Localization of Computer-Mediated Communication and Corporate Impression on Online Communities

Abstract

Purpose This study investigates the importance of localizing *online communities* (OCs) and examines how OC members form impressions of organizations that use OCs in their communication activities. A conceptual framework and measurement scale are developed that consist of complex latent constructs.

Design/methodology/approach A sequential multi-method approach is adopted with both qualitative and quantitative investigations. Using SEM, the research refines and validates the measurement scales of impression formation in OCs.

Findings Findings reveal that comprehensive messages have a direct effect on the impressions that an OC member forms. In particular, *social context* cues are an important predictor of online community corporate impression (OCCIP). *Source credibility, affiliation, characteristics,* and *interpersonal communication* are all critical to OCCIP, which in turn, influence members' attitudes toward the company and the intention to use it again. Surprisingly, *relevance, timeliness, accuracy,* and *perceived similarity* did not have any significant effect on the corporate impression.

Originality/value Three contributions are offered: First, the study provides reliable scales for measuring OCCIP. Second, support is given to the conceptual model that links OCCIP to a set of consequences, namely, attitudes toward the company, intention to use the company,

and word-of-mouth. Finally, the study is conducted across two different and unique types of OC contexts, stipulating further insights into the localization of OCs.

Keywords - Localization, corporate impression, impression formation, online communities, corporate communication, scale development.

Introduction

The increasing interest in online communities (OCs) heightens the need for a better understanding of the people gathering in those communities (e.g., Toral *et al.,* 2009; Mazaheri *et al.*, 2014; Rooderkerk and Pauwels, 2016). Such interest in OCs is *inter alia* based on the fact that online community members (OCMs) gain additional information from companies that share expert knowledge with them (Willi *et al.,* 2014), thereby creating positive impressions via OCs (e.g., Fiedler and Sarstedt, 2014) and improving the overall corporate image. OCs are places where companies address audiences that are dispersed across the globe (Chan *et al.*, 2015). While the members share a common interest, they originate from different geographical areas with different cultures and customs. Thus, companies that use OCs for their communication purposes face not only challenges to address simultaneously the global communication medium and its peculiarities (Zhou, 2011), but also local constituencies with an inherent diversity in order to create the desired corporate impression (Seraj, 2012; de Almeida *et al.,* 2014).

The need to understand localization of online communities further is of great interest due to increasing tendency toward more customization of content that fits specifically to the users. For example, the online community Quora, a question-and-answer website where questions are asked, answered and organized by its community of users, utilizes localized content depending on where its users are located such that the questions that show up relate to their near environment. This type of localization of content is growing significant as it meets the users' needs better. For example, researchers find that 76% of multinational executives view localization of websites as an important driver of customer satisfaction (Petro *et al.*, 2007). They consider websites to be a company's official digital body that can be adapted to the specific local market. Although OCs differ from websites, they are still seen as a virtual global communication platform in which companies can interact with their

audiences. The OC can also be both integrated in the language and culture of a county and tailored to custom-specific communities to create a more localized experience (e.g., Ortinau *et al*., 2013). Such localization ensures that people from similar areas and cultures have access to the same focused discussions on the platform, increasing interactivity and the exchange of ideas (van den Hooff *et al*., 2015).

To date, research has tended to focus on diverse issues such as (i) the motivation to participate in communities at all (e.g., De Valck, 2005), (ii) the types of communities (e.g., Kozinets, 1999), and (iii) the communities' influence on customer behavior and perceptions (e.g., Algesheimer *et al.,* 2005). There has been little discussion of the effects of corporate communication on localized OCs. There is no scholarly investigation that addresses comprehensively the question of how corporate communication influences formation of corporate image via localized OCs. Although our conceptualization of corporate impression in online communities is a one-dimensional construct we found the novelty in its connection with company representative who communicates on behalf of the company and acts as the sender of the message to the members of the community in an online setting. The differences between the two make them even more interesting and the influence of linkages between them and their spillover effects will enable managers dealing with online communities to efficiently and effectively place and position their company communications.

To meet this need, this study develops a framework of localization of computer-mediated communication and corporate impression on OCs. It tests a measurement scale of online community corporate impression (OCCIP) in a nomological net that links corporate impression with customer behavioral consequences, namely word-of-mouth, attitudes toward the OC, and the intention to use that OC again. Based on Goffman's (1959) theory of self-presentation, which suggests that people are all actors playing a part whether they are in public or private (Goffman, 1959), this study suggests that individuals online also play a

variety of roles on different social stages (i.e., social relationships). On each social stage, an individual offers a somewhat different version of himself or herself. Thus, to localize corporate communication effectively, a company must also act on different social stages as it has multiple audiences, each of which perceives a company in its own way (e.g., Chen et al., 2017; Johnston, 2001). This study posits that companies must generate a positive corporate image on each of these social stages and locations in which their audiences gather, such as the OCs. Our conceptual framework refers to indirect effects that our antecedents may have on the attitude and behavior of the members of online community through OCCIP as outcome measures. The basis of such a conceptualization is the study conducted by Christodoulides and de Chernatony (2004), which explains that impressions are formed based on interactions.

Since a multitude of online community types exist in which a plethora of topics are discussed, the importance of localizing communication within online communities has stark implications for corporation communication and impression formation. This study defines an online community as a place of gathering of people with common interests to communicate, work and pursue their interests, and specifically focuses on two online communities, Swissmom and Maurice Lacroix, which in combination offer contexts where relationships are developed through social relations with the exchange of consumption knowledge. Consequently, further investigation can take place into the role of localized computer-mediated communication within these global and local, virtual locations.

Literature Review

Communication and Impression Formation in OCs

When a company drafts a message and posts it in the OC, this becomes corporate communication and is part of the company's self-presentation and persona. Consequently,

there are inherent links between corporate communication and corporate image (Christensen and Askegaard, 2001). Corporate image is the reflection of corporate identity and describes the impressions an individual forms about a company's persona (Melewar and Karaosmanoglu, 2006; Tran *et al.*, 2015). This study focuses on corporate image due to its inherent link to impression management (e.g., Williams and Moffitt, 1997), which is the main focus of this study.

According to Topalian (2003, p. 1120), "a successful corporate identity is a "living" identity: a tangible reality that is a true representation of an organization and its aspiration which "breathes" and changes with that organization over time." With the rise of OCs and other social networks, companies need to understand these new places better, and adapt to the environmental changes in order to assume a dynamic (lived) identity (Cheung *et al.,* 2015). For these companies, localizing their communication and corporate image enhances such dynamic identity (Chu, 2009). Cornelissen (2000, p. 120) suggests that, "an image is a perception of a receiver of his or her received projection of the corporate identity and own reflections of interpretations of various attributes from various sources."

The production of both identity and image takes place in the form of communication. Previously, studies concentrated on communication that took place between individuals. However, as mass media technology has developed, a larger audience can be reached; hence recent studies concentrate on the combined analysis of technology and communication. Computer-mediated communication (CMC) changes the conditions of communication due to fewer social cues than in face-to-face communication. According to Walther (1995, p. 190) social context cues are "various linguistic and typographic manipulations, which reveal social and relational information." For example, in earlier studies, CMC indicated that many social context cues were absent or reduced, and consequently communication was seen as less effective (Short *et al*., 1976; Daft and Lengel, 1984). Later theories, however, claim that

CMC has the ability to convey social cues (Reicher, 1984; Walther, 1992) and that despite having fewer social cues, CMC does form impressions, although these may not be as immediate as in face-to-face communication. Today, CMC cues include various factors such as emoticons, user names, descriptions, and the dialogues in which individuals engage (Walther, 1996). These individuals create simple impressions and test them over time to form an overall impression or image. This is in accordance with Boulding (1956), who suggests that rather than relying on reality, people rely on their perceived images.

