The networked communications manager: a typology of managerial social media impression management tactics

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Abstract:

Purpose: The rise of social media has caused a shift in organizational practices, giving rise, in some cases, to genuinely "mediatized" organizations. With the present paper, we aim to explore how communications managers employ social media to influence their professional impressions.

Design: Analyzing a sample of 679 European communications professionals, we explore with factor and cluster analysis these emerging impression management tactics as well as how managers promote, involve, assist and reproach using social media.

Findings: We distinguish four patterns of online impression management: Self Promotion, Assistance Seeking, Peer Support and Authority. Because different professional duties may require different approaches to impression management, we furthermore cluster for managerial roles, showing that in the shaping of formal or informal online roles, communication professionals convey different impressions depending on their degree of online confidence and strategic purpose for using social media.

Originality: This contribution enriches the existing literature first by shedding light on impression management tactics used for social media within a professional context, concurrently exploring the effect of variables such as the extent and purpose of social media activity, the privacy concerns of managers and their roles within the organization. Second, it proposes a typology of social media impression management tailored to the reality of managers, with the aim of presenting a specific tool for understanding managerial self-communication through social media, classifying and predicting professional behaviors.

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1. Introduction: Social Media and the Organization

The Internet and social media have become increasingly important instruments for the management of social relationships in private, public and organizational settings (Walker, 2000; Gibbs et al., 2006; Lewis et al., 2008; Zhao et al., 2008). Social media are intensively used to communicate personal information on public profiles (Hewitt & Forte, 2006; DiMicco & Millen, 2007; Burcher, 2009), changing the notions and intended boundaries between privacy and publicity. In many cases, social networking sites can be thought of as a stages where a specific language is required and self-representative plays are permanently performed (cf. Goffman, 1979). Social media therefore create spaces for online self-expression and make the Internet a "playground" for the implementation of potential versions of oneself (cf. Ibarra, 1999).

In terms of the progressive construction of (digital) identities, it is worth noting how most research on this topic studies teenagers and university students (Peluchette & Karl, 2008; Ellison et al, 2007). For those who are, to a greater extent, still "measuring" potential self-concepts, online social interaction becomes specifically important as a space for self-expression (DiMicco & Millen, 2007; Manago, Graham, Greenfield & Salimkhan, 2008). However, because organizations that were not previously involved in digital communication are now converging to an increasingly mediatized status (Pallas & Fredrikson, 2011), the impression management practices of professional on social media should also be given attention.

Despite the nowadays predominant role of social media within professional communication, studies about the use of such tools remain somewhat rare (e.g. Verhoeven, Tench, Zerfass, Moreno & Verčič, 2012). The scope of this article is therefore to investigate and de-

velop a typology of online impression management tactics within communications. In this context, a reflection of the value that both work- and leisure-oriented social networks have on the expression of professionals is particularly important to us. Building on the data collected from a survey among more than 600 communication professionals, we wish to explore how their abilities and willingness to engage in impression management influence their use of the medium. As personal characteristics, levels of skills, and organizational variables such as formal and informal roles may also influence how social media are used for self-communication within a professional setting, we investigate those elements within the broader framework of the evolution of digital media.

The aim of this article is therefore to assess how communications managers use social media to manage their impressions among their audiences. To achieve this goal, we provide an overview of the elements that influence the online self-representational choices of managers, focusing in particular on their professional roles and on the techniques used to construct their online images.

2. Theoretical Context: Impression Management in Social Media

Both in "real life" and online, self-representation connects the idea of who we are to the outside world (Rosenfeld et al, 2002). Impression management techniques serve as a tool to enhance this connection because they are implemented with the purpose of shaping external perceptions into one's desired self (Jones & Pittman, 1982). Through impression management and the assistance of feedback from the recipients of their self-messages, individuals can explore their presented images and fine-tune the type of communications about themselves that they intend to project (Leary, 1995).

The desired impressions and presented images are deeply affected by a person's self-system (Gardner & Avolio, 1998; Sosik & Jung, 2003) and by the roles performed within his or her social life. Like in a theater (cf. Goffman, 1959), individuals mediate the "front-stage", i.e., the strategized message, with the "back-stage", i.e., the spontaneous, relationship-mediated communication. In a professional context, the "back-stage" is partly constructed on work-related identity dimensions, such as organizational identification (Gioia & al, 2000; Brown, 2006, Dutton & Dukerich, 1991), that intervene in the impression management process by confirming or reshaping self-concepts (Ashforth & Mael, 1989).

