
Social media communicators' motivations for professional engagement: A study of altruism, reciprocity, and reputation

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Abstract

The social media communicator represents a recently developed role within organisational settings. This research focuses on the professional engagement motivations of social media communicators. A quantitative survey was conducted to examine three motivations found to encourage people to share knowledge. Consistent with social exchange theory and existing research on online knowledge sharing, results show that social media communicators were motivated by reciprocity, reputation, and altruism. This research found that motivations varied based on their gender, social media self-education efforts, and years of professional experience. Results reveal that males were more motivated by reciprocity. And years of professional experience were a positive predictor of the reputation motivation. In addition, their efforts to teach themselves about social media best practices were positively related to the reputation and altruistic motivations.

Introduction

Social media has become an important communication tool for organisations in managing their reputations and maintaining relationships with the public (Lovejoy & Saxton, 2012; Wright & Hinson, 2011). Organisations employ professional communicators to publish on their behalf in order to manage interactions on various social media platforms (Wright & Hinson, 2008) and monitor any word-of-mouth regarding their products and services (Khang, Ki, & Ye, 2012). However, as a newly established position, little is understood about what motivates them as professional communicators. The assumption is

that motivations are congruent with behaviour, which may mean such motivations could influence how they engage with other people across social media communities. Dominant motives for specialising in social media could consist of factors such as personal gratification or power (Katz & Kahn, 1966).

One purpose of this research was to clarify social media communicators' professional motivations for engagement on social media platforms. Organisations employ communicators with the specialised knowledge to navigate and interact with online communities on their behalf. As the social media communicator is a relatively new position, organisations often rely heavily on individuals to take ownership related to decisions about what and when to publish information on organisations' social media accounts. Without clear operational guidelines for organisations, leaders may hire people with little understanding of how to develop relationships. Motivations may reveal whether social media communicators engage in communication with the public to serve the organisation or to further their own individual careers or ego. However, as a newly established position, ethical guidance for this role is still relatively weak. Behavioural cues are often in the form of an organisational social media behavioural policy because little is understood about social media communication practices. As a result, it is crucial for organisations to study active professional communicators who publish across social media platforms on behalf of an organisation because these individuals can create, maintain, and strengthen the relationship between the organisation and the

public by engaging with group members affiliated and unaffiliated with the organisation (Efimova & Grudin, 2008; Quinton & Fennemore, 2013; Wigley & Zhang, 2011).

The knowledge sharing research stream shows that reciprocity, reputation, and altruistic motivations drive digital and offline engagement behaviours (Ekdale, Namkoong, Fung, & Perlmetter, 2010). And thus, social media communicators may be motivated by such factors. A quantitative survey of professional social media communicators was conducted to explore their motivations and determine whether characteristics of individual practitioners predicted variations in motivations. Specifically, gender, social media self-education efforts, and professional social media experience were examined as predictors.

Literature review

Social media communicators' motivations

Motivations describe how people are moved to take action (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Motivation is a construct used to assess personality, and they have been used to predict intentions and behaviours of individuals (Roberts & Wood, 2006). In the realm of social media, most motivational research concentrates on bloggers. In general, research shows that people use social media for reasons such as expression, social interactions, information, entertainment, idea development, and image management (Daugherty, Eastin, & Bright, 2008; Ekdale et al., 2010; Liao, Liu, & Pi, 2010; Sepp, Liljander, & Gummerus, 2011).

Thus, it is important to begin to build theoretical models to predict motivations. This study seeks to understand what motivations orient these communicators. Cognitive psychologists state that motivational factors help practitioners and scholars understand the reasons behind behaviours (Ryan & Deci, 2000). As a newly established position, little is understood about what inspires these communicators. Motivations for professional social media engagement are factors that can help determine their goals, expectations, and norms. Research has found that managers in organisations are limited in their understanding of social media communication, which means

they are unable to provide a clear direction on social media strategies or policies (Kietzmann, Hermkens, McCarthy, & Silvestre, 2011; Kimmel & Kitchen, 2014). As a result, organisational success in social media communication largely depends on practitioners who are self-sufficient in navigating and managing their presence on these platforms.

