviews posted for the hotels we studied, we identified three comment types that overlapped with emergency response, *complaint (48%), disappointment (26%), and compliment (7%),* and one additional type, *information provision (20%).* Two examples are provided below with further illustrations of each comment type provided in Appendix B.²

Where to start... dead spiders in the bed - pee on the toilet - mould on the walls - window wouldn't open - dirty cutlery and glasses in the breakfast room - and the bed was so bad I have no words for it. The hotel claims it's “quirky” – I'd say dirty. And it's quite expensive too.

I'm no hospitality expert. I'm not a hotel professional. I'm frankly not the world's most organized person. But. Dining room the size of an aircraft hangar...busy breakfast service. One toast machine. One. Toast. Machine. Guess what ensued. Please rethink.

² We have redacted non-relevant details (e.g., hotel name, location) in the TripAdvisor postings to retain confidentiality.

Hoteliers were deeply concerned about the risks of negative comments, whether they deemed them to be reasonable (e.g., justified identification of issues) or problematic (e.g., unfair, incorrect, or offensive). These latter comment types were more troubling to hoteliers (see Appendix C for additional examples). Notwithstanding their concerns and frustrations, hoteliers recognized that TripAdvisor was transforming the travel sector leaving them little choice but to come to terms with it, noting, for example, that TripAdvisor is “not going away, so get over it,” and “it’s just something that we all have to live with.”

Looking across the two settings in our study, we found organizations being held to account by social media commentary on both platforms. Despite operating in diverse sectors (public/private) and providing distinct services (emergency response/hospitality), both DEMO and hotels experienced comparable kinds of accountability pressures from social media posts calling out their organizations, services, and workers. In contrast to standardized evaluative criteria and formalized procedures typically entailed in stakeholder-based accountability assessments of emergency response and hospitality, the online Twitter and TripAdvisor posts are informal and idiosyncratic. They draw attention to individualized issues that often lie outside the established categories and evaluative criteria of professional or regulatory purview. As some of these comments are referenced by others on social media platforms, the issues grow in salience, demanding further scrutiny. DEMO and hotels attempted to respond to this proliferation of highly-charged social media commentary, producing as we discuss, consequential outcomes.

Organizational Responses to Accountability Pressures from Social Media

Our analysis of organizational responses enacted in the face of social media accountability pressures identified four distinct organizing practices that were enacted within both emergency response and hospitality: *replying online*, *recalibrating risk*, *redeploying resources*, and *redefining service*. As we discuss below, the ongoing enactment of these practices substantially influences what is being held to account, by whom, and with what consequences.

Replying Online

In both emergency response and hospitality settings, we found managers writing online responses to the social media comments posted about their services and performance. Within DEMO, three senior managers on the 911 operations floor (covering the morning, evening, and night shifts) were made

responsible for maintaining the DEMO Twitter account, keeping track of tweets directed at them (e.g., @DEMO), as well as monitoring Twitter feeds via a social media monitoring tool that searches for relevant keywords (e.g., Delta 911, DEMO, Delta Emergency) and hashtags (e.g., #Delta911). These three DEMO managers regularly read the Twitter posts about their emergency response services, and we found that they responded to 38% of tweets in our dataset (438 of the 1,138 tweets). Over time, however, this practice changed, and as we will discuss below, the DEMO managers halted social media engagement after five months, when they decided to stop responding to Twitter posts.

For hoteliers, social media monitoring and engagement were undertaken by hotel managers who regularly (daily or weekly) accessed their hotel's TripAdvisor webpage to read the latest reviews and ratings. A few had signed up with TripAdvisor's Owners Portal and requested direct email notifications to alert them when new reviews had been posted about their hotel. We found variation in hoteliers' online response practices, with some regularly posting responses, some posting occasionally with long pauses lasting weeks and months, and a few hoteliers choosing not to post at all. Of the 2,413 TripAdvisor reviews we analyzed, 57.4% (1,385 reviews) received online responses from the hotels.

Looking across both research settings, we found four common online response practices (providing justification, offering apology, posting stock response, and inviting private follow-up) as well as three variations (providing process updates, offering thanks, and challenging details). We provide illustrations below with more examples provided in Appendix D.

Providing Justification. In response to negative social media comments, both DEMO managers and hoteliers sought to explain and justify the situation. In our Twitter dataset, 32% of DEMO responses included some form of justification for a 911 call decision. For example, when a Twitter user complained that an incident she had reported was not considered a valid emergency, the DEMO manager provided additional rationale for the call-taker's decision, explaining the criteria for a 911-level emergency and the resource constraints (number of police patrol cars and ambulances available for dispatch at any point in time). Another Twitter user complained that his 911 call about water leakage was not deemed an emergency. In response, a DEMO manager posted:

@username We fully understand the issue you are facing. As per the information gathered from you, we inferred that there is no imminent danger of flooding. This seems to be more of a plumbing issue and not a 911 emergency. We have limited number of first-responders, and therefore, we cannot dispatch for this... We hope you understand, and in the future, we look forward to serving your emergency needs.

In our TripAdvisor dataset, 19% of hotel responses included a justification with hoteliers articulating the conditions that led to some of the issues raised. These were intended to explain what had happened, often providing important contextual information, and to allow TripAdvisor users (as well as potential future guests) to make their own judgment about the reasonableness of the review. For example, responding to a complaint about no parking facilities, the manager posted:

Thank you for taking the time to leave this review. We clearly state everywhere that we do not have parking however parking in [town] is plentiful and mostly free. We will always help guests find suitable parking on request. We note your other comments and are grateful for the feedback. Thanks.

Offering Apology. About a quarter of both Twitter and TripAdvisor online responses included some form of an apology for the concerns or difficulties raised in social media comments. In our Twitter dataset, we found 27% of the DEMO responses contained apologetic content, often accompanied by a justification or invitation to follow-up privately. For example, in response to a Twitter user complaining about a homeless person camping out in front of his house, a DEMO manager posted:

@username We sincerely apologize for the inconvenience caused. Multiple other residents too have complained. We have already dispatched and requested a police officer presence. Since the DPD gets several of these requests each day, there must have been a delay.

On TripAdvisor, 26% of hotel responses expressed some form of regret about disappointments or difficulties described by guests in their reviews. Common forms of apologetic content include:

Hi there. Sorry you had these issues on your visit, I just wanted to let you know that we are currently working on further staff training in regards to food service.

Thank you for taking the time to post a review. We are sorry that you had a disturbed night's sleep. It is sometimes difficult to fully satisfy the needs of our hotel guests when also operating a busy pub and restaurant on the same site.

In some cases, the apology is standalone and unaccompanied by further explanation. In other cases, apologies are followed by a description of the steps being taken to address the issue (see first example above), or a justification for the situation (see second example). In a few cases, staff frustrations are evident alongside the apology as they highlight circumstances that make the review seem unreasonable (e.g., weather conditions or location).

Oh dear, I'm really sorry you didn't appreciate [hotel name]. Maybe [city name] would have been a better bet for you than [this scenic rural area].

Well it's a shame the floods got in the way of your stay. I'm sorry there wasn't much we could do about that.

Posting Stock Response. Both DEMO managers and hoteliers occasionally resorted to posting stock responses in template format, similar to a 'form letter' sent by mail. We found 24% of DEMO responses on Twitter contained 'bureaucratic boilerplate' phrases that were repeatedly used across postings:

@username Thanks for your message, we acknowledge receipt. We will look into it as soon as possible.

@username Thank you for your message, we acknowledge receiving it and we have passed on the information through appropriate channels. If the issue persists, please call [phone number] and you will be routed to talk to a 911 supervisor. You can also file your complaint at [website url].

The use of such stock responses by DEMO came to be derided by Twitter users, and viewed as inauthentic and uncaring.

Stock responses were similarly evident in 15% of the hotel responses on TripAdvisor. In these cases, hoteliers acknowledged the review but did not engage with any of the specific issues described in it. They offered similar and generic phrases in response to multiple, varied reviews:

Thank you for taking the time to leave a review. I have passed your comments on to the team. We hope to see you again in the future.

Thank you for taking the time to leave your review on your recent stay with us. I am sorry to read your stay fell below expectations and your comments will be shared with the management team for review and changes made where necessary.

Inviting Private Follow-up. Across the two settings, both DEMO and hotel managers also invited social media users to contact them privately and follow up on their issues or concerns. We found DEMO managers requesting a private follow-up (via DM, direct message) in 6% of their Twitter posts. This occurred more frequently in situations when additional information was required (e.g., address and phone number). For instance, in response to a user re-reporting a domestic disturbance that had started to escalate, a DEMO manager posted:

@username We sincerely apologize for the delay. We'd already dispatched for this, but we couldn't reach the location [of the victim]. Can we DM you to obtain more information?