Impression management is often the key to successful communication with peers and colleagues. Particularly for managers, it can help charismatic leaders achieve an authentic self-representation (Gardner & Avolio, 1998), allowing them to increase their trustworthiness, credibility, moral worthiness, innovativeness, esteem and power (cf. Sosik & Jung, 2003). Self-monitoring, or the ability to compare the projected self- image with how individuals desire to be seen (Leary & Kowalski, 1990; Swann, 1987), is also helpful to predict the outcomes of one's impression management (Gangestad & Snyder, 2000; Jordon & Roloff, 1997) avoiding unwanted images at the same time (Turnley & Bolino, 2001).

If self-monitoring, however, helps in making sense of how we present ourselves, it only affects half of the process. In fact, how audiences react to a self-message can be difficult to predict and, consequently, can cause difficulties in adapting behaviors on unforeseeable external expectations (cf. DePaulo, 1992; Schlenker et al., 1986).

Social media offer some advantages to this perspective by "adding a layer of depth" to the impression management discourse (Ellison et al, 2006). In fact, fuelled by the desire to express themselves, to find a job or a potential partner, users use platforms such as Facebook to build the roles necessary to achieve their goals (Rosenberg & Egbert, 2011). By creating

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and maintaining a profile, users perform identities that can serve as a self-representation exercise in a controlled setting (Marwick, 2011); this further allows for a direct contact with relevant audiences (boyd & Ellison, 2007; Pempek et al, 2009). The immediacy of the feedback is enhanced, as well as the possibility of targeting a message to specific recipients.

Online profiles represent "a promise made to an imagined audience that (…) face-to-face interaction will take place with someone who does not differ fundamentally from the person represented by the profile" (Ellison et al, 2012). In fact while the medium offers plenty of opportunities to "*curate*" one's online identity (Mendelson & Papacharissi, 2010), the self-images that individuals sketch online are somewhat accurate pictures of their true personalities (Back et al, 2010; Gosling et al, 2011). In addition to that, online relationships that presume participants will meet offline, such as dating sites, or professional contacts on e.g. LinkedIn lead participants to be even more realistic in their self-presentation (Ellison et al, 2012 ; Sievers et al, 2015). Impression management techniques help compensate for the lack of the interpersonal communication elements (such as synchronicity, sensory cues and social norms) that are inherent to face-to-face interaction (Ellison et al, 2011; Mehdizadeh, 2010). The similarity between "real-life" and online identities, and the consequent applicability of similar tactics of self-communication, are also highlighted by the anonymousness of most social media (Zhao et al, 2008): when individuals are exposed through their real names and personal characteristics, the gap between the online and offline selves becomes significantly smaller (Gunkel, 2010).

The presence of social media in professional definitions, practices and activities (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010) has become sufficiently relevant to give rise to real "mediatized organizations" (Pallas & Friedriksson, 2011) even where no real involvement was previously encouraged. Given the high representational value of social media, it seems urgent to consider

the effects it could have on the self-communication of professionals, especially for those whose online presences are requested by the nature of their environments.

3. Methods: Deriving Impression Management Typologies

3.1 Procedures

We aim to explore how public relations professionals use social media to manage their impressions, and, consequently, focus on how digital self-expression techniques can be used to understand and predict how professionals behave online. To this end, we explore the impression management techniques carried out in online settings, focusing on whether the change of medium impacts how individuals decide to present themselves. As a second step, we build a typology of social media communicators, considering their behaviors, levels of confidence and concerns, and explore the roles that communications professionals are performing online. To close the circle, we will determine if and how impression management techniques are employed by each group of communications professionals.

In order to do so, we follow a quantitative approach, building our analysis on the data relative to a survey, circulated between November and December 2011. In the next section we will provide more details as to our method of data collection, our sample and its characteristics.

3.2 Sample and Measures

The sample underlying this research was recruited from the database of the European Association of Communications Directors, a professional association for managers working in the fields of marketing and public relations. For managers in marketing and communications, who are used to being, to a certain degree, a part of the messages that they transmit, social media has become a companion within and beyond their working hours. The consequent negotiation of boundaries and exposure seems particularly fitting with the concept of impression

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management. Furthermore, communication activities belong to those work engagements defined as "technology-intensive" within the literature, which are known to trigger constant work identity re-shaping processes (Korica & Molloy, 2010). For these reasons, we found the chosen sample as particularly interesting for the scope of the present study.