While economic rewards are potentially strong motivators for individuals, people who prefer to communicate through social media channels are not likely extensively motivated by such a return. Most organisations invest little money into their social media campaign efforts (Efimova & Grudin, 2008), which means nonmonetary rewards become increasingly important to identify in individual knowledge workers (e.g., Chang & Chuang, 2011; Hsu & Lin, 2008). Their behaviour may be partially explained by social exchange theory, which suggests that people are moved to engage in behaviours even without clear obligations or specific expectations (Kankanhalli, Tan, & Wei, 2005). Social exchange theory posits that sharing information is based on self-interests and reciprocity. Self-interest may be in the form of reputational feedback. In the case of social media communicators, they may be partially encouraged by feedback in the form of 'likes' and 'shares'. Or as Hendriks (1999) found, knowledge workers seek to interact because of their desire for self-actualisation.

The literature review on *knowledge sharing* can also guide research on motivations of social media communicators because social networks provide opportunities for users to engage in knowledge sharing. Knowledge sharing refers to a communication process characterised by an exchange of knowledge between two or more individuals to create new knowledge (van den Hoof & de Ridder, 2004). Many studies on online knowledge sharing focus on professional communities in which individuals work in similar positions and engage in online communication in order to exchange knowledge related to their professions (Chang & Chuang, 2011; Hsu & Lin, 2008). Studies on knowledge sharing, a form of social exchange, have found that reciprocity, reputation, and

altruism are motivations for individuals to engage in online communication (e.g., Chang & Chuang, 2011; Hsu & Lin, 2008).

In order to study the motivations of social media communicators, reciprocity, reputation, and altruism motivational measures were developed to determine whether they were influenced by such motivations. People motivated by reciprocity may share information on social media platforms because they expect to gain mutual benefits such as future networking and information sharing in return (Bock, Zmud, Kim, & Lee, 2005). People motivated by reputation, on the other hand, may publish information online, believing that engaging in such action will enhance their reputational standing (Wasko & Faraj, 2005). People may be motivated by altruism to distribute information on social media channels because they believe the information could benefit other people. The act of helping others in itself is rewarding enough for them to continue engaging in such actions.

Reciprocity motivation

One of the earliest works on reciprocity was by Gouldner (1960). The reciprocity motivation refers to the tendency for individuals to help those who have helped them (Gouldner, 1960). Expectations of reciprocity could motivate individuals to initiate helping behaviours before receiving help from others (Wasko & Faraj, 2000). For professional social media communicators, the expected reciprocal benefits are mainly in the forms of future networking and shared knowledge (Bock et al., 2005). In this study, reciprocity motivation refers to the belief that individuals will achieve mutual benefits through engagement in social media communication (Hsu & Lin, 2008). The expectation of mutual benefits depends on voluntary contributions from multiple individuals. Social media communicators are not obligated to contribute in order to obtain information from others. However, if no one chooses to share, the relationship ceases to exist. As a result, people are motivated to engage in online communities in order to ensure the relationship continues with the support of other people reciprocating with their contributions (Chang & Chuang, 2011; Lin, 2007).

Generally, research on reciprocity has focused on the likelihood that online knowledge contributions will lead to future engagement. People hold a general expectation that their offerings will lead to a favorable return (Blau, 1964). Those who share information online also often expect that engagement will lead to future interactions (Wasko & Faraj, 2000). This expectation of future reciprocity is positively related to both a positive attitude toward knowledge sharing and knowledge sharing intentions (Lin, 2007). The perception of reciprocity also has positive effects on both the quantity and quality of knowledge contributions in online communication contexts (Wasko & Faraj, 2005). Those who believe that their knowledge contributions will be reciprocated tend to have a more positive attitude toward online knowledge contributions and a higher intention to share (Chang & Chuang, 2011).

Reciprocal practices among circles of social media experts could be also beneficial to social media communicators because they help each other define their ambiguous role with an organisation (Efimova & Grudin, 2008). Social media communicators may rely on other social media experts to learn about best practices. The posting of information on social media channels provides visible evidence that they are valuable members of the social media expert community.