This study investigates the most essential elements in the environment of OCs, namely the company's communication activities and their effects on corporate image. A central focus is the corporate identity mix presented by Melewar and Karaosmanoglu (2006), as this framework clearly depicts the components of corporate identity, thus, enabling the study to demonstrate how the different concepts of corporate identity, corporate communication, and corporate image relate to each other. Additionally, as interaction on OCs involves groups of people, this paper addresses the peculiarities of CMC from the perspective of mass media theories in order to understand the research area and, using the terminology provided by Goffman (1959), the *stage* at which the specific localization occurs. This concept of Goffman (1959) has been used by previous scholars such as Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) to explain how concept of self-representation in online communities can be applied for studying social interactions conducted with a desire to control impression of others about them. Another study conducted by Schau and Gilly (2003) was conducted to examine self-representation concept of individuals in a computer mediated online ecommerce environment through identities created by individuals using digital signs, symbols, materialistic objects and different places and linkages of such identities to their self-representation strategies of real life using a linear narrative structure. We used identity and social performance concept of Goffman (1959) by using self-representation as an intentional and tangible component of

identity by linking it with ideal values that individual or a social group might aspire to have, yet may not be able to live in reality. Although we agree that arguments of Goffman (1959) are contextual and can be applied only for specific setting which is for identified audience. Using these arguments for managing impressions in online setting, we therefore suggest that companies must use appropriate communication tools to generate a positive corporate image on each of the social stages and localized places in which their audiences gather, that is, the OCs. This is presented in the following sections.

Hypothesis Development

Theoretical background

The overarching theory for this study is Goffman's (1959) theory of self-presentation, which suggests that people are all actors playing a part whether they are in public or private (Goffman, 1959). This present study suggests that, in an online setting, individuals also play a variety of roles on different social stages, including social relationships. While Goffman's theory is a theory that is commonly applied at the individual level, we have applied it here to explain a corporate-level phenomenon. The rationale for this pertains to the idea that a firm is considered to act like an individual and can thereby give certain impressions by way of self-presentation. This is why Goffman's theory is relevant because it applies personable self-impression to a firm.

Further, the conceptual model and the corresponding hypotheses are influenced by the corporate identity framework (Melewar and Karaosmanoglu, 2006) and complemented by Christensen and Askegaard's (2001, p.296) idea that "identity and image are typically seen as opposite ends of the communication process." In other words, companies try to convey messages about the company's persona (corporate identity) to their audiences in order to create favorable impressions (corporate image). Hence, while developing the various factors

of study constructs, this framework guides the used dimensions.

The conceptual model systematizes the relationship between localized communication elements relevant in the localization of online communities and their influence on corporate impression. The model has four factors related to argument quality (H1-4) and five factors related to company representative (H5-H9). These factors are selected based on the corporate identity framework, as mentioned above. This is presented in Figure 1.

Figure 1 here.

Hypotheses

Since the OCs provide a platform where members of the online community interact, the company-representative (COR) plays a vital role in placing relevant messages on the platform for OCMs in order to make it more localized. Such messages must be specific to the location where the OCMs interact so as to create the best possible impression.

To emphasize the focal construct of localization of Online Community Corporate Impression (OCCIP), the study considers Lasswell's (1948) definition of the communication process. He describes the communication process as: who (sender, i.e., the COR) says what (message) in which channel (online community) to whom (receiver, i.e., online community member), and with what effect (impression formed, i.e., the OCCIP). The most important attributes of impression formation in the environment of OCs comprise both company-controlled and user-generated messages which take place on the same platform and at more or less the same time. These attributes, comprising of messages, must be both relevant and act as social context cues. These arguments when operationalized using theory of Goffman (1995) about impression management in an online setting explain how in a world full of much superfluous communication, messages need to be even more relevant so as to be read and exert an influence (Christodoulides and de Chernatony, 2004).

CMC theories claim that a message still has an effect even with few conveyed social context cues (Short *et al*., 1976; Walther, 1992; Reicher, 1984). Fewer social cues may actually increase the attention toward the message itself (Burgoon *et al.,* 2002). Boyd and Ellison (2007) suggest that contributions on digital platforms are persistent and searchable, thus, providing relevant social cues for reference at any time in the future. If all these points are taken into consideration, following hypothesis should be tested:

H1: The relevance of the COR's contributions are positively related to OCCI) that OCMs form of the company.

As suggested above, the information that customers look for does not have to be detailed or filled with social context cues (Jiang *et al.,* 2018). However, the study posits that such information has to be current and up to date and localized. Enhancing the timeliness of sent messages is an important step in improving online communication (Adjei *et al*., 2010). Users expect the content of a website to be updated consistently in order to deliver continuous, up-to-date information. Thus, the study hypothesizes that:

H2: The timeliness of the COR's messages are positively associated with the OCCIP that OCMs form of the company.

A message can be accurate, but at the same time, not relevant due to its lack of localization (Okazaki, 2004). Accuracy is an important dimension to the relevance of a communication. Accuracy means that the reader perceives the message to be correct and thus, refers to the reliability of the message (Wixom and Todd, 2005). Hence, the study proposes that:

H3: The accurateness of the COR's messages are positively related to OCCIP that OCMs form of the company.

A typical OC characteristic is one of people wanting to share information and engage in discussions. Consequently, a message must be comprehensible at first glance. Comprehensiveness refers to whether the message is complete, detailed, and easily understandable (Sullivan, 1999). The more comprehensive the messages are, the higher the perceived usefulness of the information (Cheung *et al*, 2008). Consequently, the study also posits that:

H4: The comprehensiveness of the COR's messages are positively associated with the OCCIP that OCMs form of the company.

Social context cues are important as they can lead to more passionate, affective, and direct communication (Mehrabian, 1969). Researchers claim that if individuals spend enough time exchanging messages, they will be able to gather sufficient information about each other to form interpersonal relationships (Walther, 1992). Jacobson (1999, p. 7) states, in the context of online environments, that "in addition to the words people choose, paralinguistic cues also influence the ways in which participants see each other." Therefore, the use of para-language (e.g., signs, emoticons) can make up for the lack of social context cues, which can also have a positive impact on impression formation. Thus, the study hypothesizes the following:

H5: Social context cues that OCMs receive about the COR have a positive effect on the OCCIP that OCMs form of the company.

Lazarsfeld and Merton's (1954) theory of homophily suggests that it is easier to communicate with individuals who are perceived to be similar to ourselves. Furthermore, studies in the field of marketing and social psychology suggest that representatives of a company who are similar to the customer are more influential than representatives who are

dissimilar (Gupta *et al*., 2016). In this study, the concept of similarity is therefore integrated into the framework and consists of congruency regarding demographic variables, beliefs, values, preferences, and lifestyle (Gilly *et al*., 1998). Individuals interacting in OCs locally are rather heterogeneous and meet online because they share the same interest. Therefore, in this context, perceived similarity consists of a large degree of congruency regarding beliefs, values, interests, and preferences. Hence, the study expects that:

H6: The COR's perceived similarity is positively related to the OCCIP that OCMs form of the company.

Source credibility is conceptualized in two ways: corporate credibility and endorser credibility (Goldsmith *et al*., 2000). In this study, source credibility refers to the endorser's credibility, namely, the COR. The two main dimensions of source credibility are: "(i) whether the source is believable (expertise), and (ii) whether the source has the public's best interests at heart (trustworthiness)" (Massey, 2003 p. 5). This current study refers to the perceived expertise and trustworthiness of the COR, that is the extent to which OCMs feel that the COR has the knowledge or the ability to fulfill their claims, and whether the COR can be trusted to tell the truth or not (Clow and Baack, 2004; Lafferty *et al.,* 2002; Ohanian, 1990). Fombrun (1996) posits that the extent to which consumers, investors, and other local constituents believe in a company's trustworthiness and expertise constitutes part of a corporation's image. Therefore, the study hypothesizes that:

H7: The COR's perceived credibility is positively associated with the OCCIP that OCMs form of the company.

Online community members do not always appreciate when companies participate in their community (Hogenkamp, 2007), which is why it is even more important for CORs to declare

their affiliation to a company. However, their expertise is an important factor in the online community, so CORs are more often welcome because their affiliation to a specific company provides that community with insider knowledge. Taking these points into consideration, the study posits that:

H8: The COR's disclosed affiliation to the company has a positive effect on the OCCIP that OCMs form of the company.

Downey and Christensen (2006) suggest that the impressions people form of each other during an interaction are based on their behavior and characteristics. Incorporating this notion, the study investigates the COR's perceived characteristics and communication behavior, including how this might influence the company's impression formation. Thus, the study proposes that:

H9: A positive perception toward the COR's characteristics has a positive effect on the OCCIP that OCMs form of the company.

Communication between OCMs is an important factor for an OC and can be described as the messages posted by OCMs that address either other OCMs or the companies. As these are not posted or positioned by COR, they are often referred to as user generated content. While doing so, the OCMs not only encounter the company's messages posted by COR, but also the messages of other OCMs. Baumgarth (2004) suggests that such an encounter is where controlled and uncontrolled communication collapses. Consequently, relationships with and attitudes toward a company are highly dependent on the communication between members of the community. This leads to the proposition that:

H10: Communication between OCMs on the online community platform has a positive effect on the OCCIP.