A total of 17 000 communicators and communications directors were invited to participate in an Internet-based survey. Within one month, a total of 1862 questionnaires had been collected, 679 of which were complete and deemed suitable for further analysis. The sample yielded a modest gender imbalance; women were slightly over-represented, with 369 female respondents relative to 310 male participants. However, relative homogeneity was reached in terms of age distribution, despite a prevalence of members in their forties and early fifties (Mean = 41.64, Mode = 50, SD = 9.021). This result is aligned with the professional nature of the sample, which exhibits a tendency towards more senior positions. The sample composition is summarized in Table 1.

TABLE 1 SAMPLE DESCRIPTION

4. Results

4.1 Techniques of Online Impression Management

Despite the support for self-coherence in online personal communications (Mehdizadeh, 201; Back et al, 2010), the passage from offline to digital interactions requires the adoption of skills that are necessary for the interpretation of sent and received messages. We therefore adapted existing impression management scales to achieve a better fit with the digital

context and the specific professional realm of the sample, which is centered on marketing and communications.

The scale developed in this study is based on an adaption of the Bolino and Turnley (1999) impression management scale, which is focused on the five components of self-promotion, ingratiation, exemplification, intimidation and supplication, and the validation of the taxonomy of impression management efforts in an organizational setting proposed by Jones and Pittman (1982). In terms of impression management analysis, scales frequently focus on behavioral elements within the self-representation of individuals: some authors have proposed behaviors such as blasting and basking, apologies and excuses, and ingratiation within organizational settings (Andrews & Kacmar, 2001; Cialdini & Richardson, 1980). The completeness of the Bolino and Turnley scale, as well as the recent assessments of its factor structure, the reliability of its subscales and their convergent and discriminant validities (Kacmar, Harris, & Nagy, 2007) make it particularly fitting for our purpose of estimating strategic external projections of self-images.

The exploration of self-representation techniques as employed by managers while interacting online begins with a factor analysis of the data collected from the survey. The employed method was principal component analysis, including a Varimax rotation. The applicability of exploratory factor analysis was ascertained for the chosen sample through a Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin test, with a result of .919 (Approx. Chi-Square 6643.669); Bartlett's Test of Sphericity, (df 231) Sig.= .000). The preliminary principal component analysis includes 22 variables that loaded on four factors. By only including the construct scores above .6, we obtain four components. To confirm the reliability of the measurement instrument, we calculated the Cronbach's alpha coefficient for each factor, which proved to be above the threshold for all factors. The 17 items remaining in the analysis comprise a scale for professional impres-

sion management in social media and their final rotated factor loadings are summarized in Table 2. The four factors explain 61.3% of the total variance.

<p style="text-align:center">T<small>ABLE</small> 2 F<small>ACTOR</small> S<small>OLUTION AND</small> L<small>OADINGS</small> – I<small>MPRESSION</small> M<small>ANAGEMENT</small></p>

Five items had to be rejected because their factor loadings and extraction values were below the considered threshold. The remaining four factors can be summarized as follows.

4.1.1. Self Promotion

The first factor, which we termed *Self Promotion*, combines two types of elements: the first relates to the transmission of an idea of professional efficiency ("Stressing your professionalism and that of your company", "Highlighting how dedicated you are to your work", "Showing others how hard-working you and your organization are", "Stressing your willingness to make an extra effort in order to achieve results"). The second, instead, stresses the personal traits leading to success in the workplace ("Talking about your personal success or that of your organization", "Mentioning your virtues and positive traits", "Talking about your participation in group achievements"). The first set of elements completely matches the "Exemplification" dimension of the traditional Bolino and Turnley scale; the second set better relates to their "Self Promotion" sub-scale. The interesting overlap of personal and professional aspects (expressed through the association of personal virtues and group achievements) can be interpreted considering social media as a space in which different self-dimensions can, simultaneously, find a place for expression. The use of social media for self promotion is perhaps the most intuitive: by managing their profiles, managers can make decisions on their appearance, messages and audiences, making self-promotional communication largely customizable according to the desired projected image.