Reputation motivation

Professional social media communicators could receive an indirect reputational benefit. Reputation refers to the general consensus of how other people perceive an individual (Ferris, Blass, Douglas, Kolodinsky, & Treadway, 2003). In this study, the reputation motivation refers to the expectation that engagement on social media platforms will enhance how other people view an individual. People are motivated to achieve and maintain a positive reputation because it could lead to many personal advantages, such as being viewed as legitimate, competent, and trustworthy (Hall, Zinko, Perryman, & Ferris, 2009), evaluated more positively on their job performance (Ferris et al., 2003), and granted more freedom in performing their jobs (Zinko, Ferris, Humphrey, Meyer, & Aime, 2012), which can

lead to higher job satisfaction, promotions (Ferris et al., 2003), and career success (Zinko et al., 2012). And thus, reputation is a strong motivator for people to contribute online information (Porter, Trammell-Sweester, Chung, & Kim, 2007; Wright & Hinson, 2008). For example, Wasko and Faraj (2005) found that people actively participate because they believe it bolsters their reputation. People motivated by their reputation tend to engage in information sharing more often and provide better quality information.

For these practitioners, reputation could be crucial to their performance evaluation. Social media offers people a way to establish themselves as information leaders because power is likely correlated with online interactions. Visible measures may provide the communicator with more internal and external power (Porter et al., 2007; Sallot, Porter, & Acosta-Alzuru, 2004). Reputational measures can include indicators such as number of followers or subscribers. For example, research on Twitter and Facebook platforms show that the number of friends and followers affects other people's perceptions of trustworthiness and credibility of the profile owner (Tong, Van Der Heide, Langwell, & Walther, 2008). The posting of useful and valuable information may attract other professional communicators to follow them, which in turn enhances their reputation as social media experts. If social media communicators establish and maintain a positive personal reputation, it could be indicative that they are able to manage the reputation of the organisation as well (Ba, Stallaert, & Whinston, 2001).

Altruistic motivation

While reciprocity and reputation motivate social media communicators to engage because they expect some personal benefits in return, altruistically motivated individuals are different. Existing research shows that some people share information online because they gain intrinsic enjoyment from helping others (Wasko & Faraj, 2000). In this study, altruistic motivation refers to enjoyment and satisfaction from helping others by sharing information without any expectations of personal benefits in return (Kollock, 1999). Altruistic motivation is derived from the construct of altruism, an

unconditional kindness without any expectations of personal benefits in return (Fehr & Gächter, 2000).

In online knowledge sharing contexts, which can include social media channels, altruism motivates people to continue to share information (e.g., Chang & Chuang, 2011; He & Wei, 2009; Hsu & Lin, 2008; Kankanhalli et al., 2005; Lai & Chen, 2014). Research shows that individuals are motivated to contribute knowledge to help other people because the act of helping others in itself is enjoyable (Kankanhalli et al., 2005; Wasko & Faraj, 2000). Thematically, helping is a key concept in the definitions of altruism. Many of the items on existing scales measuring altruistic motivation are related to the willingness to help other people. For example, Hsu and Lin (2008) asked participants to rate the degree to which they like helping other people. And Rushton, Chrisjohn, and Fekken (1981) asked participants to rate the frequency with which they help other people in various situations in a different self-report altruism scale. In addition, Wasko and Faraj (2000) found that a community of programmers contributed information because they felt a moral obligation to contribute, which means that may be motivated by altruism. Similarly, a separate study on organisational employees found they were motivated by moral obligations and community interest (Ardichvili, Page, & Wentling, 2003).

Characteristics of social media communicators

While reciprocity, reputation, and altruism have been shown to motivate online knowledge sharing and engagement, these three factors could vary based on their personal characteristics. Characteristics investigated include gender, social media self-education efforts, and professional social media experience.

Gender

Men and women may approach social media communication differently. Many studies show gender differences relate to varying reasons for engagement (e.g., Lin & Lu, 2011; Pujazon-Zazik & Park, 2010; Zhou, Jin, Vogel, Fang, & Chen, 2011). For example, Lin and Lu (2011) found women were more sensitive to peer

influence, while men were more influenced by perceived usefulness and enjoyment in using social media.