In traditional marketing, the person who undertakes the corporate communication activity is not visible and thus, has no direct influence on the audience. This is different in OCs where the COR is visible and directly impacts on the impression that an OCM forms. It seems reasonable to assume that the COR is representative to the company and will influence the OCMs' attitudes toward a company. Consequently, an impression formed by an interaction with the OC (e.g., the OCCIP) influences the OCMs' global attitudes toward the company itself. Hence, the study hypothesizes that:

H11: OCCIP has a positive effect on attitudes toward a company's OC(i.e., increase favorability toward OC).

Pina *et al*. (2008, p. 4) delineate the consequences of corporate image as follows: "As a bundle of beliefs, corporate image will give rise to a service brand attitude, which means the global affective response toward the brand. This attitude will be followed by conative responses such as the intention to use the brand." Using a similar line of reasoning, the study posits that the OCMs' attitudes will be followed by the behavioral intention to use the company's OC again. Therefore, the study hypothesizes, focusing on the intention to use a company's OC services, that:

H12: The attitude toward a company's OC has a positive effect on intention to use the company's OC again (i.e., increase the intention strength).

Finally, Godes and Mayzlin (2002, p. 8) state that "part of the difficulty in measuring word-of-mouth is the fact that it is both a precursor to, and an outcome of, sales." This current study posits that OCMs engage in word-of-mouth communication as an outcome arising from their impression of a company (Yu *et al.,* 2017). This is in line with Melewar

and Karaosmanoglu's (2006) finding that corporate image (or impression) can be positively influenced by positive communication among intermediary sources, such as those arising from word-of-mouth. Thus, the study proposes that:

H13: OCCIP has a positive effect on OCMs' word-of-mouth activities.

Method

This study applies a course of sequential procedures. Firstly, qualitative methods, namely netnography methods and expert interviews are used for exploratory purposes, and secondly, quantitative methods are applied using an online survey. The mixed method approach has previously been used in a number of corporate image studies (e.g., Harrison, 2013; Simões *et al*., 2005, Williams and Moffitt, 1997).

The Exploratory Study

To study the OC and its members, a qualitative exploration was conducted by using interview methods (Weijo *et al.*, 2014). Interviews with 17 academics and practitioners who were experts in this area of work were recruited for collecting insights on a social network site and selected according to criteria such as interest, job title, and business category helped to refine the conceptual model and hypotheses. Interviews were recorded using an electronic recorder and the sound files were later converted into word documents. In addition, non-participatory observation approaches in the OCs were conducted to gain further insights into the OCMs (Kozinets, 1999). The reason for observing these communities was the lively participation of its members. Their participation provided evidence of the validity of the sampling frame used for making observations. Thematic analysis of the master file created from all the expert interviews guided further research on this topic. Interviews with twelve OCMs enabled the adjustment of existing measurement scales and clarification of the study's

constructs. The interview findings were invaluable as they enabled the researchers to derive items for the field survey and enabled the development and refinement of the research instrument and, subsequently, in pilot-testing said instrument in a scale development process using a sample of the population. The study involved Swissmom, the OC under scrutiny, in order to learn about the platform itself, as well as the OCMs and the topics discussed on the OC. Swissmom deals with a wide range of topics concerning babies and children and is the biggest Internet portal of its kind. In addition to discussing parenthood issues, community members share their thoughts and knowledge about specific products. For this reason, companies such as Bayer, Schering, Johnson & Johnson, and Nestlé all use this online community for marketing purposes.

Following the topics: (i) online environments, (ii) communities, (iii) communication with a main focus on computer-mediated communication and impression formation, and iv) corporate identity and corporate image, the findings reveal the following:

Respondents, when referring to why they use online communities, state that *"they use online communities (OCs) because they would like to find special interest communities"; "they would like to discover new friends and they need to talk anonymously"* (Expert Interviewee 2). Furthermore, "*it helps them to be linked, connected, and have access to a network*" (Expert Interviewee 17). Expert Interviewee 17 notes that people are very much influenced by the discussions they have conducted or read in OCs. The community has more source credibility than classic media and/or commercial communication. The sentiment that people are influenced by other online OCMs is also shared by all the other expert interviewees: *"Yes, first of all because the senders of the information are more real and tangible than channels that are perceived to be more official." (Expert Interviewee 5); "In general, my hypothesis would be that the only reason the influence is slightly lower from OCs is that OCs tend to be one or two steps further removed from the closest circles of users than*

their friends and family." Finally, to successfully develop a corporate identity and brand image, both experts and OCMs state the following: "*For a company to have a successful communication in an online community it must have good editors who take into account their users' wishes and problems.*" One interviewee emphasizes that: *"For people, the recipe is more or less to behave as they would in real life, reaping the benefits of digital communication. In addition, there is a tendency that openness is a key to success."* Online community corporate impressions are antecedents of attitudes toward the company's OC, which in turn leads to a company's intention to use OC again. Thus, the interviews helped to gain insights into OCMs, clarify concepts, purify measures, and discover further important aspects of the constructs.

The Main Study

Research Setting

For the main study, this research focused on two OCs, Swissmom (as described earlier) and the Maurice Lacroix forums. Maurice Lacroix, a Swiss manufacturer of luxury watches, launched an OC on Facebook in 2008. Their site provides information about their watches and responds to any (potential) customer requests that are posted on the site. In 2013, they won the Swiss Marketing Trophy, a prestigious award in Swiss marketing circles, with an advertising campaign on their Facebook site. This supports the choice of Maurice Lacroix's Facebook Group as a good OC to study since it is well-established and a main focus of the company.

De Valck (2005, p. 51) proposes four important criteria for selecting an OC: "(i) abundance of member-generated contributions; (ii) lively participation and high traffic; (iii) large member numbers; and (iv) sufficient variation among them (participation and characteristics)." Both the Swissmom and Maurice Lacroix communities were subjected to

these criteria and considered appropriate research sites. The results show there are approximately 6,000 new entries per day in the Swissmom forum (Swissmom, 2011). The Maurice Lacroix site has 3,984 community members and nearly all posts attract around 10 to 20 comments. This indicates an abundance of member-generated contributions and these figures confirm high traffic and a large number of members in both communities. The members are people from a variety of different private and professional backgrounds, all sharing one common interest, either (i) children or (ii) a passion for luxury watches. Consequently, while their characteristics and demographics are heterogeneous, their respective interests are homogeneous. These factors make them suitable OCs for the purpose of this study.

Data Collection and Sampling

In the case of the Swissmom community, the main survey was published on the front page of the forum in the summer of 2012. To ensure that OCMs who access the forum less frequently also had a chance to participate, the survey remained open for a period of four weeks. The study was also publicized through an on-line newsletter increasing the opportunity for any OCMs who had not accessed the forum during that four-week period to take part. The newsletter in question is a monthly feature sent to all the community members and contains, among other things, current issues, links to studies, and book recommendations. The second study was announced directly on the Maurice Lacroix Facebook Group in the summer of 2013 and this was repeated one week later. With respect to how many times a survey should be publicized, some scholars argue that excessive publicity might upset OCMs (Lakhani and von Hippel, 2002), while others disagree, arguing that the response rate can be increased (Cook *et al*., 2000). As it was important to generate a medium to high sample size, the researchers took the decision to repeat the initial process.

In both cases, the purpose of the survey was explained briefly and the reader was invited to participate via a direct link to the online survey. The introduction page of the questionnaire explained the purpose of the study, contained guidance for filling in the questionnaire, and assured participants that confidentiality and anonymity were guaranteed. In online surveys, social desirability plays a less important role and questions are answered more openly as well as being valid for communication research (Gruen *et al.,* 2006; Tidwell and Walther, 2002), making them an accepted and valuable data collection tool for social scientists and researchers in the user community field (Wright, 2005).

This study generated 304 (Swissmom) and 397 (Maurice Lacroix) responses from a survey population consisting entirely of active OC members. The present study applied a volunteer sample for both studies; however, this is considered relevant owing to their online community experiences. Although the actual samples exceed recommended thresholds (Hair *et al*., 2010; Sekaran, 2000), the sample sizes were useful for further analyses. Detailed demographics of the samples can be found in Appendix A.