4.1.2. Assistance Seeking

The second factor was termed *Assistance Seeking* because it has a relatively univocal interpretation: in fact, it unifies the constructs of assistance and information seeking through strategic relationships with others ("Pointing out the limits of your knowledge so that others will help you", "Avoiding being intimidating while sharing your knowledge with others", "Showing vulnerability in order to obtain people's assistance or sympathy", "Asking directly for assistance"). All these elements match the "Supplication" sub-scale of Bolino and Turnley. A possible interpretation related to this factor, given the sample and specific application, pertains to the necessity of remaining up-to-date. Managing connections and modes of relation is therefore instrumental for the acquisition of knowledge. Social media is a fertile ground for assistance seeking because it fosters informal, cross-divisional communication, which can allow individuals to find knowledgeable colleagues beyond their usual advice-seeking paths.

4.1.3. Peer Support

The items included in the third factor, which we termed *Peer Support,* are even more significantly oriented towards peers and colleagues. This factor addresses the relational side of impression management techniques, stressing the predominance of teamwork and the necessity of attending to the needs of both internal and external organizational stakeholders. This factor almost perfectly matches the "Ingratiation" sub-scale of the Bolino-Turnley impression management scales. The score for the fourth variable ("Looking for business opportunities and actively involving people") is, however, too low to be considered. This is perhaps explained by the choice of the sample: strategic decision-making is rarely performed by communicators outside of their field, and business opportunities could therefore have been perceived by our sample as something relatively beyond their experience. Using social media for peer support is similar to using it for assistance seeking, therefore suggesting that it is an

alternative "horizontal" tool for the provision of help outside of standard office-bound rela-
tionships.

4.1.4. Authority

The last factor, which we termed *Authority*, stresses the more authoritative side of
leadership and most of its elements match the Bolino-Turnley "Intimidation" sub-scale ("Ad-
dressing people who limit your ability to get the job done", "Showing your annoyance when
someone pushes you too far" and "Sanctioning contacts who behave inappropriately"). The
fourth construct ("Underplaying your knowledge to avoid unpleasant assignments") matches
"Supplication" in the original scale: within the factor, it can be connected to the other varia-
bles assuming authority to be a role-defining activity for communicators. The creation of
boundaries, both by sanctioning unwanted behaviors or by avoiding unwanted tasks, helps in
projecting a certain professional image to the outside, and can therefore be employed strategi-
cally. The presence of personal as well as professional elements within social-media-based
profiles can help in the establishment of authority as a broader concept that includes informal
elements and allows for the communication of dimensions that could be underestimated in
"real life".

4.2 Informal Managerial Social Media Usage Roles

To expand on our exploration of impression management through social media, we as-
sumed that managerial roles, especially informal ones, had to be included within the picture to
better understand the dynamics occurring between offline and online self-representation. We
proceeded by taking the version of the established Mintzberg (1973) managerial roles scale
updated by Beaudry and Pinsonneault (2010). Then, our objective was to find social media
usage-based subgroups within the sample, starting from these managerial social media usage
roles. We employed Ward's (1963) method to establish a number of clusters, resulting in a
four-group solution. To confirm our solution, we performed a discriminant analysis on the

clusters: all three discriminant functions proved to have sufficient eigenvalues, and the analysis of residual Wilks' Lambda proved that all variables remain significant for the separation of the groups, thereby stressing the applicability of a four-cluster solution.

The discriminant analysis suggests that the *Figure Head* role has the largest discriminant meaning (weighted sum of discrimination coefficients = 1.35), followed by the *Negotiation* (sum = 1.26) and *Informational* (sum = 1.12) roles. The fourth role, *Resource Allocation*, is relatively less meaningful for the separation of the clusters (sum = 0.8). The clusters are described in detail below, after the summary of the cluster characteristics depicted in table 3.

TABLE 3 CLUSTER DESCRIPTIONS

4.2.1. Cluster (1) - Professional Networkers

The first cluster, denoting *Professional Networkers*, includes approximately 27% of the sample, features an average age of slightly over 45, and is characterized, in contrast to the overall sample, by an almost equal representation of males (50.3%) and females (49.7%).

The individuals belonging to this cluster exhibit a distinctive social media usage pattern that is characterized by the highest confidence level in professional social network use within the sample. Professional Networkers differ from the rest of the sample in terms of the purpose for which they use social media. On average, they rank the highest for usage with the objectives of career advancement and information acquisition. Social media are also used rather frequently for keeping in touch with friends and family; however, the distance from the mean of this score is not as dramatic as that for the other indicators. This suggests that 'Professional Networkers' might be more interested, or simply more involved, in using social media for professional rather than for personal purposes. When trying to paint a precise picture

of 'Professional Networkers', it is crucial to stress the audience whom they address with their professional online presence: their profiles are mostly geared towards clients and customers, followed by the general public. 'Professional Networkers' are also the most involved in social networking with NGOs and politicians.