Social media self-education

Motivations are often rooted in a desire to learn. As a recently developed position, the roles and guidelines about best practices for social media communicators are still ambiguous. In organisations, communicators do not often get much feedback because leaders are not literate in social media communication (Kietzmann et al., 2011; Kimmel & Kitchen, 2014). Social media communicators must teach themselves about best practices to develop this competence. Knowledge development is necessary because management relies on social media professionals to educate them about the direction organisations should take on social media platforms (Obar, Zube, & Lampe, 2012). If individuals are not willing to learn for the good of the organisation and themselves, they are likely not motivated individuals. As Hendriks (1999) points out, "It takes knowledge to acquire knowledge and, therefore, to share knowledge" (p. 92). Self-education is important because they must position themselves as experts who are supposed to know the correct stance on a problem. As a result, professional social media communicators have to learn about best practices through self-education efforts such as monitoring how other social media communicators interact on platforms. Cognitive evaluation theory posits that the need for competence is a driver of interpersonal and group communication efforts (Deci & Ryan, 1985). Social media communicators driven to learn more may differ from communicators less driven to teach themselves about social media best practices. Social media communicators who devote time to self-education may also be affected by the reputation motivation because they need to continually demonstrate their competence.

Social media experience

Professional experience may play a role in what motivates the social media communicator. During the early years in a career, people tend to care more about career progress, which may lead them to be more motivated by the reputation and reciprocity norms (Kanungo &

Conger, 1993). On the other hand, those with more experience tend to have a higher need for affiliation (Doering, Rhodes, & Schuster, 1983), which could lead to greater altruistic motivations.

Research questions

It is of interest to understand what influences social media experts to engage on a professional level because their motivations may influence behaviours or the organisation. This study explored how individual characteristics of social media communicators predicted reciprocity, reputation, and altruistic motivations.

RQ1: What are the relationships between the gender of social media communicators and their professional motivations for engagement?

RQ2: What are the relationships between the social media self-education efforts of social media communicators and their professional motivations for engagement?

RQ3: What are the relationships between the experience of social media communicators and their professional motivations for engagement?

Method

Sample

The professional social media communicators were diverse with males (47.4%) and females (52.6%) almost equally represented. Their ages ranged from 22 years to 64 years with an average age of 37.6 years. The majority of the respondents were white (72.3%) and most were from the United States (87.4%). Highest education levels were: high school or less (4.5%), associates/vocational degree (5.3%), bachelor's degree (44.7%), and master's degree (18.2%) with an average of 6.2 years as a professional social media communicator. Titles of respondents indicate that most respondents were social media leaders (see Table 1, below). Organisation size had a median of 150 people and most respondents worked for a corporation (22.9%), news organisation (20.8%), or marketing agency (17.7%).

Table 1: Job titles of social media communicators

Chief Engagement Officer	Manager, Social Strategy and Content Programming
Chief Marketing Officer	Managing Editor
Communications Manager	Marketing, Advertising, and Social Media Administrator
Communications Specialist	Media Manager
Community Manager and Editorial Webmaster	Online Brand Manager
Creative Accounts Coordinator	Online Content Coordinator
Customer Success Manager	Online Strategy Consultant
Deputy Editor of Digital News and Social Media	Project Manager
Deputy Social Media Editor	Senior Communications Manager
Digital Communications Representative	Senior Director of Communication
Digital Content Producer	Social Content Curator
Digital Media Content Manager	Social Media and Digital Inclusion Officer
Digital Media Manager	Social Media and Digital Marketing Manager
Director of Marketing	Social Media Community Manager
Director of Audience Engagement, Development and Social Media	Social Media Coordinator
Director of Communication, Public Relations, Social Media marketing	Social Media Director
Director of Community	Social Media Editor
Director of Content Strategy	Social Media Lead
Director of Digital Marketing	Social Media Manager
Director of Digital Media	Social Media Marketing Manager
Director of Digital Strategy	Social Media Producer
Director of New Media	Social Media Specialist
Director of Social Marketing	Social Media Strategist
Director of Social Media	Vice President of Communications and Social Engagement
Director of Social Media Operations	Vice President of Digital
Engagement Producer	Vice President of Digital Strategy, Insights and Business Management
Global Director of Social Media	Vice President of SEO and Social Media
Group Director of Content Strategy	Vice President of Social Media
Head of Social Media and User Involvement	
Manager of Social Strategy and Integration	

Sampling frame

The goal was to ensure internal validity and reach high quality and active professional social media communicators. The sampling frame creation process involved multiple steps. First, Twitter lists of social media experts were utilised (see Table 2, below). Repeated names and those who did not professionally handle social media for organisations were removed to ensure that the list included only individuals who handled social media for organisations rather than those who just post information about social media trends. Second, two lists of

top social media communicators compiled by Stampler (2013) and Tung (2013), and the search function on LinkedIn was utilised to increase the number of people on the sampling frame. Keywords for LinkedIn searches include ‘social media communicator’, ‘social media editor’, ‘social media manager’, and ‘online content editor’. Email addresses of the professionals were obtained through their personal and organisational websites or from requests via Twitter through @mentions or direct messages. The process resulted in 416 people.