In 10% of the hotel responses, we found hoteliers also occasionally inviting reviewers to contact them directly (via telephone or email), so that specific issues could be further discussed, for example:

Thank you for the feedback on your recent stay. We are extremely concerned to learn that we did not meet your expectations. ... It would seem that some elementary tasks were the cause of your disappointment which will be addressed immediately. I have been trying to contact you directly to discuss your experience without success and I would be most grateful if you could give me a call at your convenience.

A few hotel responses included an inducement to return to the hotel, as a way to make amends:

I can only apologise for the delays in service [today] ... This is definitely not our normal level of service. We would like to invite you back and offer you the same on the house. If you would like to discuss this further, please contact a member of management team on [email address]. Please accept our sincere apologies once again and we hope to see you again in the near future so we can show you how we do normally operate.

Giving Process Updates. In emergency response, 911 callers occasionally requested status updates on Twitter (e.g., “how long will be it take for an officer to reach my home?”). In response, DEMO managers provided process updates about the situation, while refraining from sharing exact information to limit liability. In our data, we found that 11% of the DEMO responses included process updates. For example, in response to a user complaining about the delay in dealing with a neighborhood bar that was playing loud music on a Friday night, a manager posted:

@username Thank you for raising this issue to DEMO, we fully understand the problem. We have already dispatched your call at 23:10. An Officer is on his way and will reach the premise shortly. We hope that this issue is resolved very soon.

Offering Thanks. We found that about a quarter (23%) of hotel responses on TripAdvisor expressed appreciation for the review and articulation of specific issues. Such thanks often provided details about how the feedback will be used to address problem areas and guide further improvements within the hotel:

Thank you for the review from your recent trip to [hotel]. I am disappointed that your trip was marred by the service you received in the [restaurant]. Your comments regarding service and the food have been shared with our Food & Beverage team who will take the necessary corrective actions to ensure there can be no repetition of such delays in service.

Challenging the Details. In 6% of responses, hoteliers challenged the veracity of social media comments, suggesting that the issues raised are incorrect, inappropriate or even dishonest. Concerned about reputational damage to their businesses, these hoteliers provided explanations to “put the record straight,” so that others could judge the validity of complaints:

When you stated that you had booked a room in the [main hotel] itself. I investigated this immediately. The confirmation [email] ... correctly confirmed that you had booked a room within the grounds. I advised you of this and you denied receiving the email. At this time, as we had a room available in the [main hotel], I offered that to you as a complimentary upgrade. It was very apparent from your demeanour that there was nothing I could do that would appease you.

Recalibrating Risk

Within both DEMO and hotels, we found workers and managers recalibrating the risks entailed in doing their work while being subject to the persistent possibility of negative social media comments. We found two primary ways in which such risk recalibration was manifesting in their practices: not responding online and acting overcautiously (see Appendix E for additional examples).

Not Responding Online. While we found managers in both settings choosing not to engage with social media comments, the reasons for and implications of this decision differed. When their Twitter account was first set up, DEMO managers actively responded to posts. However, they quickly found that their direct engagement with Twitter posts led to further vitriolic comments, escalation from retweets, and heightened visibility for those involved. As this DEMO manager noted:

Well, we tried. We really did, and wanted to engage [with social media commentary] ... Personally, I thought this is the next wave of city-wide emergency communications and all that – the future. Yeah, the future! But turns out, I was fucking wrong and this is just some stupid shit... We tried to be responsive on social media, I think we were one of the first [911 EMOs] to do so, but [it] didn't work out... things blew up [on social media], and in fact, the more we tried, the more it blew up. It's just fucking terrible.

The riskiness of responding online was underlined when a Twitter storm helped fuel a major controversy in which a 911 call-taker mixed up the details of an incident in progress, creating problems for the police officers dispatched to deal with it. The incident was reported on local news channels and anger over its handling erupted via multiple social media platforms. Despite attempts by DEMO management to provide further details and justifications for what had happened — via Twitter as well as through press releases — social media outrage about DEMO's role in the incident ensued. DEMO management ultimately suspended the call-taker and dispatcher involved in the call on the grounds that they had not collected sufficient information to enable the police officers to act effectively.

At a subsequent incident review meeting, the Director of DEMO announced a series of policy changes about internal training and supervision. He stated concern that online responses by DEMO to Twitter posts had inflamed the situation, provoking further tweets, retweets, and negative comments:

Yes, we would like to communicate more [with the public on Twitter]. I thought that by having a direct channel we should be able to explain ourselves better, on what we do, who we are, what kind of challenges we face ... and also get better information ... but honestly, I don't know if we are helping or hurting ourselves by doing this. We still need a social media presence, but I am having second thoughts on whether we should respond to the Twitter complaints. I mean, we still have formal channels if someone wants to raise a complaint, so why do we need a second channel, and that too, a very public one.

Five months after DEMO had set up their Twitter account, and in consultation with senior managers, the Director called for the DEMO Twitter handle to be confined to “official” updates about city-wide emergencies rather than single incidents. While users continued to post comments about DEMO on Twitter — we collected about 700 such tweets in our dataset — none of these received an online response

from DEMO. Despite this change in policy, social media comments by emergency service users continued to be avidly read by both DEMO managers and workers alike.

Not responding online to social media comments was also evident within hospitality. Of 2,413 TripAdvisor reviews posted for the ten hotels in our dataset, 1,028 reviews (42.6%) did not receive an online response. We found four hotels responded less than five percent of the time (even in the face of many negative reviews), two hotels responded less than a third of the time, and four hotels responded over two-thirds of the time. From our interviews, we learned that hoteliers choosing not to respond online were acutely uncomfortable with their responses being visible to everyone on the platform and permanently part of their hotel's online record. They disliked the limited text box available for responses on TripAdvisor and felt frustrated by not being able to engage privately with unknown guests expressing issues with their hotel. Many had learned from experience that commenting on negative reviews could embroil them in a "tit-for-tat" exchange that could further damage their hotel's reputation.

Years of experience in hospitality train us *not* to enter into 'he says this; I say that' situations. ... We create holidays ... not ugly confrontations. That's *not* what we are about! It goes against every fiber.

If this type of thing [complaint or issue] happened in the hotel lobby, I would ask the guest to step to one side so that other guests don't witness it all. It would be a flash in the pan, boom, dealt with, over! [When we reply on] TripAdvisor [sigh] ... it becomes a spectacle. You know, damned if we do, damned if we don't.

One hotel owner who chose not to post online noted, "I think it's very dangerous to start to pick through points [in a TripAdvisor review] as you just [sound] mealy-mouthed." Some hoteliers who refrained from responding online explained that they preferred to focus on bolstering their hotels' standing in other accreditation schemes, in the hopes that other, more positive accounts will counterbalance the weight of negative social media reviews.

Acting Overcautiously. For 911 front-line workers, continued social media commentary about their work along with the suspension of two colleagues led them to shift their practices in ways that would reduce risk. This manifested as call-takers becoming overcautious in their categorization of incoming 911 calls. Following the highly publicized controversy above, we found that call-takers were categorizing more 911 calls as valid emergencies than they had done in the past. That is, motivated by their concerns about being slandered online, call-takers were assigning higher-priority codes to incidents that they had

previously assigned lower-priority codes. For example, in the two weeks after this controversy, the average percentage of calls categorized as valid emergencies rose from 52% to 78%, and remained at that level for the next twelve weeks. As this 911 call-taker explained:

I get that people outside do not fully understand what we [911 call-takers] do. That's fine, and no one is expecting them to do so and feel sorry for us. No, I'm fine... But this social media stuff y'all, that hurts. Because it's plain wrong whichever way y'all look at it. I mean, there's a job that we got to do, we were trained to do, and I think we were doing it quite well. In a professional way... But now it feels as if we are thrown under the bus. For what? For doing our job? That's some next level BS y'all and it sucks. So yeah, everyone is now watching out for themselves, because no one wants to be exposed this way.

Over-cautious responses were similarly evident in hospitality with hoteliers becoming careful about what and how they post online, for example:

I used to reply straight away to put the record straight but my management team were like, 'Erm... maybe we should talk before you do that?' They got me to back off. I wake up thinking about it, but what can you do?

Now we seldom reply... I don't want staff wasting time on it. Less is more.

