Impression Management in Social Media: The Example of LinkedIn

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Nowadays, the relationships are often initiated and maintained in online environments, the formation and management of online impressions have gained importance and become the subject of numerous studies. The impression management is a conscious process in which people attempt to influence the perceptions of their image. They do it by controlling and managing information presented in social media. The presentation of identity is the key to success or failure for example in business life. In the article, the critical literature review related to impression management in social media is described. The example of the way of self-presentation in LinkedIn is presented. The future directions are indicated.

Key words: social media, impression management, LinkedIn, social networks

Introduction

Social media and online community attendance have increasingly become a significant part of our social lives (Burkell et al. 2014). Social media gives new opportunity for business to contact with stakeholders, including for example job candidates (Madera 2012; Bohnert and Ross 2010). Job candidates are putting great attention to a way of presenting themselves in online communities to impress employers (Dekay 2009). Impression management in social media is becoming more important. Some researcher started to examine how self-presentations strategies affect job seekers' behaviours (van der Heide, D'Angelo and Schumaker 2012).

LinkedIn has initiated a new era of workforce recruitment (Guillory and Hancock 2012) in which recruiters, head-hunters are screening candidates and job seekers are encouraged to create professional identities (Davison, Maraist, and Bing 2011), which will enable them to create positive impression on others (Caers and Castelyns 2011).

LinkedIn is the most successful network for recruiters and job seek-ers (Adams 2013). It enables to create business connections for es-tablishing large, professional networks and sharing employment op-portunities (Thew 2008).

The aim of the article is to present a critical literature review of the concept of impression management and describe the strategy of self-presentation in LinkedIn.

The Concept of Impression Management: Literature Review

Managing self-presentation in online communities is an integral part of private and professional life (Rui and Stafanone 2013). When people become members of a community, they must select the rele-vant and appropriate pieces of information for their self-presenta-tion to be consistent with the profile of the group. According to Schwämmlein and Wodzicki (2012) the willingness to provide per-sonal information in member profile is high because members gain acceptance through extensive self-presentation that facilitates the establishment of relationships with other network members. The relationship between interactions and self-identity have been inves-tigating by many researchers, for example, Goffman (1959), Jones and Pittman (1982), Leary (1996), Pontari and Schlenker (2006), and Snyder (1974). One of the first researchers who described this con-cept was Goffman (1959). He insisted that people not only try to convince others to see them as respectable and trustful individ-uals, but also they want to maintain established desired positive image.

Nowadays, people do not only seek to manage their impression face-to-face but also in computer-mediated environments especially in social media (Zhao, Grasmuck, and Martin 2008).

Impression management can be defined as a study of how peo-ple attempt to manage or control the perceptions which others form of them (Bozeman and Kacmar 1997; Drory and Zaidman 2007). The main aim of impression management is to steer others' impres-sion with the use of controlling information, photos, and videos and present them in a proper way in social media. In real life, the impres-sion management takes place through both verbal and nonverbal communication, including body language, posture, speech and rank (i.e., status) (Bolino and Turnley 1999; Leary and Kowalski 1990). Both in real life and online, self-representation connects the idea of who we are to the outside world (Rosenfeld, Giacalone, and Riordan 2002). Thanks to the feedback from recipients, people can explore

their presented images and develop or adjust it to the desired images.

Impression management is recognized as the key element of successful communication with co-workers, team members, and colleagues. According to Gardner and Avolio (1998), it can help managers who are charismatic leaders to achieve an authentic self-representation, allowing them to increase their trustworthiness, credibility, esteem and power (Jung and Sosik 2003).

Impression management is used in individual life as also can be applied at the organizational level (Avery and McKay 2006; Mohamed and Gardner 2004). Organizations use impression management in social media to build the positive image. The impression management model consists of the two key players: an 'actor' who engages in 'impression management behaviours' and an 'audience' who interacts with 'actors' under certain 'environmental settings'. This actor – audience relationship often occurs between managers and their subordinates (Barsness, Diekmann, and Seidel 2005). Impression management can by divided into two strategies: assertive (which an actor uses to establish desirable image), and protective (which are excuses and justifications to repair damaged identities) (Drory and Zaidman 2007). Very interesting taxonomy of organizational impression management was presented by Mohamed, Gardner, and Paolillo (1999). According to them, it can be categorized into four types: direct and assertive, direct and defensive, indirect and assertive, and indirect and defensive tactics. Organizations use (Mohamed, Gardner, and Paolillo 1999):

- direct tactics to present information about their skills, abilities, and accomplishments,
- indirect tactics to enhance their images by managing information about the people and events with which they are associated with,
- utilize assertive tactics when they see opportunities to boost their image,
- defensive tactics to minimize or repair damage to their images.

Members of social networks have various socio-discursive needs – expressive, communicative, or promotional. People engage in self-presentation for many social and professional reasons, including gaining employment, to conduct business, to establish friendships, to express themselves (Shepherd 2005; Bolino et al. 2008) or to correct inaccurate impressions that colleagues have of them (Giacalone and Rosenfeld 1991). The topic of self-presentation was examined by

Birnbaum (2013), DeAndrea and Walther (2011), Labrecque, Markos, and Milne (2011), and Schwämmlein and Wodzicki (2012). The importance of being recognized in a positive light has become very important in social circles. The development of social media like LinkedIn has facilitated identity construction through the abilities to shape the information, photos, and video posted on an individual's profile in attempts to control how others will perceive them in real and internet world. Goffman (1959) highlighted the fact that the perception of others socially influences our behaviour.