Measures

To operationalize the study's constructs and identify existing measurement scales, most items derived from existing scales are consistent with previous research (Clark and Watson, 1995). In addition, the study developed twenty-four items based on the findings of the qualitative studies. The antecedents, the focal constructs, and the consequences were measured using multi-item scales. Appendix B shows a full list of items including their sources.

A questionnaire was designed, consisting of 81 questions (83 for the Maurice Lacroix study) to measure the model's 14 latent variables. Most questions were in the form of statements such as (i) the message of the author meets my needs sufficiently, (ii)

paralinguistics (emoticons, orthographic exaggerations, etc.) provide useful cues, and (iii) authors should follow the emerging forum language norms to express their attitudes and ideas. The respondent is asked to rate his or her level of agreement using a 7-point Likert scale (from *strongly disagree* to *strongly agree*).

Content and face validity of the scales were tested by six academics, knowledgeable in this field of study. In addition, the questionnaire was pre-tested with a few members of both the Swissmom forum and the Maurice Lacroix community. These members were contacted via the message function and asked directly if they would be interested in pre-testing the questionnaire. Twelve and eight persons respectively were available for the pre-test for each survey instrument and the questionnaire amended slightly before publication.

Data Analysis

Data analysis consisted of two stages, namely an exploratory and a confirmatory factor analysis. Prior to the analysis, data were examined and prepared carefully, performed using IBM SPSS 20. The normality of the data showed satisfactory results.

Scale Validation

To evaluate the instrument's validity, exploratory factor analysis was applied in order to test the unidimensionality of the scales. This current study employed the data from real subjects to run the principal component analysis using Varimax rotation. Items with factor loadings greater than 0.50 were retained in the factor solution (Tabachnick and Fidell, 2007), except for item C24 with 0.462, which according to Comrey (1973) is still reasonable. The number of extracted factors was specified *a priori* according to the scale development process (Churchill, 1979). A satisfactory factorability of items is shown as the values for KMO were above 0.50 and p-values for Bartlett's test of sphericity were below 0.05.

Specifically, as the KMO value is 0.965 and the Bartlett's test is significant (p = 0.000), the factor analysis is appropriate.

Measurement Reliability

Next, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) took place to assess the overall model fit. The proposed items are specified to load on the factors that are determined in the conceptual model. The results indicate that the model with the specified items fits the data adequately. In addition, the results show that all indicators significantly loaded on the latent constructs, demonstrating a reasonable fit of the measurement model with the data. When taken together, the measurement model confirms the instrument's factor structure.

To validate the measurement instrument, a second study was conducted using a different study site, namely the Maurice Lacroix Facebook Group. The following statements provide a summary of the assessment of the measurement model of the Maurice Lacroix study: (a) Parameter estimates: The critical ratios for the estimates range from 9.637 to 23.477, thus, the estimates are significant, (b) the standardized factor loadings range from 0.595 to 0.983 (threshold values ≥ 0.5) and are statistically significant ($p < 0.001$), (c) all the SMC values are greater than 0.30, ranging from 0.353 to 0.966 showing that all the indicators of the latent variables are good factors, and (d) to evaluate internal consistency of constructs, two measures were used: (i) Composite reliability and (ii) Average Variance Extracted (AVE). Composite reliability is achieved as all factors are above 0.7, ranging from 0.823 to 0.934. The AVE values for all constructs, except for C2 and C5, are higher than the required criteria and therefore suggest good internal consistency. The values for C2 (0.441) and C5 (0.474) are a little lower than the cut off value, but retained for further analyses. The CFA for the Maurice Lacroix sample indicates the following: $\chi^2 = 1776.6$ $df = 1411$; CFI = 0.96; TLI = 0.96; NFI = 0.87; and RMSEA = 0.03. Thus, on the whole, the results indicate that the model

with the specified items adequately fits the data and the measurement model confirms the instrument's factor structure.

Convergent and Discriminant Validity

Internal consistency of the constructs was measured by convergent validity, which is based on: (i) composite reliability (≥ 0.70), (ii) the average variance extracted (≥ 0.5), and (iii) Cronbach alpha (≥ 0.7) (Anderson and Gerbing, 1988; Fornell and Larcker, 1981). As illustrated in Table 1 above, all values for the Swissmom sample are good indicators of convergent validity. For the Maurice Lacroix sample, Cronbach alpha values range from 0.823 to 0.946 and composite reliability values from 0.823 to 0.934. With the exception of two cases, all values of AVE are ≥ 0.5 and acceptable.

Discriminant validity was assessed via χ^2 tests for every pair of the estimated variables. This was done by comparing χ^2 obtained from a constrained and an unconstrained model where the correlation between two constructs was set to zero. The results indicate that for both samples, discriminant validity is given between all the factors as the χ^2 values of the unconstrained model are all considerably lower than the ones in the constrained model.

Additionally, discriminant validity was further assessed according to Fornell and Larcker (1981) by comparing the constructs' correlations with the square roots of AVE (Table 2 shows the results across the two samples). As these values are higher than any correlation values below it, an acceptable level of discriminant validity is achieved (Fornell and Larcker, 1981).

Table 2 here.

Finally, following the method suggested by Podsakoff *et al*. (2003), Harman's (1967) one-factor test indicates that since no single factor explains more than 50% of the covariation, a common method bias is not a concern.

Findings

Hypotheses Testing

Structural equation modeling (SEM) was used to test the theoretical model and nomological validity which contains 14 latent constructs and the corresponding hypothesized paths. The study examined the coefficient parameter estimates in order to determine whether the hypothesized model fits the data. Table 3 reports the results of the hypothesis testing.

Table 3 here.

The results indicate support for H4 and H5, as well as H7-H13, revealing the following: *Comprehensive messages* have a direct effect on the impressions an OCM forms (β=0.168, p ≤0.009). The relationship between social context cues and OCCIP is significant (β=0.136, p ≤0.039), thus, the findings support the argument that *social context cues* are an important predictor of online community corporate impression. The relationship between perceived *source credibility* and OCCIP is validated (β=0.128, p ≤0.025). Furthermore, the results support the notion that *affiliation* has a direct, positive effect on OCCIP (β=0.094, p ≤0.037). Additionally, evidence shows that *characteristics* contribute to OCCIP (β=0.177, p ≤0.000) and a statistically significant effect of *interpersonal communication* on OCCIP (β=0.200, p ≤0.000). The consequences are all supported, suggesting that a positive *OCCIP* positively influences *attitude toward the company (Maurice Lacroix's Facebook Group)* (β=0.588, p ≤0.000), which in turn positively influences *the intention to use it again* (β=0.570, p ≤0.000). In addition to the findings above, the results illustrate the importance of OCCIP as a predictor of word-of-mouth since there is a significant association between *OCCIP* and *word-of-mouth* (β=0.505, p ≤0.000). However, the results indicate that H1-H3 need to be rejected because *relevance, timeliness*, and *accuracy* have an insignificant effect on OCCIP. Furthermore, *perceived similarity* has an insignificant effect on OCCIP and is thus, also rejected. Next, the

study's findings are discussed.

Discussion

A substantial shortage of academic research exists regarding the role of corporate impression formation in localized online communities. This study highlights the importance of localizing OCs in the same way as localized websites. It examines the relationships or associations between corporate communication in localized OCs and image formation and develops a measurement scale to evaluate the impression it makes on an online community.

Many *corporate image* scales are not suitable for measuring corporate impression formation in this specific, localized context since they include elements such as products, product quality, sales staff, points of sales, and after-sales services (e.g., Barich and Kotler, 1991). Previous impression formation measurements are too focused on communication between individuals, which is why a new instrument was required. The focal construct of this study is the localized online corporate community impression (OCCIP). Adapting a scale entitled *website perception* (Shyam and Sriram, 2004), this study adjusts this measurement scale according to the input of 54 OCMs from the Maurice Lacroix community in order to fit the specific context. The two pre-tests with the Swissmom OCMs and one pre-test with the Maurice Lacroix OCMs as well as the main survey confirm that the updated measurement scale is suitable for measuring OCCIP in the context of online communities. Implications of the study's findings exist in terms of providing further insight into the need for localization of the content found within OCs and also in terms of the management and involvement perspectives. Specifically, the findings reveal that comprehensive messages have a direct effect on the impressions an OC member forms. In particular, *social context* cues are an important predictor of online community corporate impression (OCCIP). *Source credibility, affiliation, characteristics,* and *interpersonal communication* are all critical to OCCIP, which

in turn, influences members' attitude toward the company and the intention to use it again. Surprisingly, *relevance, timeliness, accuracy,* and *perceived similarity* did not have any significant effect on the corporate impression. Thus, the study has contributed to the literature on OCs and internet research in general.