Hoteliers also reported trying to anticipate and preempt possible guest concerns that may end up becoming problematic reviews on social media. For example, one hotelier explained how he had told his staff to appease guests and acquiesce to demands made during their stay, so as to prevent possible negative comments being posted online. As he noted:

It's bad, I know it's bad. But now, if a guest starts on and on about posting a bad review [when checking out], I've told my staff on the front desk to take something off their bill or offer them a discount on their next visit. I'm not proud of that.

Redeploying Resources

Across both emergency and hospitality settings, we found that the work practices of managers and workers began shifting, with more attention, time, and effort being redirected towards specific issues raised in online comments. Within DEMO, for example, the proliferation of negative Twitter comments led managers to reorder their priorities, moving away from important tactical issues (such as the appropriate categorization of incoming 911 calls) and longer-term considerations (such as improving emergency response training and providing ongoing feedback to the 911 call-takers). Instead, they began to privilege short-term demands, motivated by the desire to avoid controversy on social media. This changed how they monitored and managed the call-takers.

In particular, we observed that over time the 911 supervisors were focusing less on call-takers' conduct and their call-categorization accuracy, and more on "scandal avoidance." Indeed, 911 supervisors were well aware that growing social media scrutiny had led their 911 call-takers to be overly cautious in how they categorized calls in order to avoid being pilloried on Twitter. Despite the increase in collective overcaution within DEMO, the 911 supervisors resisted taking corrective action. By "looking the other way," many 911 supervisors subtly sanctioned the call-takers' overcautious categorization. In acquiescing to less-effective performance outcomes for the organization, they hope to reduce the risk of reputational damage from negative social media comments, for both the individual workers and DEMO as a whole. This collective shift in call categorization has consequences for resource distribution across the emergency response system, with specific spillover effects for the work of dispatchers and police officers.

During peak hours, the 911 dispatchers' dashboard is filled with over 60–80 calls to be dispatched, each of which needs to be dispatched within the maximum time-to-dispatch limit. As both lower-priority calls (higher in volume) and higher-priority calls (relatively lower in volume) compete for attention, the increase in non-emergency calls that have been assigned a higher priority impacts how effectively dispatchers can do their work. And this has implications for how quickly police officers can be dispatched to deal with emergencies. As the number of available police officers is limited, real emergencies have to await resource deployment given that police officers have already been allocated to dealing with earlier, less severe incidents. A senior police administrator at Delta City's Police Department observed:

There are so many [911] jobs, that the Officers don't have time to do anything else. ... Our Officers are always busy, always attending to something. ... [They] are frustrated but they just don't want to say no as it is risky.

Collectively, the ongoing overcautious actions of 911 call-takers are significantly changing how emergency response practices are enacted on the ground, increasing the number of calls dispatched and extending police involvement in non-emergency incidents. Recalibration of risk at the front end of emergency response is having the unintended consequence of tying up resources at later stages of emergency response and increasing the risk of emergencies not being handled quickly enough.

Within hospitality, negative social media comments similarly shifted hoteliers' attention, time, and effort towards specific issues highlighted by TripAdvisor reviews. Hoteliers view these comments as

demands that require quick investigation to address particular problems. Following a negative review, resources are refocused on extensive inquiries examining what happened and why. One hotelier referred to this investigative work as “getting to the bottom of things,” while another noted:

We have a bit of an inquest on what the hell has gone wrong, and what we can do and, you know, who’s fault was it and why it happened. We do have an inquest if some comment is made.

Having identified what had led to particular complaints in reviewers’ posts, shifts in practices are made to address the issue going forward. One hotelier told us that in response to comments about his hotel, he changed when and how food was served in the dining room, while another remarked, “I’ve put more continental style breakfast stuff, which some people, you know, wanted, and which I have taken up.” When replying to reviewers’ comments online, many hoteliers make a point of referring to these changes in practice. For example, after repeated reviews complaining about the lack of poolside beds, a hotelier responded, “I am delighted to confirm that we have recently received and now institute 30 new beds and loungers around the pool.” In another case, when a reviewer complained about the lack of late-night access, the hotelier responded by referring to the installation of a “new system in regards to keys ... so no guest will ever be able to check-in without receiving everything they should need.”

Hoteliers note that they feel compelled to quickly address the specific issues raised in reviews because these have been made public online and are now widely known. They know from comments made by guests arriving at their hotel (or potential guests inquiring about the hotel) that they have read about and are aware of issues in TripAdvisor reviews. Giving immediate attention to such issues is thus seen to be imperative but is often done at the expense of other work, leading to delays in scheduled maintenance, and postponement of longer-term programs of improvement. As one hotel manager noted:

This morning, after reading a review I said ‘Forget it, just get on with the day.’ But I found myself going up to Room 7 and looking out the window to see if I could understand their point about the ‘offensive view.’ But it is nonsense and I was in a bad mood all day because I had let it get to me when I was already busy. If we want to get our next star, I mean we know what we have to do for the AA’s next inspection. What are we doing being pulled into [social media] stuff? Comments that just aren’t right? I’m a busy man!

In addition to investigating and addressing issues in reviews, hotel managers also use social media comments in their management of front-line and back-office staff. In particular, they now use detailed comments made in TripAdvisor reviews to focus staff on certain aspects of their work. This happens

through staff appraisal discussions, as well as highlighting portions of printed reviews on bulletin boards in the staff room. Some managers bring copies of TripAdvisor reviews into weekly staff meetings, reading out selected comments that call out staff members by name or position, doing this to both praise and chastise. Scrutiny of TripAdvisor comments in staff meetings or appraisal sessions is followed by a discussion of any changes required in service work or staff demeanor to address them.

Uncertainty over the veracity and validity of social media comments taxes organizational attention and potentially redeploys resources in the wrong direction. As an industry expert noted:

Now there is a degree of difficulty in being able to monitor exactly what it is people are intending to say and whether it's true or not. So, you know, clearly if you are the general manager of an establishment where your reputation, you know, is put at risk by what is being posted, then you're going to find that stressful, because, you know, if it's true, it shouldn't have happened, therefore you will be very stressed, and if it's not true, then you've got a whole set of recovery sort of activities to undertake for no good reason.

While hoteliers value the opportunity to address problematic issues, several participants reported that they dreaded going online, fearing what they may find, and what that will mean for their day's work. As one hotelier said "I resist looking at TripAdvisor in the morning because otherwise I make staff run around fixing problems mentioned in reviews, and the important things scheduled for the day don't get done."

Redefining Service

In both settings, the work practices of emergency response and hospitality shifted in response to highly visible and often aggressive demands made in social media comments. While DEMO is a public sector organization and as such not subject to competitive pressures, there had been a long-standing service ethos among call takers. During their training, 911 call-takers were coached in how to connect with panicked callers, calming them down before asking questions about the nature of their emergency. In doing so, 911 call-takers effectively served as the "first 'first responders'" by reassuring and supporting distressed callers before initiating a line of action. Increasing volumes of 911 calls (including "bullshit calls") and rising numbers of social media complaints pressured senior managers to re-script the call-taking protocol, significantly changing their work practices. Instead of initially counseling callers, 911 call-takers are now required to quickly take control of the call trajectory, asking a series of rapid fact-finding questions to obtain basic details about the emergency and its location. This new call control protocol generated cynical comments among call-takers who saw it as a defining shift in practice. They

regarded it as a move towards mundane ‘customer service’ work in which they are positioned as ‘customer service representatives’ in an impersonal and distanced relationship with callers. Call-takers experience this work redefinition as demoralizing and identity-challenging. As one 911 call-taker put it:

I have come to terms with this. Do not think too much, it will only get you in trouble... just take the call, get the info, send it out, take the call get the info send it out, take the call get the info send it out. That’s ALL there is to it. The folks who call are customers, I am there to take the call and give them what they need. This is no emergency management, and I am no longer in the public safety profession.

The shift in service ethos, from providing critical assistance to the public in need to customer service, became evident in way that the meaning, relations, and activities of their work practices were enacted. For example, a more cynical ‘customer service’ tone appeared in some online responses posted by DEMO managers: “... in the future, we look forward to serving your emergency needs” and “Every #DeltaCity resident is important to us and we look forward to serving you.” In sum, these changes in practices — recalibration of risk by workers and managers, redeployment of resources to deal with short-term demands and avoid social media controversies, redefinition of emergency response as customer service — decreased organizational morale and effectiveness. As this DEMO Senior Manager noted:

Every agency I was part of [in the past], there was a goal, sometimes more than one. But they were all anchored around a more basic mission... For us at DEMO, our goal is city-wide emergency management and also emergency communications, but it was anchored around 911 calls. That’s our everyday reality. We answer and screen calls made to 911, we then process and dispatch those calls... based on standards about what would fall within the bounds of a 911 emergency and what would fall outside the bounds... But now, I’m not sure [of the distinction] anymore, and [pauses] that is making my life – and all of our lives in this Ops floor – difficult. And painful.