Table 2: Social media communicator Twitter lists

Twitter list	Number of members
Sree Sreenivasan's SocMedia Editors	219
Mari Smith's Social Media Stars	159
Susan Beebe's Social Media Smarties	489
Scott Monty's Social Media Top	128
Ekaterina Walter's Social Media Tweeps	281
Courtenay Bird's Digital and Social Media	490
Marshall Kirkpatrick's Social Strategists	276
Andrew Nystrom's Social Media	472
Josh Elman's Awesome Social	137
Jake Wengroff's Social Media Experts	78
Robert Scoble's Tech News People	657
Jamie Crager's Social Media	360
Brian Gainor's MKE Sports Social Media	119
Kompari's Social Media, Networking	518
Carlos Martinez-Lage's Social Media Marketing	533
Sean Pifher's Social Media	790
SocialMediaExaminer's Writers	151
Mashable's Social Media Managers	42

Procedure

The quantitative survey was administered online through Qualtrics over a period of four weeks in May and June 2014. The online survey method was chosen because this sample group was most likely active on and accessible via the Internet. Emails with the link to the survey were sent to participants with three reminder emails. Participants were offered a chance to win one of 20 \$50 gift cards to increase the response rate. A total of 126 people responded to the survey with a response rate of 30.3%, excluding eight people who were eliminated because they clearly abandoned the survey.

Operational measures

Social media communicator motivations for professional engagement

This study modified existing measures for reciprocity, reputation, and altruistic motivations to suit the context of social media communicators. The motivations' scale consisted of five modified reciprocity motivation items adopted from Hsu and Lin (2008), eight reputation motivation items adopted from Hochwarter, Ferris, Zinko, Arnell

and James (2007), and Hsu and Lin (2008), and four altruistic motivation items adopted from Hsu and Lin (2008). The 17-itemed motivations' scale was created using exploratory factor analysis (EFA) using Principal Axis Factoring with a Promax rotation. Exploratory factor analysis was appropriate based on Bartlett's test of sphericity ($\chi^2 = 866.111$, $df = 136$, $p < .001$) and the KMO sampling adequacy statistic of .87 (Kaiser, 1974; Pett, Lackey, & Sullivan, 2003; Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007). Factors were retained using a combination of the following criteria: visual scree plot, parallel analysis, and theoretical convergence. Promax with a k value of 4 was the oblique rotation method that was applied in this study (Gorsuch, 1997; Hendrickson & White, 1964). Items were retained using a combination of the following criteria: item sets with item loadings at or above the .32 level, no cross-loadings, and no factors with fewer than three items (Kline, 2013; Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007; Worthington & Whittaker, 2006). The results demonstrate external validity of the social media communicators' motivations for professional

engagement scale. It explained 72.4% of the total variance and resulted in three dimensions with three items for reciprocity ($\alpha=.86$), three items for altruism ($\alpha=.82$), and four items for reputation ($\alpha=.73$). Respondents were asked, “Please read each statement and report whether it describes your professional motivations for participating on social media platforms”. The scale was administered on a 5-point Likert-type scale, ranging from *strongly disagree* to *strongly agree*. The final reputation factor included the following items: “My participation on social media platforms enhances my personal reputation”; “I find my participation on social media platforms can be advantageous to me”; “I have the respect of my followers, friends, and contacts”; and “I am regarded highly by others within my social media circles”. The reciprocity motivation included these items: “I believe that my queries for knowledge will be answered on social media platforms”; “I believe that I will get answers when I post questions on social media platforms”; and “I expect to receive a response when I am in need on social media channels”. And altruism consisted of the following items: “I like helping other people”; “I like helping others learn about how to use social media”; and “I enjoy helping others through social media channels”.