4.2.2. Cluster (2) - Social Media Pragmatists

Individuals who can be described as *Social Media Pragmatists* represent the third largest group, including approximately 26% of the sample. Its gender representation mirrors the general predominance of females (59.5%) over males (40.5%) within the sample; similarly to the first cluster, the average age is approximately 45. In terms of informal roles, this factor is characterized by the strong presence of information gathering. The lower means for all other roles suggests a more technical profile for these individuals and a more pragmatic use of social media to gather intelligence on the organization's stakeholder environment.

This second cluster is therefore characterized by a more pragmatic social media usage pattern than the first cluster. In comparison with the first group of communicators, members of cluster 2 show a lower confidence in their professional social media usage and more recent involvement in professional digital communication. Furthermore, when asked about their privacy concerns, they report the highest levels of the sample, particularly in regard to the theft and third-party misuse of work related data, which suggests a social media usage pattern characterized by high risk awareness. Interesting in this context is the audience to which the profiles of 'Pragmatics' are geared: they address an internal network composed of their peers and colleagues more than customers and the general public. Presumably, in this more protected environment, 'Pragmatists' are more comfortable in representing themselves.

4.2.3. Cluster (3) - Social Media Skeptics

The third cluster is made up of *Social Media Skeptics*, the smallest group within the sample, representing approximately 13% of the participants. The demographic characteristics

of this cluster are slightly different from the others, with a higher average age (approximately 48), and a majority of males (53.8%) over females (46.2%). Here, the informational role seems to define the cluster the least, indicating that these individuals might not be managing the organization-stakeholder interface.

The social media usage in this cluster is determined by member characteristics: 'Social Media Skeptics' appear to have particularly low levels of confidence in professional social media use, leading them to rank as the least confident within the entire sample. At the same time, all indicators of privacy concerns rank only slightly above the overall average, signifying usage that may be more limited by the individuals' perception of their own skills than by external concerns. A relatively "conservative" use of social networks can also be connected to the 'Skeptics', who have used social media for the least amount of time within the sample and report the lowest number of social networking sites compared to other clusters. Interestingly, the profiles of the 'Skeptics' seem to be mostly oriented towards the general public, which might exacerbate the feeling of perceived unease in light of their recent and somewhat insecure use of social media.

4.2.4. Cluster (4) - Sociable Networkers

The fourth cluster includes *Sociable Networkers*, the largest of the four clusters, accounting for approximately 34% of the sample. In terms of demographics, it scores similarly to cluster 2 with an average age of 46 and a slight overrepresentation of females (56%) compared to males (44%). This cluster is characterized by a role profile that leans towards figurehead activities and representing the organization to the outside. If we consider this combination, we can assume that members might be in positions requiring constant exchanges of ideas with numerous stakeholders; this makes the collection and circulation of information through social media advantageous.

The individuals in the 'Sociable Networkers' cluster are characterized by a high degree of confidence in their professional social media activity and by the widest network of contacts within the sample. Privacy concerns score lower than average for all indicators and the length of professional social media use is higher than average, although slightly less than in cluster 1. Whereas 'Professional Networkers' stress the work-related nature of their online activities, 'Sociable Networkers' tend to use social media as a reprieve from their working lives instead. They score higher than any other cluster in using social networks with the purposes of "keeping in touch with friends and family" and "maintaining a social life outside of work". Overall, the clusters tend to be significantly defined by the social media usage patterns of their members. In fact, the degree of confidence of individuals, as well as their scopes in usage purposes and concerns, seems to determine four significantly different profiles for communications managers as illustrated in the figure below. Our next step, documented in the following section, will be to link the typologies of managers with the impression management techniques that they employ. To do this, we explored the differing online self-representations and applications of the depicted profiles.

FIGURE 1: USE OF DIGITAL MEDIA PER CLUSTER, COMPARED TO SAMPLE AVERAGE

4.3. Types of Managers and Impression Management

Having uncovered the four usage-based profiles within the sample and the impression management techniques they apply in social media interactions, a comparison of these two measures can help in further defining whether, and how, managers strategically represent themselves on social media. The results can be found in the table below.