Within hospitality, hoteliers are increasingly concerned about their responsiveness to TripAdvisor reviews. Both workers and managers note considerable anxiety at the possibility of a poor hotel review, fearing, in particular, online comments that criticize them personally for inadequate or inappropriate action. Our findings highlight how much the established norms and locales of hotel engagement have changed. Traditionally, hotel staff engaged with guests personally and face to face. When issues needed to be discussed or addressed, these tended to happen in private, whether at the reception desk, over the phone, or by letter/email. With social media commentary, hotel responses are now enacted online, publicly, loudly enough for everyone to ‘hear,’ without the hotel staff knowing who the reviewers are, and even if they stayed at the hotel at all. One hotel manager observed:

I'll tell you what TripAdvisor was designed to do. It was designed to give hotel managers psychological problems. ... Once it's out there, a bad review, that's it. For all the world to see. You can't shake it. They don't think about it, the impact on us. It goes public and stays public for the world to read.

Many hoteliers are dismayed at what they see to be a dramatic change in how they perform their hospitality work. Whereas previously they welcomed “guests” to their hotels, they now see prospective “reviewers walking through the door.” Instead of hosting guests, they now obsess over the details of online reviews, the issues they raise, and the potential reviewers currently staying in their hotels. The ongoing stream of social media comments has taught them to anticipate possible queries and concerns, and they now attempt to preempt these by explaining particular conditions (e.g., policies regarding pets, parking, spotty wifi, etc.) during the check-in process or when showing guests to the room. One hotelier explained, We were getting quite a number of comments about TVs not working. Now, in every bedroom, we have a notice saying, ‘[The region] is just about to go through digitalization. We’re really sorry, but the TVs aren’t working.’ But people would still write and say, ‘The TVs didn’t work.’ Even though this had absolutely been pointed out, and we had apologized in advance. ... But it did make us a bit more proactive about actually speaking to people, not just assuming that they would read something that was in their room.

Some hoteliers attend seminars or participate in webinars that offer advice on how to manage online commentary and use it for generating feedback. More hoteliers actively encourage guests to post reviews on TripAdvisor, despite worries over the possibility of false or offensive reviews. One acknowledged that many hotels in his region “work harder at trying to get the customers to write reviews,” with a couple “positively campaign to get people to write reviews.” These hotels prominently display TripAdvisor signs on doors and in lobbies, and remind guests to write TripAdvisor reviews via nudges and email requests:

If we get it right, instead of saying ‘glad you liked it, enjoy your day’ like we used to do, we have cards that we give out saying ‘please leave us a review.’ Leave one in the room, give them one at check-out.

We have it all set up now on the system. Unless we change the setting, they [guests] get the follow-up email asking if they enjoyed their stay with the TripAdvisor logo and a link. It’s how it is done now. All automated.

Hoteliers are acutely aware of the scale, speed, and power of social media commentary, and many engage with the social media comments online while taking action on the ground to address issues in the reviews. The shift in hospitality practices —recalibration of risk and redeploying of resources to quickly investigate issues and redress problems with facilities and staff — produces an overall redefinition of hotel service in ways that engender a focus on immediate and short-term issues, along with a displacing of longer-term priorities, tactical maintenance, and improvement projects. Hoteliers’ work on the ground has

been substantially redefined from enacting hospitality service to being oriented to the demands of social media commentary; they are in effect being “micromanaged by the crowd.” As one manager noted,

“TripAdvisor is in the room now.” For some, such a redefinition of hospitality work is intolerable:

We will see this season out ...then we are getting out [of the hospitality business]. I didn't opt in to this rubbish. Judge me for the actual service I provide, the hotel, how I run it and what we offer from this location. I set up my hotel for people to get away from the world, to do something different for people. Because I loved living here and hosting them. I'm not [willing to] be given the runaround.

Discussion: Reconfiguring Accountability in the Social Media Era

In this research, we set out to understand how organizations respond to accountability pressures from social media commentary and with what consequences for organizing. Based on our comparative analysis, we distinguished a number of practices enacted by organizational actors in response to social media commentary posted on two platforms. While the Twitter and TripAdvisor platforms are different and the organizations we studied operate in distinct sectors (emergency response and hospitality), our comparison of commonalities as well as variations in practices and outcomes allows us to identify and elaborate key insights about accountability and organizing in the social media era. Leveraging the analytic power of data from multiple field studies (Bechky & O'Mahony 2015; Shestakofsky & Kelkar 2020), we theorize how accountability pressures by the social media crowd and the accountability responses by organizations together enact what we refer to as *crowd-based accountability*. Below, we develop the notion of crowd-based accountability and contrast it to stakeholder-based accountability.

Theorizing Crowd-based Accountability and its Organizational Consequences

Crowd-based accountability entails both accountability pressures materializing as social media commentary and the accountability responses of organizations to those pressures. While crowd-based accountability shares some commonalities with stakeholder-based accountability, there are notable and consequential differences, as we detail in Table 1.

--- Insert Table 1 here ---

In stakeholder-based accountability, the constituents are generally known and identifiable stakeholders (e.g., customers, auditors, and regulators), with evaluative criteria that are relatively clear, stable, and well-specified, entailing more-or-less defined issues that are used to hold organizations accountable. In

crowd-based accountability, the constituents are a diverse, dispersed set of actors posting accounts on social media platforms, with evaluative criteria that are unclear, in-flux, and unspecified, thus imposing uncertain and variable demands on organizations. Whereas constituents in the former are positioned as *stakeholders*, the constituents in the latter are positioned as a collective phenomenon, *the crowd*. The idea of subject position recognizes that subjects are not bounded, stable entities but rather that different subject positions are performed in practice (Hultin & Introna 2019). As Hultin and Introna (2019) observe, it is through practices that subjects become positioned to be and act in certain ways. This conceptualization of subject positioning allows us to understand how the largely individual-level grievances and disaffections of actors, when posted pseudonymously on social media platforms, become enacted as a collective stream of commentary materializing as the crowd.

As the assessment criteria of the social media crowd are uncertain and mutable, the precise focus of accountability pressures is often not identifiable in advance. Instead, it becomes determined in practice as micro-details of recounted incidents become negatively amplified in social media commentary of the crowd. A key way in which this amplification becomes power-charged is the distinctive form of visibility that is enacted through social media platforms. Recent studies have suggested that new digital technologies can make communications and behaviors visible in ways that were not possible before (Leonardi & Treem 2020; Treem, Leonardi & van den Hoof 2020). As Leonardi and Treem (2020, p. 1608) note, the visibility of actors' actions enabled through digital connectivity is no longer within their control, but "belong[s] to a broad and heterogeneous empirical audience that typically has to expend very little effort to become exposed to them." Similarly, postings on social media platforms are readily available for viewing and posting 24/7 by a large and distributed audience. The visibility of social media commentary, however, differs from that of behavioral trace data or enterprise-wide communications in that it is a visibility of accounts that others have posted about actions, interactions, and decisions of organizations and their members. These accounts of others manifesting as tweets and reviews are generally pseudonymous, often provocative, and posted with few limits. They enact a form of visibility that departs substantially from that enacted by stakeholder-based accountability.

In stakeholder-based accountability, visibility materializes through the episodic and delimited metrics, audits, and inspections performed by stakeholders. In contrast, the visibility of crowd-based accountability materializes as the persistent, pervasive, and public gaze of the social media crowd viewing the accounts of others. Where the scrutiny of stakeholder-based accountability is panoptic-like, rendering *the many visible to a few* (Thompson 2005), the scrutiny of crowd-based accountability is synoptic-like (Mathiesen 1997), rendering *a few visible to the many* (Adorjan & Ricciardelli 2021; Thompson 2005). Some see synoptic visibility as a return (albeit partially) to the prominence of the spectacle in social life (Brighenti 2010; Mathiesen 1997). But unlike the co-located, event-like temporal-spatial boundaries of spectacles in prior ages, the synoptic-like visibility enacted on social media platforms materializes as a continual stream of accounts by and for a distributed audience across space and time. Uldam (2018, p. 43) notes that “increased synoptic visibility has brought about new reputational challenges for companies.” We find similarly that the synoptic-like visibility of social media amplifies the extensive, and potentially corrosive, accountability pressures experienced by organizations.