Theoretical Contributions

Several main contributions to literature are offered: The investigation of localized OCCIP provides additional knowledge that allows further integration of corporate communication dimensions in the future with several contributions to existing literature. Firstly, the study develops a comprehensive conceptual model, which links elements of media theory and computer-mediated communication with localized OCCIP. Furthermore, the model links OCCIP to a set of consequences, namely attitudes toward the company, intentions to use the company, and word-of-mouth. This research therefore brings together various strands of theories and relates them to the present context of localization of online communities. A major contribution is the specification of each communication mix as part of the OCCIP. Most of these specifications are new to existing literature, as shown in Table 4.

Table 4 here.

Secondly, this study provides scales for measuring localized online community corporate impression (OCCIP). Many corporate image scales including impression management scales are not suitable for measuring impression formation in this specific context (e.g., Melewar and Karaosmanoglu, 2006). Using rigorous statistical tests, the study confirms the suitability of the measurement scale to measure localization of OCCIP including scales for the constructs *affiliation, characteristics*, and *social context cues,* which are also shown to be reliable and valid. Such a scale is useful for the measurement and observation of OCs that endeavor to either become more localized by including the relevant constructs or more

generally to measure the level of localization and its impact on other outcome variables.

Finally, this study examines two different and unique types of OC contexts and its findings may be applied to other kinds of OCs, which differ either regarding the topics they discuss or the brands they support. By selecting two very different types of online OC, the study shows that the new OCCIP dimensions added to the corporate communication mix are also valid in other types of OCs. For users, it is reassuring to know that the developed scale is beneficial if different contexts.

Surprisingly, *relevance, timeliness, accuracy,* and *perceived similarity* did not have any significant effect on the corporate impression. We believe that these variables – in particular, relevance and perceived similarity, may be redundant due to the fact that the OC members already knew the purpose of the online community and therefore, saw these as given. Consequently, the impression of these on the OC members did not create a major effect.

On the whole, three major contributions are offered: First, the study provides reliable scales for measuring localized OCCIP. Second, support is given to the conceptual model that links OCCIP to a set of consequence, namely, attitudes toward the company, intentions to use the company, and word-of-mouth. Finally, the study is conducted across two different and unique types of OC contexts, stipulating further insights into the localization of OCs.

Managerial Contributions

This study suggests that a localized online community is more effective than a general online community. This is in evidence on a daily basis when websites use cookies to track where the user is from and ensures a more customized experience with localized content, such as advertising. In addition, the study emphasizes that the role of the COR is crucial to the success of online communication, as it matters considerably who interacts with the OC members. The following issues need to be taken into consideration when selecting a COR: (i)

the COR has to adapt to the writing style of the OCMs, be genuinely interested in the issues, and able to provide additional knowledge to the community; (ii) the study finds that the characteristics of the COR have a positive effect on OCCIP, thus, the COR should have similar characteristics to the OCMs; and (iii) the COR must be willing to spend sufficient time in the OC. For instance, he or she needs to send several messages a day to create a positive impression; iv) since the OCMs request transparency, it is important that a COR declares his or her affiliation to the company; v) the study confirms the effect of social context cues to OCCIP, which implies that a COR should provide some additional information about him/herself; and finally, (vi) a COR needs to engage in discussions between OCMs as interpersonal communication is relevant.

Conclusion

This study highlights the importance of using the online media in the corporate communication mix and to localize its content, in particular because it is not just another type of passive media but rather actively targets people who are part of online networks. Online media connects people all around the globe; they come from different backgrounds and cultures, yet they still communicate with one another in a specific, localized place (e.g., Boyd and Ellis, 2007; Walther, 1993, 1997). By studying corporate communication activities in OCs, a new communication element is integrated into the corporate identity mix (e.g., Balmer and Soenen, 1999) and into established corporate identity models (Melewar and Karaosmanoglu, 2006). All the elements of the corporate identity mix convey messages about the company's persona to its constituencies, who receive these messages and form an immediate impression based on this interaction within the OC.

The corporate communication activities in OCs are important elements for study since no other communication channel demonstrates a direct interplay of controlled and uncontrolled

communication, where messages are commented on, forwarded, and mixed with other content. Furthermore, this interaction takes place in a virtual, global environment that is accessible from many different localities. This study examines the specific, localized place where these interactions take place on this global communication platform to lay the foundation for further research to address the influences of different cultures interacting in the same space. All these components play a role in terms of how the company is perceived and it is therefore important to understand each single element and how it influences the impression formation process. In doing so, the localized OCs become more relevant and more interesting for its users because the content is more customized. This ensures greater use and interaction between the users, which may encourage more knowledge sharing (Hafeez et al., 2018).

Limitations and Directions for Further Research

When the results are interpreted, several limitations should be kept in mind. Firstly, although the study is conducted within two OCs, the results cannot be fully generalized to other online communities. Secondly, this study has a cross-sectional design with data collected within a short period of time. Another important limitation of our research is the limited criteria of using measure of timeliness for testing effect of timeliness on OCCIP, which may create inadequate variance which might result into ceiling effect explained by Vogt and Johnson (2011).

Many interesting avenues suggest themselves for potential future research. Firstly, multiple media platforms might be another important aspect when considering a company's online communication activities. For example, while a company's online communication mix normally consists of several activities which take place in different media locations (including Facebook groups, blogs or Twitter), one company may use several social media

networks simultaneously. Secondly, much work remains to establish the conditions under which OCMs may change their perception of a COR or of the company that he or she represents. Possible conditions might be (i) website structure, color, (ii) pictures or video clips displayed on the platform, and (iii) the number of discussion topics as well as the type of discussion topics not considered. In addition to this, the influence of competing websites has been disregarded completely and requires further research. Thirdly, the extent to which the OCCIP affects corporate image and vice versa needs addressing in future studies. Questions such as how offline interactions and perceptions influence the image formation process in the online world, and vice versa, also need further attention. Finally, this study confirms the importance of the COR in terms of building impressions about a company, implying that not everybody should be allowed to communicate with OCMs. Future investigations should provide additional knowledge about the type of person needed for successful communications in online forums.

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Appendix A - Demographic Profiles of Swissmom and Maurice Lacroix Members

Category	*Description*	*Swissmom*		*Maurice Lacroix*	
		N	*%*	*N*	*%*
Gender	Male	27	8.9	227	57.2
	Female	277	91.1	170	42.8
	Total	*304*	*100*	*397*	*100*
Age	< 20	-	-	1	0.3
	20-25	14	4.6	6	1.5
	26-30	43	14.1	11	2.8
	31-35	91	29.9	82	20.7
	36-40	100	32.9	121	30.5
	41-45	39	12.8	112	28.2
	46-50	5	1.6	44	11.1
	> 50	12	3.9	20	5
	Total	*304*	*100*	*397*	*100*
Educational level	Up to high school	5	1.6	5	1.3
	Professional education	125	41.1	133	33.5
	Bachelor's level	77	25.3	108	27.2
	Master's level or higher	89	29.3	147	37.0
	N/A	8	2.6	4	1.0
	Total	*304*	*100*	*397*	*100*
Marital status	Single	73	24	64	16.1
	Married	214	70.4	231	58.2
	In partnership	4	1.3	66	16.6
	Divorced	13	4.3	35	8.8
	Widowed	-	-	1	0.3
	Total	*304*	*100*	*397*	*100*
Employment status	Student	3	1	5	1.3
	Employed	168	55.3	225	56.7
	Taking care of the children	65	21.4	N/A	N/A
	Self-employed	59	19.4	141	35.5
	Unemployed	5	1.6	21	5.3
	Retired	1	0.3	3	.8
	Others	3	1	2	.5
	Total	*304*	*100*	*397*	*100*