TABLE 4 MEAN COMPARISON OF IMPRESSION MANAGEMENT TECHNIQUES PER CLUSTER

Given the different relationship that each cluster seems to have with social media, it is not very surprising that individuals belonging to one group could employ impression management techniques differently from the others. Considering each tactic separately, the following can be observed:

Self-Promotion, assumed to be one of the main features of social media-based interaction, works very differently for managers in different groups: whereas the two Networkers score positive averages, Pragmatists and Skeptics report significantly negative scores. As counterintuitive as this is given the self-centered nature of online communication, there is coherence between use of Self-Promotion and the reported levels of confidence and privacy concerns. In fact, the clusters with the highest level of discomfort with web-based interaction seem to be the worst Self-Promoters, most likely due to their risk-averseness. On the other hand, the clusters showing higher levels of confidence in social media use also seem to be employing the medium for their own promotion. This can be due to the larger perceived advantages of digital exposure.

There are also remarkable differences in **Assistance Seeking** among the various clusters: the only cluster reporting a positive average is the Professional Networkers, with the others reporting neutral (Sociable Networkers and Social Media Pragmatists) or very negative (Social Media Skeptics) values. This can also be motivated by the characteristics of the sample: individuals who find social media advantageous for their professional lives more than for their personal lives might recognize the search for support as something familiar within their working life. Those who use social media as another way to engage in conversation with

friends and family, such as the Sociable Networkers and, to a lesser extent, the Social Media Skeptics, might use other means to obtain help and support.

In regard to **Peer Support**, once again, the two groups of Networkers exhibit similar behavior, possibly because of their longer experience with social media, which allows their online behaviors to be more oriented towards their networks. Social Media Pragmatists present a negative value, although not as dramatic as that of the Skeptics, who see the fewest advantages in Peer Support through social media within the sample. One possible interpretation of this difference again relates to the degree of trust in the network: individuals who perceive an advantage to social media participation might also find a larger incentive for giving back to their peers, whereas those who show uncertainty in online interactions may simply not see a good reason to support others.

Authority represents, overall, the most extreme case; among the four typologies, in fact, only Professional Networkers score positively, whereas the other clusters report neutral (Sociable Networkers) or negative (Social Media Pragmatics and Skeptics) averages. A possible explanation for this pertains to the type of professional engagement of the different groups. Professional Networkers, who are more defined by the Negotiation role than any other cluster, could find, through their interaction with clients and stakeholders, a motivation for having an authoritative appearance on social media. The neutral average of Sociable Networkers can also be connected with their type of social media usage: given the prevalence of their exposure in personal, rather than professional, settings, there is simply no need for them to represent themselves as authoritative.

5. Discussion and Conclusions

The aim of this paper was to explore how public relation professionals use impression management techniques to represent themselves on social media. In order to include the professional aspect of online interactions, we included a measure for managerial roles. The use of additional variables specific to the Internet allowed for the delineation of a more precise and multidimensional picture of what it means for managers to express themselves online.

The main result emerging from our research definitely concerns the four professional profiles characterizing our sample. PR professionals, in fact, characterized themselves as eager to interact with digital technologies for their career (Professional Networkers) or personal life (Sociable Networkers), other are instead either suspicious (Social Media Pragmatics) or plain hostile (Social Media Skeptics). Furthermore, the way in which individuals operate, interact and work with social media seems to better distinguish clusters than other demographic characteristics. PR professionals therefore seem to be better defined by their attitude towards social media than by their gender, age or level of education. This might be a signal that "digital immigrants" (Bennett et al, 2008) within a professional setting, when similarly involved in social media, behave similarly to younger audiences. It might also signal the reaction of a business where the role of digital communication has peaked: not everyone will participate in the change with equal enthusiasm. In more general terms, the identity consequences of the high relevance of "digital selves" are also quite striking: if, in fact, social media usage becomes predominant in self-definition over other factors (e.g., age, gender, work experience), this could signify the greater salience of online exposure compared to other personal identity-defining characteristics (Stets & Burke, 2003).

Another interesting point of discussion concerns the differences in impression management techniques and typologies based on the four profiles. The two groups most at ease

with the use of social media, i.e. the two Networkers, are those implementing the most techniques. Professional Networkers employ the full array of techniques (with a peak in Authority), whereas Sociable Networkers score higher for the techniques that suggest the projection of a self-message (i.e., Self-Promotion) or of assistance (i.e., Peer Support), confirming their peer-oriented nature. In regard to Social Media Pragmatists and Skeptics, the situation appears very different. In fact whereas the former group has neutral scores for Assistance Seeking, proving some interest in social media-based exchanges, the latter group scores negatively for all impression management techniques, confirming a skeptical and conservative use of online communications that is apparently devoid of any advantage in strategic self-expression.