In response to accountability pressures, organizations have typically responded by conforming to and aligning with the criteria of evaluation. Espeland and Sauder (2007) characterized such responses in terms of reactivity, whereby organizational actors change their behavior in reaction to being evaluated or measured. With stakeholder-based accountability, organizations respond in ways that affirm the evaluative criteria. This produces a *convergent reactivity* that is achieved through the mechanisms of self-fulfilling prophecy and commensuration (Espeland & Sauder 2007, 2016; see also Rahman 2021). For example, organizational actors gather additional information about the performance expectations and evaluative criteria of external stakeholders, and then change their structures, processes, and messaging in relation to them (Dobbin & Kelly 2007; Hallett 2010; Espeland & Sauder 2007; Sauder & Espeland 2009). Even with some variance in response among organizational actors, the changes nonetheless tend to converge with regard to estimating, experimenting, complying, and fulfilling the evaluative criteria (Brandtner 2017; Rahman 2021). Akin to the self-disciplining of those subject to panoptic-like scrutiny, organizations subject to stakeholder-based accountability pressures internalize their stakeholders’ evaluative criteria and adapt their activities accordingly.

With crowd-based accountability, it is difficult for organizations to comply with or conform to constituents' evaluative criteria as these are not clear, stable, or well-specified. Instead, organizations struggle with how to be accountable to the diverse, dispersed, and pseudonymous social media crowd that manifests as a stream of negative and wide-ranging commentary. While some organizations with limited or no competition over clients may be able to reduce their social media activity (such as DEMO in our study) and even deactivate their social media accounts, other organizations facing competition over clients do not always have this option (such as some of the hotels in our study). Despite variations in their online responses, organizations across our two settings responded similarly in enacting changes to their offline practices. Specifically, we found organizations engaging in scattered and often ad hoc attempts to address the accountability pressures of the social media crowd. Such responses enact what we term *diffractive reactivity*,³ whereby organizations respond equivocally in multiple and variable ways, bending and even contorting (as opposed to complying or conforming) their practices in multiple ways to deal with the crowd's unclear, in-flux, and unspecified evaluative criteria.

Our findings across two settings suggest that diffractive reactivity is produced as organizational actors attempt to rework the situation and reposition their core activities in order to avoid unnecessary social media exposure, minimize controversies, and even preempt escalations and scandals on social media platforms. When provoked by negative social media posts that describe particular incidents, experiences, or concerns, organizations confront accounts of situations depicted by others. In reworking the situation, they may engage with these accounts directly to explain, justify or redress the issues. They may also post stock responses or decline to respond altogether, thus distancing themselves from the social media commentary to avoid stirring up controversy or triggering further criticism. These findings resonate with those from a recent study of rural police officers by Adorjan and Ricciardelli (2021) that observed the synoptic-like visibility of social media eliciting a form of prudentialism on the part of the officers. This involved the officers taking preemptive action to avoid or alleviate anticipated negative outcomes arising

³ In physics, diffraction refers to phenomena that arise when a wave encounters an obstacle or opening. It is defined as the bending of waves around the corners of an obstacle or through an aperture. (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Diffraction>)

from their acute awareness of the ubiquitous scrutiny of the many on social media. In our settings, we similarly observed the emergency response and hotel staff attempting to prevent negative commentary online by anticipating and even preempting potential concerns.

In repositioning the core, organizations change — either deliberately or inadvertently — the activities that constitute service work in significant ways. Seeking to minimize the risk of further reputational damage to themselves or organizations, workers and managers become overcautious in their decisions and actions. Resources are redeployed when managers feel compelled to address or contain the social media crowds' demands for change. This has unintended consequences for downstream or future activities that will have to contend with reduced resources to execute longer-term priorities, as organizational resources and attention are directed toward addressing shorter-term issues and demands. This, in turn, renders organizations' relations with their service users increasingly fraught, unpredictable, and even hostile. Forced to aim for daily perfection, where every interaction with a service user, no matter how small, short, or appropriate, must be enacted flawlessly, organizations defer putting in place effective policies, facilities, and infrastructure that would ordinarily be viewed as ensuring good service. As a result, these processes produce consequential outcomes on the ground in ways that generate subtle but substantial shifts in the nature and quality of service provisioning.

The emergence of social media commentary on platforms such as Twitter and TripAdvisor has complicated the conditions of possibility for organizations to respond to accountability pressures. Reactivity is no longer what it used to be. It has multiplied into convergent *and* diffractive forms. Organizations now find themselves responding with convergent reactivity to stakeholder-based accountability (to comply with the criteria set by stakeholders such as regulators, auditors, and rating agencies), while also responding with diffractive reactivity to crowd-based accountability (to assuage the highly visible, immediate, and often idiosyncratic demands of the crowd). Since these distinct forms of reactivity are entangled in practice and elicit disparate responses, enacting both at the same time creates serious challenges for organizations given bounded resources, physical constraints, limits to managerial attention, and emotional toll on front-line workers. Thus, the simultaneous enactment of both convergent

and diffractive reactivities provokes organizations to privilege quick fixes and short-term changes, while undermining their capacity to consider strategic priorities or implement longer-term changes (Chu, 2021).

As the accountability pressures of social media commentary penetrate directly into the core of organizations, they redefine service work and what it means to be a service organization. As a result, core aspects of organizations (their products, services, service work) shift in substantial ways. For instance, previously established understandings and implicit definitions of what counts as service (e.g., an “emergency,” “5-star hospitality”) are up for grabs. Furthermore, the meanings and boundaries of organizational accountability are being reconfigured. In the social media era, what does it mean to hold organizations to account? What criteria are relevant or appropriate in the shifting and sliding kaleidoscopic worlds of social media commentary? Organizational actors are increasingly unsure about what they are held accountable for and uncertain about how, when, and to whom they are accountable.

Figure 1 synthesizes these insights in a model of crowd-based accountability highlighting the critical aspects of this distinctive form of accountability: how social media commentary generates accountability pressures provoking organizational responses that change practices and enact a diffractive reactivity, which, in turn, produces important organizational consequences.

--- Insert Figure 1 here ---

Contributions to Research on Organizational Accountability and Social Media

This study advances our understanding of organizational accountability by examining the practices through which it is reconfigured in the social media era. In doing so, this research contributes to the literature on organizational accountability and social media in the following ways.

First, we unpack and highlight *how* organizations respond to social media commentary from the crowd. While prior empirical research has tended to focus on why and in what ways the social media crowd pressurizes organizations by disseminating concerns and accelerating social disapproval (Pfeffer et al. 2014; Toubiana & Zietsma 2017; Wang et al., 2021), there has been less empirical research on understanding how organizations respond to such pressures and with what consequences for workers, managers, and organizing (for an exception see Albu & Etter 2016). We address this gap by focusing on organizational responses to accountability pressures manifesting as social media commentary. In doing

so, we propose a model of crowd-based accountability that articulates the distinctive accountability pressures produced by the social media crowd and theorizes organizational responses to those pressures, along with their consequences. Our insights into crowd-based accountability are analytically transferable to other service organizations (e.g., restaurants, retail outlets, public service agencies) that have one-off or fleeting “service encounters” (Guttek et al. 2000) with their constituents, who may choose at any time to comment about these encounters on social media platforms.

In developing the notion of crowd-based accountability and contrasting it with stakeholder-based accountability, our research identifies how social media commentary exerts acute, as well as chronic, accountability pressures on organizations, provoking them to substantially alter their core practices. These shifts are consequential for organizations and workers/managers, fragmenting focus as attention and resources turn towards short-term demands and displace longer-term priorities. Such changes, in turn, reconfigure the boundaries of organizational accountability, leaving open and unsettled the question of what constitutes organizational accountability in the social media era.

Second, and relatedly, we propose the concept of diffractive reactivity to characterize the type and tenor of organizational responses to accountability pressures from the social media crowd. We contrast this with the convergent reactivity (Espeland & Sauder 2007) that characterizes organizational responses to stakeholder-based accountability pressures from identifiable stakeholders such as regulators, auditors, rating agencies, and news media such as the *US News and World Report* and *Business Week* (Chaney & Philipich 2002; Espeland & Vannebo 2007; Gioia & Corley 2002; Hallet 2010). Whereas convergent reactivity relies on self-fulfilling prophecy and commensuration to achieve congruence, diffractive reactivity entails reworking the situation and repositioning the core to produce significantly different organizational realities. In the former, we see alignment, conformity, and even isomorphism, while in the latter, overcautious activities, diverted resources, and shifting identities, alongside increasingly fraught relations with service users (Levy & Barocas 2018; Rahman 2021). Our research, thus, goes beyond prevailing understandings of how managers and workers adapt to or resist the criticisms of the social media crowd. We draw attention to the markedly different way that practices of service provisioning, service relations, and service identity shift in response to social media commentary. We raise concerns

about organizations compromising their core focus, activities, and values in attempts to preempt controversies and address short-term demands, which end up eclipsing longer-term priorities. In the wake of social media commentary, what counts as an emergency or as hospitality, and what it means to be an effective emergency management organization or good quality hotel are being substantially redefined.

