

Communication and social media management: theory, research and practice

In the current ongoing scenario of market turbulence, businesses and non-profit organisations (NGOs) are facing new communication challenges from both marketing and corporate perspectives. Societies now look askance at global businesses, consumers are sceptical of promises made and citizens increasingly distrust institutions, governments and political processes. Consumer trust in business practice is at all-time low. Rhetoric without substance is despised everywhere and (probably) only a marked sense of responsibility can lead to new scenarios of success. In response to such a turbulent environment, practitioners and academics need to devise new strategies, models, processes, systems and practices to move their brands forward via effective brand communication. The guest editors along with others have encouraged this academic research stream by organising colloquia and bringing together multiple strands in the *3rd International Colloquium on Corporate Branding, Identity, Image and Reputation* at Middlesex University London in 2017, which has since become an annual event (Ageeva and Foroudi, 2019; Ageeva *et al.*, 2018, 2019a, 2019b, 2019c; Foroudi *et al.*, 2014, 2016, 2019a, 2019b; Foroudi, 2019, 2020; McIntyre *et al.*, 2017; Melewar *et al.*, 2014, 2017, 2018; Palazzo *et al.*, 2019, 2020).

The focal point of the special issue lies in analysing past, present and future scenarios in terms of corporate sustainability and responsible communication. Which communication campaigns or practices have proved adequate or inadequate? What, if any, changes are needed? What is the role of corporate and marketing communications in reinvigorating businesses, societies and economies? How can communication build trust and confidence in brands either of a corporate or marketing nature? The same questions apply to institutions, NGOs and other organisations that are inexorably tied up with the business of communication. This issue includes nine best papers from well-known contributors in the domain of corporate branding, identity and social media.

Articles were received from well-known contributors in the field of corporate branding, identity, image and reputation. This special issue starts with six papers on how social commerce and online brand community can impact upon digital immigrants (DI) and digital natives' (DN) perception. The first paper by Maria Teresa Cuomo, Alice Mazzucchelli, Roberto Chierici and Francesca Ceruti aims to investigate how the growth of social commerce and the fast adoption of online brand communities have given firms the opportunity to establish a new kind of community, namely, the social commerce brand community. Adopting a managerial perspective, the research aims to identify the core dimensions of social commerce brand community and shed light on how they contribute in engaging customers and transform them into brand advocates. This study substantiates the rise of social commerce brand community as a new phenomenon that differs from traditional online brand communities and provides firms with concrete support in selling activities and in managing relationships with customers. The multiple case study also allows to detect social commerce brand community core pillars, namely, participants' identification, participation, conversation and social support. These four elements turned out to be pivotal in developing an effective social commerce brand community.

Dorit Zimand Sheiner and Tamar Lahav aim to focus on customer-initiated contact (CIC) discourse on Facebook brand pages. The paper investigates how brands manage CIC on Facebook when customers are more concerned with brand communications than product-related issues, price or distribution. A research framework from the perspective



of consumer-initiated touch-point communication model is proposed. Their study demonstrated that customers use Facebook as a discourse platform for TV commercial brand advertising. However, brands are not always prepared to engage in online CIC involving advertising issues. The reply rate is only moderate and the reply manner is inconsistent, tending to be characterised as “official and dismissive”.

A paper by Sema Misci Kip and Pinar Umul Ünsal aims to achieve broad insights into perceptions and attitudes of Turkish DIs and DN towards a native advertising (NA) format. The study gains new knowledge on issues related to NA format, such as self-determination of viewing, privacy and accuracy of information. Findings provide whys and wherefores for these undiscovered issues, as well as for pre-existing themes such as format recall and recognition, disclosure, communication/marketing aims, attitudes towards NA format, brand and publisher, NA placement and “nativity” of the format. In terms of perceptions and attitudes of DIs and DNs, both similarities and differences exist. DNs consider viewing NA content under their own initiative, so their perceptions and attitudes towards NA are shaped accordingly.

Maria Palazzo, Pantea Foroudi, Philip Kitchen and Alfonso Siano explore the emergence, growth and importance of corporate communications (corpcoms) and how that field is evolving and creating competitive advantage for Italian firms. The study offers insights into corpcoms practices in the sampled companies. The paper demonstrates that corpcoms involve a complex range of activities leading to performance – managed and implemented under CEO direction.

MariaTeresa Cuomo, Debora Tortora, Giuseppe Festa, Francesca Ceruti and Metallo discuss the adoption of augmented reality (AR) settings, which represents an extraordinary opportunity to enrich the value of the omni-customer brand experience, especially in fashion retail. AR enhances the brand of extra-contents, both informational and sensorial, amplifies its significance towards consumers and inflects its commercial and emotional charm through new dimensions in the store. In this light, the purpose of this paper is to verify whether AR affects customer behaviour towards brands in the retailing system. The preliminary findings suggest that AR can create extra brand value by simplifying the decision-making process and engaging customers. In the sum, four “realms” in terms of augmented brand experience can emerge and be managed by retailers.