Impression Management Strategy: The Example of LinkedIn

LinkedIn is a social network dedicated to professionals and is focused on business relationships and interactions. It has more than 364 million members in over 200 countries. LinkedIn was launched on May 5, 2003. Its founders are Reid Hoffman, Allen Blue, Konstantin Guericke, Eric Ly, and Jean-Luc Vaillant (see https://press.linkedin.com/about-linkedin).

LinkedIn can be used to build awareness and gain referrals (Kietzmann et al. 2011; Mas-Bleda et al. 2014). It is very popular among recruiters and job seekers. This platform is used to find jobs, recommend others in the network, and receive recommendations from others.

LinkedIn allows users to fill in information, which includes profile summary, experience, volunteer experience and causes, projects, languages, certifications, publications, education, discussion posts and comments, recommendations, endorsed skills and expertise, interests, honours and awards, and contact information. A properly filled-out profile gives information about one's job title, detail employment history, business accomplishments, and where they were educated. On the profile, individual can also present a portrait (photo). There are also presented the recommendations from others. People can join groups, especially those offering jobs, recruitment, and business deals. LinkedIn enables to share Amazon book-reading lists, slide presentations, documents, travel itineraries, and blog entries.

LinkedIn helps to find people based on a variety of criteria for example: by defining the specific industry, the size of the company, the seniority level, and the groups of which a particular person is a member (Bradbury 2011).

LinkedIn is giving a lot of opportunities for people who are looking for new challenges. A lot of companies use it for talent acquisi-

tion. The impression management is very important concept related to this social network. Tsai et al. (2011) and Guillory and Hancock (2012) found that a job seeker can influence recruiter evaluations through impression management.

Individuals use various self-presentation tactics in social media to present themselves in favourable ways. The self-presentation tactics can be described as: 'behaviours used to manage impressions to achieve foreseeable short-term interpersonal objectives or goals' (Lee et al. 1999, 702).

LinkedIn presents information about a user that viewers can use to make judgments about the source, such as their credibility, trustfulness, social and professional attractiveness.

One must fill in all information in the LinkedIn profile to create a positive image (Ivcevic and Ambady 2012). It is important to put the photography. Results of the research presented by Edwards et al. (2015) indicates that users who post a profile picture along with their LinkedIn profile are perceived as more socially attractive and more competent than users who do not post a picture. Images help to increase social presence in electronic communications.

Neuberg and Fiske (1987) highlights that the appearance of an individual is most prominent when we first come into contact with somebody. However, the more information a person has on the profile, the more likely hiring professionals will gain an understanding of the individual's personality and behaviour looking at this information.

Also, the information is people's interests and hobbies. According to Goffman's (1959) theory of identity management, people strategically present characteristics that they believe others will approve. For example, people who are looking for a job may be aware that posting specific interests personal or professional can sway how attractive they are to recruiters because they may coincide with recruiters' hobbies. Spelling and grammar mistakes on the LinkedIn Profile are believed to be more troubling, than on paper cv, because it can very fast create a negative impression. And for example, recruiters may dismiss a candidate based on a single spelling error. Another important characteristic of the LinkedIn profile is the number of connections users have in their network. The number of connections is important for a candidate in certain careers (i.e. sales, marketing, public relations, recruiting, etc.). It also shows how this person can create a social network. For good impression management also is important to put attention to defining the skill set. Social network LinkedIn users are asked not to provide their life story

but to highlight specific skills, thus promoting their strengths for different business stakeholders. LinkedIn users, who are not writing a comprehensive list of skills and expertise, will be found less often than those members who do list them.

The use of LinkedIn, as a recruitment tool is very popular because it is easy to manage and it is a low-cost solution (Zide, Elman, and Shahani-Denning 2014; Chiang and Suen 2015). Potential candidates from all over the world are easier to find. There are opportunities for introduction to new professional connections through existing networks.

Conclusion and Future Directions

LinkedIn is a social networking site dedicated to making business connections for building a professional network and sharing employment opportunities. The users generate the content, and they can professionally prepare the information which they would like to publish on the Internet. Nowadays, it is very important to have knowledge about the strategy of self-presentation in social networks because the presentation of identity is the key to success or failure for example in business life. Summarize, it is very important to create professional LinkedIn Profile in which user will:

- build a complete profile,
- highlight only relevant information,
- always include photography,
- limit recommendations to trustful people,
- add credible people to network,
- join different groups, and
- provide high-quality and researched-based information.

People should be conscious and active in impression management and be aware what information exists about them in social media and if the information is protected by the appropriate levels of security and privacy.

The social networks are growing, and there is a need for further research to provide more definitive guidelines on both the potential advantages as well as disadvantages of using professional networks. Although using LinkedIn for recruitment purposes is commonplace in today's workforce there is a need to solve many ethical and legal problems related to use private information published in social media in the process of recruitment and selection. Privacy in social media is critical issue that deserves reflection and research, especially cyberstalking and location disclosure, social profiling and third

party disclosure, invasive privacy agreements. Questions that need attention regarding this privacy issue are: Will social media sites be honest and competent in dealing with users' information? Will social media be capable in preventing users against cyberstalking, location disclosure, social profiling?

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