The connection between individuals' use of social media and their employment of impression management techniques does not seem surprising. In fact, the employment of different impressions in order to project a specific identity requires a degree of confidence and trust in the medium, which in this case is easy to connect with a more engaged presence on social media. It therefore follows that the two clusters (Professional and Sociable Networkers) who seem more interested, and consequently more successful, in tailoring their behaviors and appearances (Bolino, 1999) are those who use a wider range of impression management techniques. They might also do so because they are the ones who better see the advantages, rather than the risks, of the specific engagement with the online audiences (Schlenker et al., 1986).

This finding is coherent with the perspective of "*digital profile as a promise*" introduced by Ellison, Hancock and Toma (2012): when individuals see in social network sites opportunities that extend beyond simple online interaction, they invest in such self-communications, making their online identities truly representative. In this sense, the lack of trust in the medium could represent a barrier to the creation of digital identities and the formulation of online impression management techniques. If users are concerned about putting their

data online, they will not have incentives to share details about themselves; also, they see no point in strategically representing themselves. This could be the expression of a need to set more stable boundaries between one's personal and professional identity, and deciding to only use social media to represent the latter. This is also a reason why further research should be conducted on professional digital identities: the affordances and motivations behind social media use might be entirely different from those of other samples.

Overall, we should always approach social media as a place where strategic self-communication occurs through different languages and mechanisms compared with what takes place offline. Being able to monitor oneself online, and hence to manage one's impressions (Bolino & Turnley, 2001), requires a knowledge of the medium and the establishment of the technical skills (Hargittai, 2010) that are necessary to understand how to read and interpret cues from the other members of the network (Ellison et al, 2007; Marwick, 2011).

This has important practical implications. First, the range of available impression management techniques states self-promotion as only one of the tactics that professionals put in place when expressing themselves on social media. Professionals reach out to others online to receive or provide support, and to express their role in the hierarchy. This introduces unsuspected potential in the possibility of blurring boundaries between personal and professional identities, as it can be beneficial to the achievement of the objectives behind self-presentation. Additionally, the inclusion of elements that belong to different personal spheres allows for the transmission of a depth of character (cf. Goffman, 1959) that is hardly possible offline. This can also help in giving adequate messages of Authority, as informal communication can help generate immediate feedback from the audience and correct possibly misplaced messages. All of the Impression Management techniques uncovered by our study have practical relevance because they draw attention to the "collective" dimension of social media. Es-

pecially considering the evolution of enterprise-based social media sites, the knowledge of how helpful the network might play an increasingly important role in future team management.

The main limitation of our research is the specificity of its field: the clusters emerging from our data are deeply rooted in the communication profession. Their replication in other fields might not yield similar results. However, the reliance of organizations on social media has risen dramatically in the last year, also in fields previously unengaged in technology. This might determine a rise in the importance of social-media-based impression management, as more and more professionals see the advantage of using digital communication as part of their career as well as their personal life. Being more aware in the uses of social media, and on its potential for impression management and self-expression might make professionals more confident online, giving them a further tool in the development of their careers balancing work with a personal life.

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TABLE 1 SAMPLE DESCRIPTION

Variable	Values	Percent
Gender	Female	54.4
	Male	45.6
Age	Under 30	8.6
	30–35	20.2
	36–40	17.4
	41–45	19.6
	46–50	17.6
	Over 50	16.5
Highest Academic Degree	Doctorate	4.6
	Master's	56.9
	Bachelor's	28.8
	No post-secondary academic degree	9.8
Position	Chief Communications Officer	41.6
	Head of Subunit	30.2
	Senior Team Member	7.5
	Junior Team Member	0.6
	Other	20.1
Individuals who are professionally "active" and "very active", per social media type	Blogs	26.5
	Social Networking Sites	45.7
	Microblogging	45.3
	Multimedia	36.3
	In-Office Social Networking Sites	13.2
	Professional Social Networking Sites	44.4
	Location-Based Social Networking Sites	5.5
	Virtual Worlds	1.6
	Online Forums	25
Professional length of social media use	Less than 1 year	10.7
	1 to 2 years	29.6
	2 to 3 years	25.6
	3 to 4 years	15.5
	More than 4 years	18.6