Third, this research advances our understanding of the public visibility of social media commentary and its consequences for organizations. While prior research has largely focused on enterprise-wide social media (e.g., Leonardi, 2017; Leonardi & Treem, 2012; Turco, 2016), this research examines the organizational consequences of commentary on public-facing social media platforms characterized by continual and persistent visibility where the few observe the many. While stakeholder-based accountability tends to be enacted in circumscribed spheres, crowd-based accountability is enacted in public, leaving organizational actors with little room to maneuver. In the face of synoptic-like public scrutiny of the social media crowd, organizational actors work with heightened anticipatory anxiety, effectively with a Sword of Damocles over their heads. Our insight into this synoptic-like visibility of social media commentary supports the notion of synoptic prudentialism (Adorjan & Ricciardelli 2021), and positions it as a significant organizational response to crowd-based accountability pressures. Further research can help elaborate how synoptic visibility of social media commentary may elicit additional responses from organizations subject to the relentless gaze of the many on social media platforms.

Fourth, our study sheds light on the ways in which organizational work is redefined in response to social media commentary. Extant literature points to how social media rapidly amplifies social disapproval about organizations, providing valuable ways of understanding how organizations respond online to social media commentary (Barnett et al. 2020; Wang et al. 2021). This prior work is largely focused on externally-oriented communications and impression management that organizations need to engage in order to prevent, contain, or minimize social disapproval due to social media commentary. By providing a more dynamic view of organizational change in which responses to social media commentary rework situations and reposition core activities, we highlight the criticality of organizational practices enacted on the ground in response to social media commentary. In that sense, this research advances understanding of how social media commentary influences the “collective reputational judgments” of

organizations (Etter et al. 2019, p. 29) through the dissemination of emotionally-charged evaluative accounts. For instance, our findings provide empirical support for conceptual frameworks positing that an organizations' reactive reticence and limited engagement with social media commentary can help contain social disapproval and minimize reputational damage (Wang et al 2021; Etter et al. 2019). Our findings also go further, indicating that social media commentary does not just influence organizational reputation, but also engenders changes to practices that alter meanings, activities, relations, and outcomes, thus disrupting organizational identity and focus.

Fifth, the practice-based perspective we followed in this research helped us advance our understanding of social media commentary in reconfiguring the boundaries of organizational accountability. Prior research shows how different affordances of social media technologies shape organizing in unique ways (Kane et al. 2014; Leonardi & Treem 2012, 2017; Majchrzak et al. 2013), specifically focusing on existing material properties of these technologies and the "action possibilities" (Gibson 1977) they afford users. In contrast, our practice-based approach focuses on how social media commentary materializes on two social media platforms to provoke organizations across two different settings to change their practices in consequential ways. Our research underscores the important theoretical point that what makes a difference to work and organizing are not the affordances or properties of emerging technologies per se, but how they are entangled with practices. While we found particular outcomes of crowd-based accountability by studying practices in emergency response and hospitality, further research is needed on transformative changes relating to other social media commentary. For example, the #MeToo movement on Twitter consolidated private information spread across multiple people, making it public and collective knowledge, provoking specific and significant policy changes in organizations.

Our research thus suggests that focusing on practices is critical to furthering empirical and theoretical understanding of transformative organizational change and emerging technologies. More generally, our approach can help scholars investigate how organizational phenomena, in practice, materialize differently with novel digital technologies, and with what outcomes. By focusing on reconfigurations in practice, researchers can account for how digital organizing is producing organizational realities in new and unexpected ways that are deeply consequential for work, workers, organizations, and society at large.

References

- Adorjan, M.C. & Ricciardelli, R. 2021. Synoptic Prudentialism: The police, social media, and bureaucratic resistance. *Canadian Journal of Sociology*, **46**(1), 59-84.
- Adut, A. 2019. *Reign of Appearances: The Misery and Splendor of the Public Sphere*. Cambridge University Press.
- Albu, O.B., Etter, M. 2016. Hypertextuality and social media: A study of the constitutive and paradoxical implications of organizational Twitter use. *Management Communication Quarterly*, **30**(1), 5-31.
- Aratani, L. 2018 A year after the infamous United dragging incident, has anything changed for airline travelers? *Washington Post*. Accessed at <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/dr-gridlock/wp/2018/04/09/a-year-after-the-infamous-united-dragging-incident-has-anything-changed-for-airlines-travelers/>
- Augustine, G. 2021. We're not like those crazy hippies: The dynamics of jurisdictional drift in externally mandated occupational groups. *Organization Science*, Forthcoming.
- Bailey, D.E., Leonardi, P.M., Chong, J. 2010. Minding the gaps: Understanding technology interdependence and coordination in knowledge work. *Organization Science*, **21**(3), 713-730.
- Barnett, M.L., Henriques, I., Husted, B.W. 2020 The rise and stall of stakeholder influence: How the digital age limits social control. *Academy of Management Perspectives*, **34**(1), 48-64.
- Bechky, B.A., O'Mahony, S. 2015. Leveraging comparative field data for theory generation. *Handbook of Qualitative Organizational Research, Innovative Pathways and Methods*, 168-176.
- Bechky, B.A., Okhuysen, G.A. 2011. Expecting the unexpected? How SWAT officers and film crews handle surprises. *Academy of Management Journal*, **54**(2), 239-261.
- Bergsteiner, H. 2011. *Accountability Theory meets Accountability Practice*. Emerald Group Publishing.
- Bolino, M.C., Turnley, W.H. 2003. More than one way to make an impression: Exploring profiles of impression management. *Journal of Management*, **29**(2), 141-160.
- Brandtner, C. 2017. Plurality in organizational evaluation. *Sociological Theory*, **35**(3), 200-227.
- Brightenti, A.M. 2010. *Visibility in Social Theory and Social Research*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Bryne, J.A. 2021. Former B-School Dean indicted on fraud charges in MBA rankings scandal. *Poets & Quants*. Accessed at <https://poetsandquants.com/2021/04/16/former-b-school-dean-indicted-on-fraud-charges-in-mba-rankings-scandal/?pq-category=business-school-news>
- Bundy, J., Pfarrer, M.D. 2015. A burden of responsibility: The role of social approval at the onset of a crisis. *Academy of Management Review*, **40**(3), 345-369.
- Bundy, J., Iqbal, F., Pfarrer, M.D. 2021. Reputations in flux: How a firm defends its multiple reputations in response to different violations. *Strategic Management Journal*, **42**(6), 1109-1138.
- Busenbark, J.R., Lange, D., Certo, S.T. 2017. Foreshadowing as impression management: Illuminating the path for security analysts. *Strategic Management Journal*, **38**(12), 2486-2507.
- Chaney, P.K., Philipich, K.L. 2002. Shredded reputation: The cost of audit failure. *Journal of Accounting Research*, **40**(4), 1221-1245.
- Chatterji, A.K., Toffel, M.W. 2010. How firms respond to being rated. *Strategic Management Journal*, **31**(9), 917-945.
- Chu, J. 2021. Cameras of Merit or Engines of Inequality? College Ranking Systems and the Enrollment of Disadvantaged Students. *American Journal of Sociology*, **126**(6), 1307-1346.
- Cotter, M., Snyder, W. 1998. How guide books affect restaurant behavior. *Journal of Restaurant & Foodservice Marketing*, **3**(1), 69-75.
- Dobbin, F., Kelly, E.L. 2007. How to stop harassment: Professional construction of legal compliance in organizations. *American Journal of Sociology*, **112**(4), 1203-1243.
- Dubnick, M. 2005. Accountability and the promise of performance: In search of mechanisms. *Public Performance and Management Review*, **28**, 376-417.
- Espeland, W.N., Sauder, M. 2007. Ranking and Reactivity: How public measures recreate social worlds. *American Journal of Sociology*, **113**(1), 1-40.
- Espeland, W.N., Sauder, M. 2016. *Engines of Anxiety: Academic Rankings, Reputation, and Accountability*. Russell Sage Foundation.
- Espeland W.N., Vannebo, B. 2008. Accountability, quantification, and law, *Annual Review of Law and Social Science*, **3**(1), 21-43.
- Etter, M., Ravasi, D., Colleoni, E. 2019. Social media and the formation of organizational reputation. *Academy of Management Review*, **44**(1), 28-52.
- Etter, M., Colleoni, E., Illia, L., Meggiorin, K., D'Eugenio, A. 2018. Measuring organizational legitimacy in social media: Assessing citizens' judgments with sentiment analysis. *Business & Society*, **57**(1), 60-97.
- Ferrara, E. & Yang, Z. 2015. Measuring emotional contagion in social media. *PLOS One*, **10**(11).
- Frink, D.D., Hall, A.T., Perryman, A.A., Ranft, A.L., Hochwarter, W.A., Ferris, G.R., Todd Royle, M. 2008. Meso-