Appendix B - Complete List of Items

Construct	No.	Item	Item Source	Item Type
C1a Relevance of message	C1a1	The messages of the author are relevant.	Cheung *et al*., 2008 based on Citrin, 2001	Items are **adopted** from existing scales.
	C1a2	The messages of the author are appropriate.		
	C1a3	The messages of the author are applicable.		
C1b Timeliness of message	C1b1	The messages of the author are current.	Cheung *et al.,* 2008, based on Wixom and Todd, 2005	Items are **adopted** from existing scales.
	C1b2	The messages of the author are timely.		
	C1b3	The messages of the author are up-to-date.		
C1c Accuracy of message	C1c1	The messages of the author are accurate.	Cheung *et al.,* 2008, based on Wixom and Todd, 2005	Items are **adopted** from existing scales.
	C1c2	The messages of the author are correct.		
	C1c3	The messages of the author are reliable.		
C1d Comprehensiveness of message	C1d1	The messages of the author sufficiently complete my needs.	Cheung *et al.,* 2008, based on Wixom and Todd, 2005	Items are **adopted** from existing scales.
	C1d2	The messages of the author include all necessary values.		
	C1d3	The messages of the author cover my needs.		
	C1d4	The messages of the author have sufficient breadth and depth.		
C2 Social Context Cues	2.1	Chronemics, such as indications of time when (e.g., early in the morning, late at night) the message has been sent, provide useful cues.	Liu and Ginther, 1999; Tidwell and Walther, 2002 And supported by the qualitative study.	Items 1-5 are **based on** existing literature as well as supported by the qualitative study.
	2.2	The number of messages sent by the author provides useful cues.		
	2.3	How fast a reply has been sent provides useful cues.		
	2.4	Paralinguistics (emoticons, orthographic exaggeration, etc.) provide useful cues.		
	2.5	Authors should follow the emerging forum language norms to express their attitudes and ideas.		
	2.6	Authors should provide some personal information.	Qualitative study and Jacobson, 1999	Item 6 comes from **exploratory** fieldwork.
	2.7	A user name provides useful cues.	Qualitative study and Jacobson, 1999	Item 7 comes from **exploratory fieldwork**.
	2.8	A user status provides useful cues.	Qualitative study	Item 8 comes from **exploratory fieldwork**.

	2.9	A picture of the author provides useful cues.	Qualitative study and Walther, 1996	Item 9 comes from **exploratory fieldwork** and is **based on** existing literature (see Walther, 1996).
C3 Perceived similarity	3.1	Considering your outlook on life, how similar are you and the author?	Gilly *et al*., 1998 And supported by the qualitative study	Items 1-3 are **existing measurement scales**. Item 4-5 from this existing measurement scale have been dropped as they do not suit the study context.
	3.2	Considering your likes and dislikes, how similar are you and the author?		
	3.3	Considering your values and experiences, how similar are you and the author?		
	3.4	Considering your interests in life, how similar are you and the author?	Qualitative study	Item 4 comes from **exploratory fieldwork**.
	3.5	Considering the topics you would like to discuss, how similar are you and the author?	Qualitative study	Item 5 comes from **exploratory fieldwork**.
	3.6	Considering your writing style, how similar are you and the author?	Qualitative study	Item 6 comes from **exploratory fieldwork**.
C4 Source Credibility	4.1	The author who has left comments in the forum is knowledgeable in the topic he/she discusses.	Cheung *et al.,* 2008, based on Wu and Shaffer, 1987	Items 1-4 are **adopted** from existing measurement scales.
	4.2	The author who has left comments in the forum is an expert in the topic he/she discusses.		
	4.3	The author who has left comments in the forum is trustworthy.		
	4.4	The author who has left comments in the forum is reliable.		
C5 Affiliation	5.1	If an author is a company-representative, he/she needs to be recognizable as such.	Qualitative study	All items come from **exploratory fieldwork**.
	5.2	If an author is a company-representative, he/she should disclose his/her affiliation to the company.		
	5.3	An author's affiliation to the company needs to be clearly declared.		
	5.4	An author's affiliation to the company needs to be visible at first site.		
	5.5	If an author is a company-representative, he/she should disclose his/her motivation for participating in the forum.		
	5.6	If an author is a company-representative; he/she should not only disclose his/her affiliation to the company but also disclose his/her status within the company (e.g., head of communication, marketing director, CFO, CIO, CEO, etc.).		
C6 Characteristics	6.1	Unfriendly-friendly	Garlick, 1993 adopted and supplemented by qualitative study	None of the instruments found in literature seems to be 100% adequate to measure characteristics. Thus, the author has taken three instruments from impression formation literature that might be used to measure impression formation in this specific online community and has tested them in the qualitative study with OC
	6.2	Unkind-kind		
	6.3	Rude–courteous		
	6.4	Negative-positive		
	6.5	Uncaring-caring		
	6.6	Disagreeable-agreeable		

	6.7	Unlikable-likable		members. Based on the qualitative study, Garlick's instrument appears to be the most appropriate for measuring the impressions formed about the COR in the Swissmom community. In order for the instrument to suit the study context, it has been adjusted according to the results of the qualitative study.
	6.8	Insincere-candid	Qualitative study	Item 8 comes from **exploratory fieldwork**.
	6.9	Uncommunicative-communicative	Qualitative study	Item 9 comes from **exploratory fieldwork**.
	6.10	Incompetent-competent	Qualitative study	Item 10 comes from **exploratory fieldwork**.
	6.11	Not committed-committed	Qualitative study	Item 11 comes from **exploratory fieldwork**.
	6.12	Unreliable-reliable	Qualitative study	Item 12 comes from **exploratory fieldwork**.
	6.13	Indifferent-interested	Qualitative study	Item 13 comes from **exploratory fieldwork**.
C7 Interpersonal communication	7.1	Overall, the forum is an important source of information for me.	Gruen *et al*., 2006	Items 1-2 are **existing measurement scales**. Item 3-4 from this existing measurement scales have been deleted as they do not fit the research context.
	7.2	I find the interaction among forum participants enhances my knowledge.		
	7.3	Contributions by other forum participants help me to form an opinion about topics discussed.	Qualitative study	Item 3 comes from **exploratory fieldwork**.
	7.4	Discussions between forum participants influence my view on the discussed topics.	Qualitative study	Item 4 comes from **exploratory fieldwork**.
	7.5	Contributions by other forum participants direct me to reflect on the discussed topics.	Qualitative study	Item 5 comes from **exploratory fieldwork**.
C8 Localized OCCIP	8.1	Appealing	Williams and Moffitt, 1997; Karaosmanoglu and Melewar, 2006; Willi *et al.,* 2014	All items are adapted from **existing measurement scales**.
	8.2	Informative		
	8.3	Useful		
	8.4	Positive		
	8.5	Good		

	8.6	Favorable		
	8.7	Attractive		
	8.8	Exciting		
	8.9	Clear		
	8.10	Sophisticated		
	8.11	Coherent		
	8.12	High-quality		
	8.13	Responding		
	8.14	Transparent		
C9 Attitude toward the company's OC	9.1	Swissmom builds a relationship with me.	Ko *et al.*, 2005	All items are **existing measurement scales**.
	9.2	I would like to visit Swissmom again.		
	9.3	I am satisfied with the service of Swissmom.		
	9.4	I feel comfortable surfing Swissmom.		
	9.5	Swissmom is a good place to spend my time.		
	9.6	I would rate Swissmom as one of the best sites.		
C10 Intention to use the company's OC again	10.1	Likely–unlikely	Ko *et al.,* 2005	All items are **existing measurement scales**.
	10.2	Probable-improbable		
	10.3	Possible-impossible		
C11 Word of mouth	11.1	I mention this service organization to others quite frequently.	Harrison-Walker, 2001	All items are **existing measurement scales**. Two dimensions of the four aspects of WOM have been used: WOM activity (1-4) and WOM praise (5-6). The other aspects were rejected by Harrison-Walker (2001) during the scale purification process. Two items were dropped based on content validity
	11.2	I've told more people about this service organization than about most other service organizations.		
	11.3	I seldom miss an opportunity to tell others about this service organization.		
	11.4	When I tell others about this service organization, I tend to talk about the organization in great detail.		
	11.5	I have only good things to say about this service organization.		