Social media self-education effort

Respondents answered 12 items ranging from *not at all* to *a great extent* to measure their social media self-education efforts. Respondents were asked to read each statement and report how often they have relied on these sources to teach themselves about the best practices on how to use social media. The items on the index were created based on qualitative interviews with 10 professional social media communicators. In March 2014, a total of 10 social media communicators were interviewed to closely investigate and identify themes based on their responses about how they taught themselves about social media best practices. The index included the following items: “searching for materials about best practices through search engines”; “actively participating on social media channels”; “following social media leaders and experts”; “being mentored by individuals within my organisation”;

“attending professional association meetings and/or conferences”; “networking with local social media communicators”; “watching or attending seminars, training sessions, or webinars”; “taking online courses such as MOOCs (Massive Open Online Courses)”; “taking classes at a higher learning educational institution”; “reading or watching internal organisational training materials”; “examining behavioural analytics or data”; and “talking with friends and family”.

Social media communicator experience

Participants were asked to estimate the number of years they had worked as a professional social media communicator.

Results

Altruism, reciprocity, and reputation were shown to be motivations for engagement for professional social media communicators. Social media communicators were most likely motivated by altruistic factors based on descriptive statistics. Altruism had a mean of 13.8 on a scale ranging from three to 15 possible points; followed by reputation, which had a mean of 18.0 (4–20) and reciprocity, which had a mean of 12.7 (3–15).

Three standard regressions were used to answer the three research questions posed. RQ1 asked the relationship between gender and motivations for professional engagement. Males were more likely motivated by reciprocity than females ($\beta = .23, p < .05$). However results were non-significant for altruism and reputation motivations (see Table 3, below). Additional statistical analysis from independent sample t-tests showed a significant difference in reciprocity motivation for males ($m= 4.35, sd=.51$) and females ($m= 4.09, sd=.68; t(93)= 2.04, p < .05$) as well (see Table 3, below).

RQ2 posited a question about the relationship between social media self-education and motivations for professional engagement. Two measures were statistically significant. Educational efforts positively predicted the altruism ($\beta = .24, p < .05$) and reputation ($\beta = .20, p < .05$) motivations (see Table 4). Self-education did not significantly predict reciprocity as a motivation.

Table 3: Independent sample t-test results for gender differences in motivations for social media engagement

	Males		Females	
	<i>m</i>	<i>sd</i>	<i>m</i>	<i>sd</i>
Reciprocity*	4.35	0.51	4.09	0.68
Altruism	4.54	0.50	4.63	0.49
Reputation	4.54	0.49	4.44	0.49

Note. *m* = mean. *sd* = standard deviation. **p*<.05.

Table 4: Regression results for motivations for social media engagement

Predictors	β	SE	<i>t</i>
<u>Reciprocity</u>			
Gender*	.229	.384	2.256
Social media self education	.175	.028	1.725
Social media experience	.135	.074	1.328
Constant		1.253	7.808
Adjusted R ² = .094, <i>n</i> = 96, <i>df</i> = 3			
<u>Altruism</u>			
Gender	-.073	.302	-.712
Social media self education*	.244	.022	2.386
Social media experience	.122	.058	1.192
Constant		.985	11.551
Adjusted R ² = .076, <i>n</i> = 96, <i>df</i> = 3			
<u>Reputation</u>			
Gender	.106	.399	1.039
Social media self education*	.201	.029	1.981
Social media experience*	.214	.077	2.105
Constant		1.302	11.117
Adjusted R ² = .089, <i>n</i> = 96, <i>df</i> = 3			

Note: Three standard regressions were conducted (one for each outcome variable). β s are standardised coefficients. Gender: (Female = 0; Male = 1). **p* < .05

RQ3 asked whether years of professional social media experience related to variations in motivations. Years of experience positively related to reputation as a motivation ($\beta = .21$, *p* < .05). However this analysis did not support the prediction of experience as a predictor of the altruism and reciprocal motivations (see Table 4).

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine social media communicators' motivations for professional engagement. The construct of psychological needs is central to occupational and organisation behavioural research. The

results of this study are consistent with existing research findings that reciprocity, reputation, and altruism were motivations for engagement, with the altruistic motivation being the strongest factor. Characteristics of social media communicators also predicted variations in motivations.