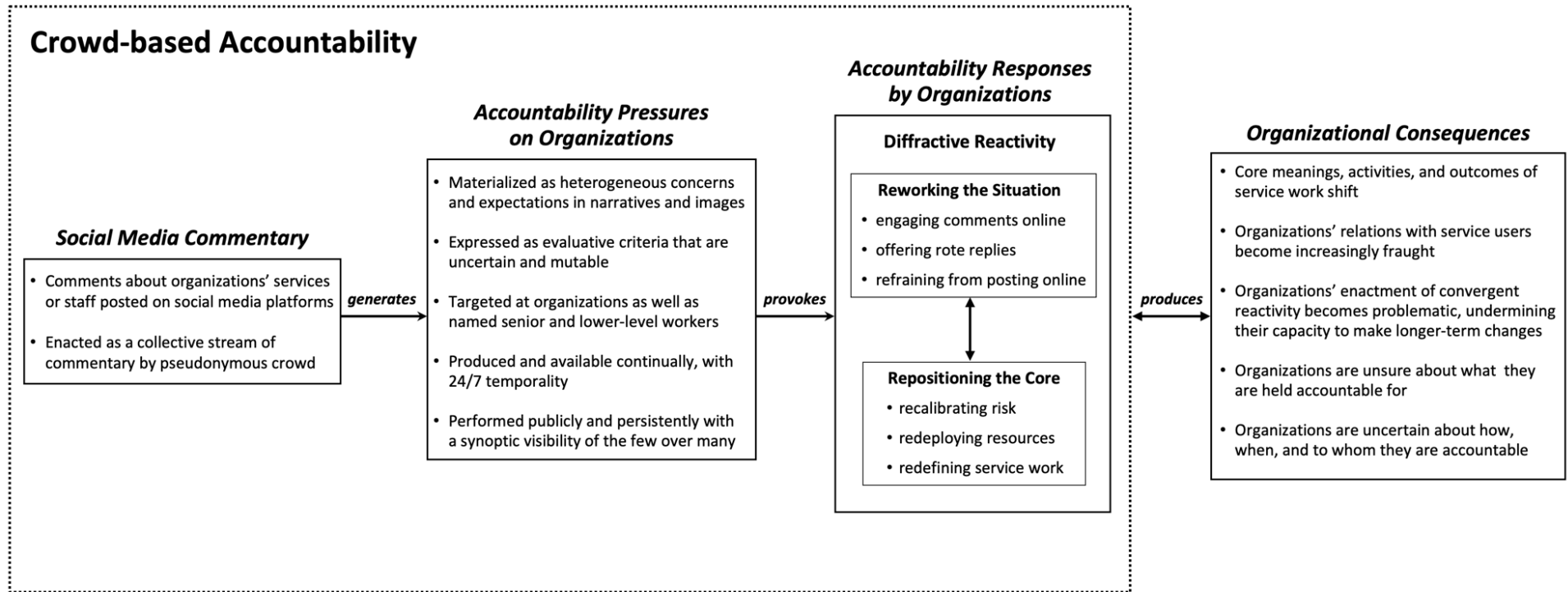
- level theory of accountability in organizations. In *Research in Personnel and Human Resources Management*, pp. 177-245. Emerald Group Publishing.
- Gibson, J.J. 1977. *The Theory of Affordances*. Hilldale Press.
- Gioia, D. A., Corley, K. G. 2002. Being good versus looking good: Business school rankings and the Circean transformation from substance to image. *Academy of Management Learning & Education*, **1**(1), 107-120.
- Goodman, M. 2014 Twitter storm forces Chimerix's hand in compassionate use request. *Nature Biotechnology*, **32**: 503–504.
- Gutek, B. A., Cherry, B., Bhappu, A. D., Schneider, S., & Woolf, L. 2000. Features of service relationships and encounters. *Work and Occupations*, **27**(3), 319-352.
- Hallett, T. 2010. The myth incarnate: Recoupling processes, turmoil, and inhabited institutions in an urban elementary school. *American Sociological Review*, **75**(1), 52-74.
- Hill, K. 2012. McDStories: When a hashtag becomes a bashtag. *Forbes*. Accessed at <http://www.forbes.com/sites/kashmirhill/2012/01/24/mcdstories-when-a-hashtagbecomes-a-bashtag>
- Huising, R. 2015. To hive or to hold? Producing professional authority through scut work. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, **60**(2), 263-299.
- Jeacle, I., Carter, C. 2011. In TripAdvisor we trust: Rankings, calculative regimes and abstract systems.” *Accounting, Organizations and Society*, **3**(4), 293–309.
- Kane, G.C., Alavi, M., LaBianca, G.J., S.Borgatti. 2014. What's different about social media networks? A framework and research agenda. *MIS Quarterly*, **38**(1), 275-304.
- Kim. A. 2020. An Oregon police department is asking residents to stop calling 911 because they've run out of toilet paper. Accessed at <https://www.cnn.com/2020/03/16/us/newport-911-toilet-paper-trnd/index.html>
- King, B.G. 2008. A political mediation model of corporate response to social movement activism. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, **53**(3), 395-421.
- Leonardi, P.M. 2014. Social media, knowledge sharing, and innovation: Toward a theory of communication visibility. *Information Systems Research*, **25**(4), 796-816.
- Leonardi, P.M. 2018. Social media and the development of shared cognition: The roles of network expansion, content integration, and triggered recalling. *Organization Science*, **29**(4), 547-568.
- Leonardi, P.M., Treem, J. W. 2020. Behavioral visibility: A new paradigm for organization studies in the age of digitization, digitalization, and datafication. *Organization Studies*, **41**(12), 1601–1625
- Leonardi, P.M., Vaast, E. 2017. Social media and their affordances for organizing: A review and agenda for research. *Academy of Management Annals*, **11**(1), 150-188.
- Lerner, J.S., Tetlock, P.E. 1999. Accounting for the effects of accountability. *Psychological Bulletin*, **125**(2), 255.
- Levy, K., Barocas, S. 2018. Privacy at the Margins refractive surveillance: Monitoring customers to manage workers. *International Journal of Communication*, **12**, 1166–1188.
- Majchrzak, A., Faraj, S., Kane, G.C., Azad, B. 2013. The contradictory influence of social media affordances on online communal knowledge sharing. *Journal of Computer Mediated Communication*, **19**(1), 38-55.
- Mathiesen, T. 1997. The viewer society: Michel Foucault's Panopticon revisited. *Theoretical Criminology*, **1**(2), 215-234.
- McDonnell, M. H., King, B. 2013. Keeping up appearances: Reputational threat and impression management after social movement boycotts. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, **58**(3), 387-419.
- Milan, S. 2015. Mobilizing in times of social media. From a politics of identity to a politics of visibility. In L. Dencik and O. Leister (eds.). *Critical Perspectives on Social Media and Protest*. Rowman & Littlefield: 53-71.
- Miller, P., Rose, N. 2008. *Governing the Present: Administering Economic, Social and Personal life*. Polity Press.
- Nader, R. 1965. *Unsafe at Any Speed: The Designed-in dangers of the American Automobile*. Grossman.
- O'Connor, P. 2010. Managing a hotel's image on TripAdvisor. *Journal of Hospitality Marketing, Management*, **19**(7), 754-772.
- Orlikowski, W.J., Scott, S.V. 2014. What happens when evaluation goes online? Exploring apparatuses of valuation in the travel sector. *Organization Science*, **25**(3), 868-891.
- Pfarrer, M.D., Smith, K.G., Bartol, K.M., Khanin, D.M., Zhang, X. 2008. Coming forward: The effects of social and regulatory forces on the voluntary restatement of earnings subsequent to wrongdoing. *Organization Science*, **19**(3), 386-403.
- Pfeffer J., Zorbach T., Carley K.M. 2014. Understanding online firestorms: Negative word-of-mouth dynamics in social media networks. *Journal of Marketing Communications*. **20**(1–2), 117–128.
- Pollock, T.G., Rindova, V.P. 2003. Media legitimation effects in the market for initial public offerings. *Academy of Management Journal*, **46**(5), 631-642.
- Porter, T.M. 1995. *Trust in Numbers: Pursuit of Objectivity in Science and Public Life*. Princeton University Press.
- Power, M. 1997. *The Audit Society: Rituals of Verification*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.