Figure 1 Research Model

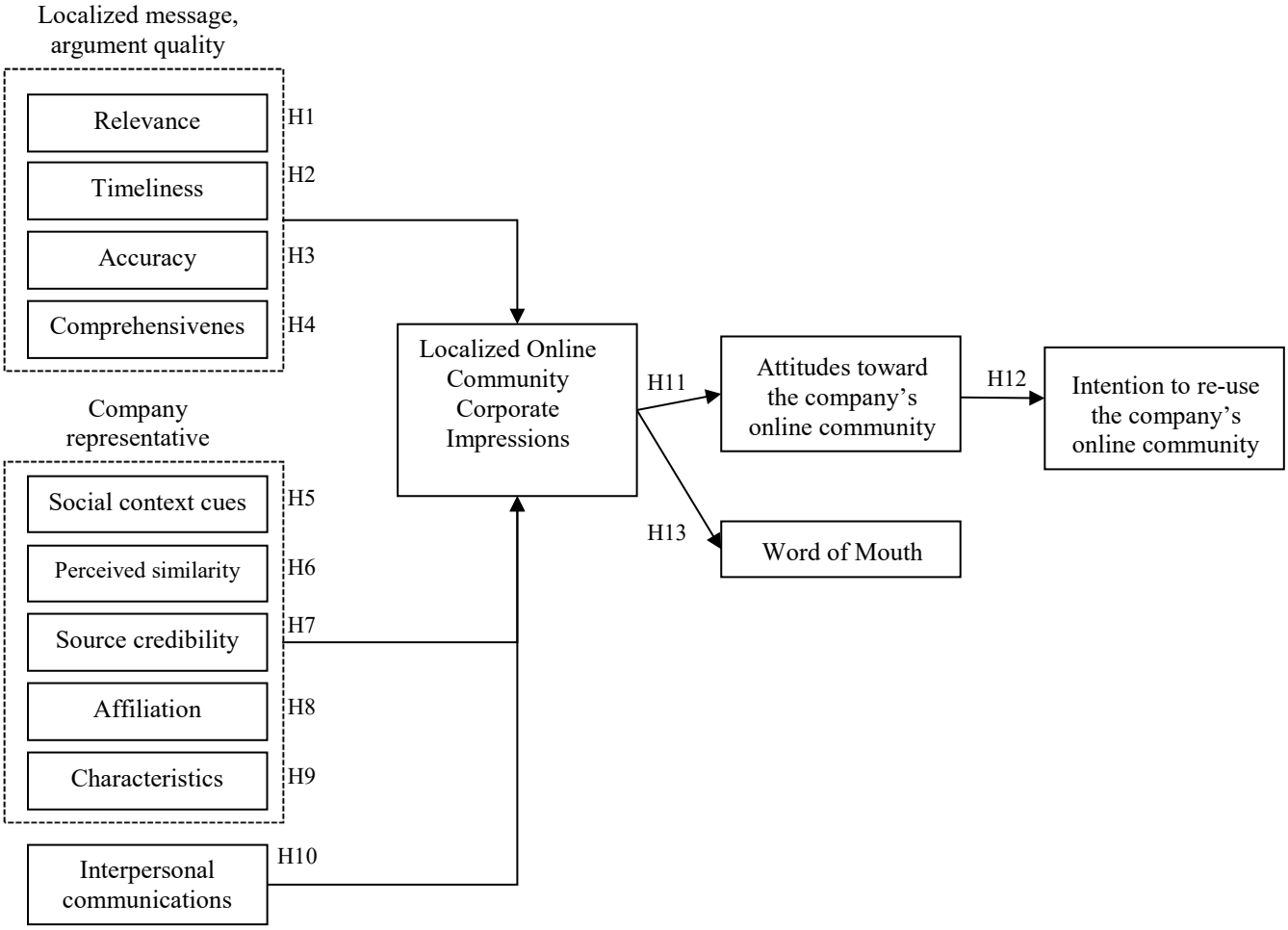

Table 1 - CFA Results

Factors	Measurement items	Standardized factor loadings (λ)	z-value	Cronbach alpha	Composite reliability	AVE
η1 **Relevance (C1a)**	C1a1	0.818		0.882	0.887	0.723
	C1a2	0.867	16.407***			
	C1a3	0.865	21.229***			
η2 **Timeliness (C1b)**	C1b1	0.908		0.924	0.925	0.804
	C1b2	0.900	14.850***			
	C1b3	0.883	20.113***			
η3 **Accuracy (C1c)**	C1c1	0.848		0.923	0.925	0.804
	C1c2	0.915	18.474***			
	C1c3	0.924	17.190***			
η4 **Comprehensiveness (C1d)**	C1d1	0.892		0.928	0.932	0.773
	C1d2	0.893	21.676***			
	C1d3	0.876	23.563***			
	C1d4	0.857	15.669***			
η5 **Social context cues (C2)**	C21	0.738		0.914	0.912	0.537
	C22	0.767	22.364***			
	C23	0.737	13.908***			
	C24	0.625	9.467***			
	C25	0.584	10.406***			
	C26	0.782	14.299***			
	C27	0.819	15.123***			
	C28	0.776	13.191***			
	C29	0.735	12.428***			
η6 **Perceived similarity (C3)**	C31	0.909		0.937	0.939	0.721
	C32	0.880	28.242***			
	C33	0.880	24.799***			
	C34	0.872	23.707***			
	C35	0.829	25.142***			
	C36	0.708	16.049***			
η7 **Source credibility (C4)**	C41	0.869		0.932	0.921	0.743
	C42	0.830	20.810***			
	C43	0.871	18.855***			
	C44	0.879	19.754***			
η8 **Affiliation (C5)**	C51	0.908		0.957	0.952	0.768
	C52	0.908	30.456***			
	C53	0.972	18.771***			
	C54	0.958	17.312***			
	C55	0.767	13.232***			
	C56	0.714	12.686***			
η10 **Interpersonal**	C71	0.912		0.966	0.967	0.853
	C72	0.946	37.440***			
	C73	0.942	38.408***			
	C74	0.932	40.910***			

communication (C7)						
	C75	0.884	21.581***			
η12 **Attitudes toward Swissmom (C9)**	C91	0.774		0.960	0.963	0.815
	C92	0.941	22.304***			
	C93	0.933	17.223***			
	C94	0.950	18.592***			
	C95	0.929	21.880***			
	C96	0.901	20.509***			
η13 **Intention to use Swissmom again (C10)**	C101	0.966		0.958	0.947	0.857
	C102	0.940	30.735***			
	C103	0.867	18.709***			
η14 **Word-of-mouth (C11)**	C111	0.937		0.972	0.973	0.900
	C112	0.927	24.540***			
	C113	0.977	39.753***			
	C114	0.952	37.733***			

Note: *** p<0.001; AVE: Average Variance Extracted

Table 2 - Discriminant Validity

Swissmom Sample

	C1a	C1b	C1c	C1d	C2	C3	C4	C5	C7	C9	C10	C11
C1a	**0.850**											
C1b	0.796	**0.896**										
C1c	0.820	0.664	**0.896**									
C1d	0.782	0.685	0.834	**0.879**								
C2	0.580	0.420	0.683	0.692	**0.732**							
C3	0.658	0.600	0.634	0.675	0.548	**0.849**						
C4	0.763	0.617	0.800	0.819	0.751*	0.706	**0.862**					
C5	0.331	0.271	0.370	0.346	0.517	0.258	0.457	**0.876**				
C7	0.691	0.597	0.717	0.749	0.703	0.596	0.695	0.342	**0.924**			
C9	0.715	0.593	0.676	0.768	0.668	0.613	0.711	0.356	0.822	**0.903**		
C10	0.591	0.536	0.600	0.689	0.561	0.555	0.588	0.355	0.754	0.911*	**0.926**	
C11	0.629	0.588	0.683	0.731	0.576	0.571	0.711	0.337	0.742	0.866	0.836	**0.949**

Diagonal elements are square roots of AVE

Maurice Lacroix Sample

	C1a	C1b	C1c	C1d	C2	C3	C4	C5	C7	C9	C10	C11
C1a	**0.802**											
C1b	0.532	**0.838**										
C1c	0.566	0.569	**0.796**									
C1d	0.523	0.631	0.627	**0.841**								
C2	0.483	0.546	0.599	0.730	**0.664**							
C3	0.489	0.471	0.446	0.484	0.413	**0.784**						
C4	0.454	0.532	0.595	0.609	0.663	0.486	**0.849**					
C5	0.249	0.344	0.270	0.309	0.384	0.086	0.393	**0.688**				
C7	0.359	0.467	0.540	0.643	0.638	0.376	0.526	0.260	**0.756**			
C9	0.287	0.498	0.396	0.555	0.499	0.389	0.452	0.172	0.689	**0.716**		
C10	0.237	0.416	0.386	0.440	0.383	0.300	0.327	0.107	0.565	0.611	**0.908**	
C11	0.260	0.364	0.358	0.499	0.480	0.348	0.480	0.177	0.572	0.722*	0.550	**0.732**

Diagonal elements are square roots of AVE

* The construct pair does not meet the discriminant validity test of Fornell and Larcker (1981) but meets that of Anderson and Gerbing (1988).