This study found that males were more likely motivated by the expectation of reciprocity. The idealisation that contributions or posts will lead to information sharing may exist to a slightly greater extent for male communicators than females. Previous research has shown that men are more motivated by perceived usefulness when they engage in

social media practices (Lin & Lu, 2011). One past concern of social experts on the web was that male communicators possessed more power within online communities (Chow, Deng, & Ho, 2000). Females may perceive that their communication behaviours are not as reciprocated by other social media users. If female communicators are not as likely to receive support within such communities, they may not offer support to other communicators, affecting the diversity of voices represented on public channels representing an organisation. This finding may also partially explain why some women do not participate as much as males. The expectation of reciprocity needs to be further investigated to determine whether, and in what situations, women are less likely to expect that other people will respond to their prompts for information and networking requests.

An increase in social media self-education efforts was related to an increase in reputation and altruistic motivations. Often the reason people chose to help other people is because of their own experiences and struggles (Bock et al., 2005). The motivation to help society and people situated within it has been shown to encourage social media use (Ekdale et al., 2010), and this research shows the desire to learn about their role is related to their inclination to want to help others. Altruistic motivation has predicted increases in the quality of contributions in past research (Kankanhalli et al., 2005). A desire to improve themselves in order to be of service to others demonstrates the importance of creating a work environment in which they are encouraged to learn more about their professional role. People who perceive that they possess expertise may believe they need to share their knowledge, and they may perceive that they have the power to affect others with such information.

One attraction to the professional social media role is to advance one's career and vanity (DiMicco et al., 2008). People are more likely to share information if they feel that it represents them on an individual level (Raban & Rafaeli, 2007). Thus, individual reputation plays an important role in the willingness to share on behalf of an organisation. And the results of this study showed that as years of

experience increased, the greater the likelihood they were motivated to maintain their reputation. Reputation is an important motivation because many communicators may be driven to appear knowledgeable because they are representatives of an organisation (Efimova & Grudin, 2008). Research shows that individuals generally discount information from untrustworthy sources (Hovland & Weiss, 1952), and thus, they likely want to appear competent. If their work occurs at a more individual level, their ego and social status can be a driver for organisational success because of a psychological need to maintain self-esteem and self-worth (Nicholls, 1984; Ryan, 1982). Social media communicators can display competence by sharing expertise, commenting on events, and mentioning accomplishments. Future research could examine whether the reputation motivation leads them to acts such as editing their communication posts or selecting of posts that market themselves to readers in a particular way (Schau & Gilly, 2003; Sepp et al., 2011).

Conclusion

While social media is an important communication venue for organisations, many managers are unable to provide clear strategies and policies for professional social media communicators to follow. Instead, organisations often rely on individual professionals to develop strategies and guidelines for their own practices. This is why it is important to first understand them at an individual level by developing measures assessing them within this particular communicator role. Operational measures were created to advance these efforts. However some of the operational study measures were modified from existing scales to suit social media communication contexts, which means further validation of the scales and the index is needed.

Relationships are a key theoretical concept in public relations research. Yet this study shows that reciprocity, which can be indicative of relational communication, motivated male communicators to a greater degree. While social media offers great opportunities for

organisations to engage in relational communication with the public, a limited expectation of reciprocity may hinder females from fully engaging in relational behaviours on behalf of the organisation. And thus, it is theoretically relevant to investigate what specifically influences representatives from committing to the normative relationship ideal because male social media communicators may perceive more of a reciprocal atmosphere across platforms than females.

This study also provides some practical contributions for organisations in selecting their professional social media communicators. First, this study shows such communicators need entrepreneurial characteristics such as a motivation to learn because individuals need to be self-motivated in order to keep serving an organisation. Second, social media audits of future or current employees could include these measures to help identify talented individuals to handle their social media communication.

This study should be interpreted with caution since the research has some limitations. The variance explained by regressions analysis was relatively small, which highlights the need for additional variables to fully understand professional social media communicators' motivations for engagement. For example, future research could address the potential influence of several concepts such as organisational goals (e.g., community service or environment sustainable goals) and organisational types (e.g., non-profit or for-profit) to examine how they may influence the motivations of social media communicators at an individual level. Future research could also compare communicators' use of social media for personal and professional purposes to determine whether they vary dependent upon context.

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