- Proserpio, D., Zervas, G. 2017. Online reputation management: Estimating the impact of management responses on consumer reviews. *Marketing Science*, **36**(5), 645-665.
- Pugh, H.B., Brady, M.K., Hopkins, L.M. 2018. A customer scorned: effects of employee reprimands in frontline service encounters. *Journal of Service Research*, **21**(2), 219-234.
- Rahman, H.A. 2021. The invisible cage: Workers' reactivity to opaque algorithmic evaluations. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, <https://doi.org/10.1177/00018392211010118>
- Ravasi, D., Rindova, V., Etter, M., Cornelissen, J. 2018. The formation of organizational reputation. *Academy of Management Annals*, **12**(2), 574-599.
- Reinstein, J. 2018. Dunkin' Donuts is under rife for a sign that people are calling racist. Accessed at <https://www.buzzfeednews.com/article/juliareinstein/dunkin-donuts-sign-racist-english>
- Rao, H. 1998. Caveat emptor: The construction of nonprofit consumer watchdog organizations. *American Journal of Sociology*, **103**(4), 912-961.
- Roberts, J. 1991. The possibilities of accountability. *Accounting, Organizations and Society*, **16**(4), 355-368.
- Roberts, J. 2009. No one is perfect: The limits of transparency and an ethic for 'intelligent' accountability. *Accounting, Organizations and Society*, **34**(8), 957-970.
- Sandholtz, K.W. 2012. Making standards stick: A theory of coupled vs. decoupled compliance. *Organization Studies*, **33**(5-6), 655-679.
- Sharkey, A.J., Bromley, P. 2015. Can ratings have indirect effects? Evidence from the organizational response to peers' environmental ratings. *American Sociological Review*, **80**(1), 63-91.
- Shestakofsky, B., Kelkar, S. 2020. Making platforms work: relationship labor and the management of publics. *Theory and Society*, **49**(5), 863-896.
- Scott, S.V., Orlikowski, W.J. 2012. Reconfiguring relations of accountability: Materialization of social media in the travel sector. *Accounting, Organizations and Society*, **37**(1), 26-40.
- Shore, C., Wright, S. 1999. Audit culture and anthropology: Neo-liberalism in British higher education. *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, **5**(4), 557-557.
- Stevens, M. 2018. Starbucks C.E.O. apologizes after arrests of 2 black men. *New York Times*. Accessed at <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/04/15/us/starbucks-philadelphia-black-men-arrest.html>
- Strathern, M. 2000. The tyranny of transparency. *British Educational Research Journal*, **26**(3), 309-321.
- Suchman, L. 1993. Working relations of technology production and use. *Computer Supported Cooperative Work*, **2**(1-2), 21-39.
- Suddaby, R., Greenwood, R. 2005. Rhetorical strategies of legitimacy. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, **50**(1), 35-67.
- Tetlock, P.E., Vieider, F.M., Patil, S.V., Grant, A.M. 2013. Accountability and ideology: When left looks right and right looks left. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, **122**(1), 22-35.
- Thompson, J.B. 2005. The new visibility. *Theory, Culture & Society*, **22**(6), 31-51.
- Toubiana, M., Zietsma, C. 2017. The message is on the wall? Emotions, social media and the dynamics of institutional complexity. *Academy of Management Journal*, **60**(3), 922-953.
- Treem, J.W. 2015. Social media as technologies of accountability: Explaining resistance to implementation within organizations. *American Behavioral Scientist*, **59**(1), 53-74.
- Treem, J.W., Leonardi, P.M. 2013. Social media use in organizations: Exploring the affordances of visibility, editability, persistence, and association. *Annals of the International Communication Association*, **36**(1), 143-189.
- Tsugawa, S., Ohsaki, H. 2017. On the relation between message sentiment and its virality on social media. *Social Network Analysis and Mining*, **7**(1), 19.
- Turco, C. 2016. *The Conversational Firm: Rethinking Bureaucracy in the Age of Social Media*. Columbia University Press.
- Uldam, J. 2018. Social media visibility: Challenges to activism. *Media, Culture & Society*, **40**(1), 41-58.
- Victor, D., Stevens, M. 2017. United Airlines passenger is dragged from an overbooked flight. *New York Times*. Accessed at <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/04/10/business/united-flight-passenger-dragged.html>
- Xie, K.L., Zhang, Z., Zhang, Z. 2014. The business value of online consumer reviews and management response to hotel performance. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, **43**(1), 1-12.
- Wang, X., Reger, R.K., Pfarrer, M. 2020. Faster, hotter, and more Linked In: Managing social disapproval in the social media era. *Academy of Management Review*, In-press, <https://doi.org/10.5465/amr.2017.0375>
- Zavvalova, A., Pfarrer, M.D., Reger, R.K., Shapiro, D.L. 2012. Managing the message: The effects of firm actions and industry spillovers on media coverage following wrongdoing. *Academy of Management Journal*, **55**(5), 1079-1101.
- Zavvalova, A., Pfarrer, M.D., Reger, R.K. 2017. Celebrity and infamy? The consequences of media narratives about organizational identity. *Academy of Management Review*, **42**(3), 461-480.

Table 1: Comparing Stakeholder-based and Crowd-based Accountability

	Stakeholder-based Accountability	Crowd-based Accountability
Accountability Pressures		
Constituents	Generally known, identifiable, and often authorized stakeholder groups	Diverse, dispersed, and largely pseudonymous social media crowd
Evaluative Criteria	Evaluative criteria are relatively clear, stable, and well-specified	Evaluative criteria are unclear, in-flux, and unspecified
Target	Directed at the focal organization and/or its top managers and rarely at front-line or back-office workers performing operational work	Directed at the focal organization and named individuals performing both senior-level as well as front-line and back-office work
Temporality	Episodic (e.g., once a year, every three months, by incident.)	Continual (occurring 24/7)
Manifestation	Scorecards, metrics, reports, rankings, campaigns	Multi-modal narratives, text, and images posted on social media platforms.
Visibility	Bounded and situated, typically manifesting off-line and in circumscribed spheres; panoptic-like where the few observe the many	Persistent and pervasive, manifesting online and publicly; synoptic-like where the many observe the few
Accountability Responses		
Characteristics of Responses	<p><i>Structural</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Designating roles to establish and/or enforce policies that address stakeholder concerns Instituting subunits that monitor and/or enforce compliance <p><i>Rhetorical</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Circulating narratives, using framing techniques, and messaging to manage stakeholder concerns Employing impression management tactics to strengthen or regain the reputation of the organization 	<p><i>Online</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engaging with social media commentary so as to explain, justify, challenge details, offer apology, etc. <p><i>Offline</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recalibrating risk: not responding online; acting overcautiously Redeploying resources: shifting attention, time, and effort; privileging short-term demands over strategic considerations Redefining service: shifting work practices that constitute the core meanings, activities, and relations of service
Motivations for Responses	<p><i>Structural</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Complying (substantively or symbolically) with stakeholder demands <p><i>Rhetorical</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Minimizing social disapproval and increasing legitimacy 	<p><i>Both online and offline</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Minimizing controversies, avoiding exposure, and/or preempting social media escalations and scandals that concern the organization (e.g., its products, services, managers, front-line workers)
Critical Outcomes	Convergent Reactivity: Organizational actors change their behavior in reaction to being evaluated, observed, or measured in a manner that aligns or conforms with their stakeholders' evaluative criteria	Diffraction Reactivity: Organizational actors produce scattered and equivocal responses that split attention and fragment processes in attempts to deal with the varying and uncertain demands of the social media crowd
Consequences		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Structures and rhetoric conform with stakeholders' evaluative criteria Organizational actors may engage in gaming the criteria Organizations' relations with primary stakeholders are "managed" Boundaries of accountability remain relatively stable 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Core activities, relations, and outcomes of service are repositioned Organizational actors respond in variable and often ad hoc ways Organizations' relations with primary constituents become fraught Boundaries of accountability are reconfigured

Figure 1. A Model of Crowd-based Accountability and Consequences for Organizing



Please note: An online Appendix will be available for this publication