Table 3 – Hypotheses Test Results Using SEM

Hypothesis				*Standardized Regression Coefficient*	*z-value*	*Hypothesis*
H1	Relevance *C1a*	→	OCCIP *C8neu*	0.056	1.125	Reject (*p*-value 0.261)
H2	Timeliness *C1b*	→	OCCIP *C8neu*	0.066	1.336	Reject (*p*-value 0.181)
H3	Accuracy *C1c*	→	OCCIP *C8neu*	-0.014	-0.242	Reject (*p*-value 0.809)
H4	Comprehensiveness *C1d*	→	OCCIP *C8neu*	0.168	2.623**	Accept
H5	Social context cues *C2*	→	OCCIP *C8neu*	0.136	2.059*	Accept
H6	Perceived similarity *C3*	→	OCCIP *C8neu*	-0.019	-0.430	Reject (*p*-value 0.667)
H7	Source credibility *C4*	→	OCCIP *C8neu*	0.128	2.246*	Accept
H8	Affiliation *C5*	→	OCCIP *C8neu*	0.094	2.090*	Accept
H9	Characteristics *C6neu*	→	OCCIP *C8neu*	0.177	5.361***	Accept
H10	Interpersonal communication *C7*	→	OCCIP *C8neu*	0.200	3.539***	Accept
H11	OCCIP *C8neu*	→	Attitudes toward OC *C9*	0.588	10.147***	Accept
H12	Attitudes toward OC *C9*	→	Intention *C10*	0.570	13.258***	Accept
H13	OCCIP *C8neu*	→	WOM *C11*	0.505	10.332***	Accept

Note: * $p< 0.05$; ** $p< 0.01$; *** $p< 0.001$
Goodness-of-fit: (χ^2= 2424.968 (p-value 0.000), *df* = 1540, CFI, 0.931, TLI 0.926, NFI 0.833, RMSEA 0.038).

Table 4 - Specification of Each Communication Mix to the localized OCCIP Framework

Relevance of Message
The relevance of a message is considered to be of high importance in CMC (e.g., Burgoon *et al*, 2002; Kiesler *et al.,* 1984). Surprisingly, the results of this study show that the relationship between relevance of messages and OCCIP is not significant and thus, contradicts previous findings. A possible explanation for this outcome might be that nowadays customers are interconnected and regularly exchange information with others. As a result, they do not depend on one piece of information but actively discuss topics with a wide number of individuals. A single piece of information thus, has less weight and its relevance is not always of high importance. This has also been confirmed to some extent by some qualitative results: *"I don't think a contribution needs to be particularly relevant. People might also like to know about details, personal views, gossip"* (Expert Interviewee 4, 2010).
Timeliness of Message
Information that customers are looking for has to be current and up to date (Adjei *et al.,* 2010). This statement leads to the assumption that timeliness is considered to be a predictor of OCCIP. This has been maintained by a community interviewee who states: "I only read very current messages, I am not interested in old stuff. Life is far too fast" (Community Interviewee 11). However, this hypothesis is not supported by the data.
Accuracy of Message
By accuracy, it is understood that the message is perceived to be correct (Cheung *et al*., 2008). Since OCMs interact and can comment on the messages of a company, it is assumed that these messages need to be correct. If this is not the case, "I will challenge the message and this might have an impact on how the original message is perceived" (Community Interviewee 7). This is underlined by another interviewee mentioning that "if a message is wrong, I will for sure comment on it if others have not done this already" (Community Interviewee 9). The study, however, provides no support for the hypothesized effects of accuracy on OCCIP. This might be explained in the same way as for the effect of the relevance of a message.
Comprehensiveness of Message
The results of the test of Hypothesis 4 support the notion that comprehensiveness has a direct, positive effect on OCCIP. This relationship is supported by previous literature such as Cheung *et al.* (2008) who suggests that "the more comprehensive the messages are, the higher the perceived information usefulness of the message" (Cheung *et al.,* 2008, p. 234). Furthermore, a statement by an interviewee in the qualitative interviews underlines the importance of the comprehensiveness of a message: "Look at a situation when I speak with someone. If I don't get the point, I won't really like the situation → I'll have a negative impression of the conversation and also of the communicator" (Community Interviewee 7).
Social Context Cues
Social context cues are various linguistic and typographic manipulations (such as paralanguage) as well as additional information about an author which reveals social and relational information (Walther, 1995). The relationship of social context cues to OCCIP is confirmed by the results. This is consistent with the findings of earlier studies (e.g., Walther, 1995) and the findings of the qualitative study. For example, an interviewee states: "If a moderator tells a lot about himself, he gives the impression of being open-minded and communicative. He creates an environment in which one likes to speak" (Community Interviewee 1).
Perceived Similarity
Contrary to expectations, this study did not find a statistically significant effect of perceived similarity on OCCIP. These findings do not support previous studies which suggest that perceived similarity between individuals is a key factor affecting the persuasiveness of word-of-mouth information (Gilly *et al*., 1998). The reason for this is not clear but it may have something to do with how similarity is perceived. As one interviewee states: "*Similarity of individuals is not important; it is the similarity of interests, common values, or opponents that is relevant*" (Expert Interviewee 5, 2010). Thus, similarity has to be conceptualized in a different way for further studies in online environment.

Source Credibility
Source credibility is an important concept which has been studied by numerous scholars (e.g., Goldsmith *et al.,* 2000; Lafferty *et al.,* 2002; Massey, 2003; Ohanian, 1990). Fombrun (1996) posits that corporate credibility or the extent to which consumers, investors, and other constituents believe in a company's trustworthiness and expertise forms part of a corporation's image. Source credibility is also considered to be very important by the interviewees. Statements such as the following were provided: "Credibility is very important to me and represents almost 100% of my impression of the COR" (Community Interviewee 8). The results of the present study confirm the relationship between source credibility and OCCIP.
Affiliation
According to Warnick (2004), it is important to know the source of the content of a website, and thus, it is assumed that it is important to know our speaking partner's identity and role. Company representatives might not always be appreciated on OCs. Thus, it seems to be important to indicate a COR's affiliation. This is supported by the qualitative interviews. One interviewee stresses the importance of disclosing the affiliation by stating that "if he or she does not do so and later on someone finds out, this will have a negative impact on the impressions formed about the company" (Community Interviewee 2). A direct link between affiliation and OCCIP was supported by the quantitative data that was available in the present study. This result supports the findings of the qualitative study.
Characteristics
People who interact form impressions of one another even if they do not meet directly. The relationship between characteristics and OCCIP is confirmed and supported by literature, which points out that people form impressions of one another based on the others' behavior and characteristics (Downey and Christensen, 2006).
Interpersonal Communication
Interpersonal communication is the communication between OCMs. Results of the current study indicate that interpersonal communication has a direct effect on OCCIP. These results are consistent with those of other studies and suggest that the relationships with and the attitudes toward a company or brand depend fundamentally on the social interactions between members of the group (Baumgarth, 2004). The qualitative interviews also support these findings. One interviewee states, "I think that other contributions can influence me, I might reflect again and rethink things" (Community Interviewee 4).
Consequences:
In line with the qualitative findings of the present study and the literature review (Schwartz, 2007), all proposed relationships of the consequences are statistically significant. The first consequence of OCMs when bearing in mind a positive impression is seen in their global *attitudes toward the company's OC*. In this sense, one expert interviewee states that "Attitude is greatly influenced. Positive and negative images have a tendency to become exaggerated in OCs" (Expert Interviewee 6). This is supported by the quantitative findings. As defined by the theory of reasoned action (Ajzen and Fishbein, 1975), the attitude will be followed by conative responses such as the *intention to use the company's OC* again. An expert interviewee describes this by saying: "I mean, yes, if someone likes the company and has a positive attitude toward its VC, that person most probably comes back to the OC, either to get new information or to discuss other issues" (Expert Interviewee 5). This is confirmed by the quantitative data. The significant association between OCCIP and *word-of-mouth* is consistent with previous studies that showed an effect of corporate image on word-of-mouth. This result is also supported by qualitative findings. As one expert points out: "*I think this influences word-of-mouth a lot, since word-of-mouth can only be good if a person really has a good overall picture of a company. On the other hand, if a company's image is bad it will certainly result in bad word-of-mouth since people like that gossip and the effect of negative experiences seems to be bigger and more stable*" (Expert Interviewee 4, 2010).