The next three papers empirically investigate the role of corporate branding in retailing. Ammar Sammour, Weifeng Chen and John Balmer studied corporate heritage brand traits and corporate heritage brand identity by concentrating on developing key dimensions for corporate heritage brand dimensions in the retailing industry in the UK. This study advances corporate brand heritage theory and introduces the theory of corporate heritage brand identity, which is developed from the case study of John Lewis – one of the most respected and oldest retailers in the UK established in 1864. This study references Balmer’s (2013) corporate heritage brand traits that are essential to be considered for corporate heritage brands in the retailing industry to sustain their innovativeness and competitiveness. The findings of the case study informed the four dimensions of corporate heritage brand identity, which include price, quality, symbol and design. The findings are incorporated into a theoretical framework of corporate heritage brand identity traits.

Dilini Edirisinghe, Alireza Nazarian, Pantea Foroudi and Andrew Lindridge investigate how young female customers establish psychological relationships with small- to medium-scale retail stores over time forming purchase intentions, actual purchase patterns and repurchase behaviour. The role of various customer typologies was also considered. Their study reveals a number of interesting findings on how female customers form and develop psychological relationships with clothing retailers over time that ultimately builds customer loyalty. Customer behaviour in pre-purchase, purchase and repurchase stages can significantly vary according to their individual perceptions, whereas they have a few favourite clothing brands

Article no.			Authors
1	QMR-12-2017-0186.R2	Exploiting online environment to engage customers: social commerce brand community	Maria Teresa Cuomo, Alice Mazzucchelli, Roberto Chierici, Francesca Ceruti
2	QMR-12-2017-0177.R2	Managing marketing communications: CIC on Israeli Facebook Brand	Dorit Zimand Sheiner, Tamar Lahav
3	QMR-01-2018-0016.R1	Exploring Native Advertising in Turkey: Insights from Digital Immigrants and Digital Natives	Sema Misci Kip, Pinar Umul Ünsal
4	QMR-12-2017-0185.R1	DEVELOPING CORPORATE COMMUNICATIONS: Insights from the Italian scenario	Maria Palazzo, Pantea Foroudi, Philip Kitchen, Alfonso Siano
5	QMR-11-2017-0142.R3	Managing omni-customer brand experience via Augmented Reality	Maria Teresa Cuomo, Debora Tortora, Giuseppe Festa, Francesca Ceruti, Gerardino Metallo
6	QMR-03-2018-0039.R2	Corporate heritage brand traits and corporate heritage brand identity: the case study of John Lewis	Ammar Sammour, Weifeng Chen, John Balmer
7	QMR-12-2017-0167.R2	Establishing psychological relationship between female customers and retailers: a study of the small to medium scale clothing retail industry	Dilini Edirisinghe, Alireza Nazarian, Pantea Foroudi, Andrew Lindridge
8	QMR-11-2017-0144.R4	The use of new technologies for corporate marketing communication in luxury retailing: preliminary findings	Rosanna Passavanti, Eleonora Pantano, Constantinos Vasiliou Priporas, Saverino Verteramo
9	QMR-12-2017-0159.R3	Investigating Internal Market Orientation: Is Context Relevant?	Qionglei Yu, Bradley R. Barnes, Yu Ye

Table 1.
List of the accepted papers in the special issue

that they frequently shop for. Preference for online shopping was found to be minimal, most of them enjoying in-store experiences. Further, word of mouth and unique designs emerged as key contributors in establishing retail brand loyalty.

The next paper aims to explore the extent to which luxury brand retailers use new technologies as a tool for corporate marketing communication. Rosanna Passavanti, Eleonora Pantano, Constantinos Vasiliou Priporas and Saverino Verteramo's findings reveal that while this sector is aware of the benefits of using new media as a marketing communication tool, the effective use of these new media is still limited. The study provides an empirical contribution to the emerging topic of innovation and technology management in retailing, with the emphasis being placed on the luxury sector through an in-depth investigation of the usage of new technologies by the firms studied.

The last paper in our special issue undertakes qualitative research within different industrial contexts. The study aims to address the following: How do practitioners in non-service organisations interpret internal market orientation (IMO); how is IMO practised within an eastern cultural context; and what are the outcomes of its implementation? Qionglei Yu, Bradley Barnes and Yu Ye reveal that:

- senior management commitment should be included in the design of IMO at the strategic level;
- effective responsiveness to internal information collected is crucial to its success;
- creative ways to meet internal customers' needs and expectations are contextualised; and
- cultural nuances need to be considered when applying IMO.

In conclusion, this special issue develops a coherent and consistent contribution to research into corporate brand communication and social media with empirical studies across a wide range of settings. The guest editors thank all of the authors who submitted papers to the colloquium. We also thank the reviewers for the detailed, constructive comments that have contributed to the development of this special issue.

Charles Dennis, Pantea Foroudi and T.C. Melewar
Middlesex University London, London, UK

Philip Kitchen
ICN-Artem Ecole du Business, Nancy, France, and
Yioula Melanthiou and Ioanna Papasolonou
University of Nicosia, Nicosia, Cyprus

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Further reading

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