<u>TABLE2 FACTOR SOLUTION AND LOADINGS – IMPRESSION MANAGEMENT</u>

Factor	Item Text	Loading	
1	**Self Promotion** (α = .886)		Eigenvalue:
	Stressing your professionalism and that of your company.	.814	
	Highlighting how dedicated you are to your work.	.778	8.989
	Showing others how hard-working you and your company are.	.773	
	Talking about your personal success or that of your company.	.694	Variance
	Mentioning your virtues and positive traits.	.656	explained:
	Talking about your participation in group achievements.	.653	40.86%
2	**Assistance Seeking** (α = .894)		Eigenvalue:
	Pointing out the limits of your knowledge so that others will help you.	.757	
	Avoiding being intimidating while sharing your knowledge with others.	.705	2.106
	Showing vulnerability in order to obtain people's assistance or sympathy.	.680	Variance
	Directly asking for assistance.	.625	explained: 9.6%
3	**Peer Support** (α = .833)		Eigenvalue: 1.284
	Complimenting people on their achievements.	.776	
	Trying to make others happy.	.754	Variance
	Paying attention to people's needs and concerns.	.728	explained: 5.84%
4	**Authority** (α = .792)		Eigenvalue: 1.092
	Addressing people who limit your ability to get the job done.	.827	
	Showing your annoyance when someone pushes you too far.	.790	Variance
	Underplaying your knowledge to avoid unpleasant assignments.	.652.	explained: 4.97%
	Sanctioning contacts who behave inappropriately.	.652	

TABLE 3 CLUSTER DESCRIPTIONS

	Cluster 1 - Professional Networkers 26.95%	Cluster 2 – Social Media Pragmatists 25.93%	Cluster 3 – Social Media Skeptics 13.22%	Cluster 4 – Sociable Networkers 33.90%	Sample Descriptive
Final Cluster Centers (via K-Means-Method)					
Negotiation (Mean)	1.068	-.225	-.360	-.516	
Figure Head (Mean)	.241	-1.016	-.236	.696	
Informational (Mean)	.0579	.520	-1.522	.192	
Resource Allocation (Mean)	-.172	-.200	-.381	.452	
Gender					
Male	50.30%	40.50%	53.80%	44.00%	45.66%
Female	49.70%	59.50%	46.20%	56.00%	54.34%
Age					
Lower than 30 (%)	9.90%	11.40%	10.50%	14.70%	11.53%
31 to 40 (%)	35.40%	34.80%	26.70%	33.80%	34.74%
41 to 50 (%)	37.90%	42.40%	36.00%	32.80%	37.23%
Over 51 (%)	15.50%	10.80%	23.30%	18.10%	16.51%
Social media Confidence and Usage					
Average confidence in using SM as a professional (5-point Likert scale)	4.156	3.723	3.303	4.145	3.91
Average number of online contacts (7-point Likert scale from "Less than 100" to "More than 401")	3.64	2.78	2.85	3.70	3.24
Purpose of social media use (Averages, 5-point Likert scales)					
To keep in touch with friends and family	4.07	4.04	3.45	4.12	3.96
To advance in my career	3.25	3.04	2.27	3.05	2.98
To acquire information I would not otherwise obtain	3.93	3.58	2.82	3.82	3.64
To maintain a social life outside of work	2.93	2.79	2.34	3.08	2.83
To provide a coherent image of myself as a person	2.77	2.53	2.18	2.72	2.59
To provide a coherent image of myself as a professional	3.07	2.84	2.27	3.13	2.9
Average length of use (Averages, 5-point Likert scale from "Less than 1 year" to "More than 4 years")					
Professional	3.31	2.99	2.62	3.13	3.08
Audiences of professional SM use (Averages, 5-point Likert scale)					
Internal	2.89	2.82	2.15	3.2	2.85
Clients and customers	3.88	2.75	2.06	1.77	3.37
NGOs	3.01	2.06	1.99	2.79	2.57
Politicians	2.62	1.77	1.93	2.34	2.23
General public	3.45	2.68	2.7	3.38	3.14
Privacy concerns (Averages, 5-point Likert scale)					
I am concerned that the work-related information I circulate through SM could be misused	2.59	2.78	2.9	2.64	2.71
When using SM, I worry about the possible theft of my personal data	2.74	3.05	2.98	2.79	2.86
I am concerned about submitting work-related information on the Internet because of what others might to with it	2.71	3.13	2.93	2.62	2.84

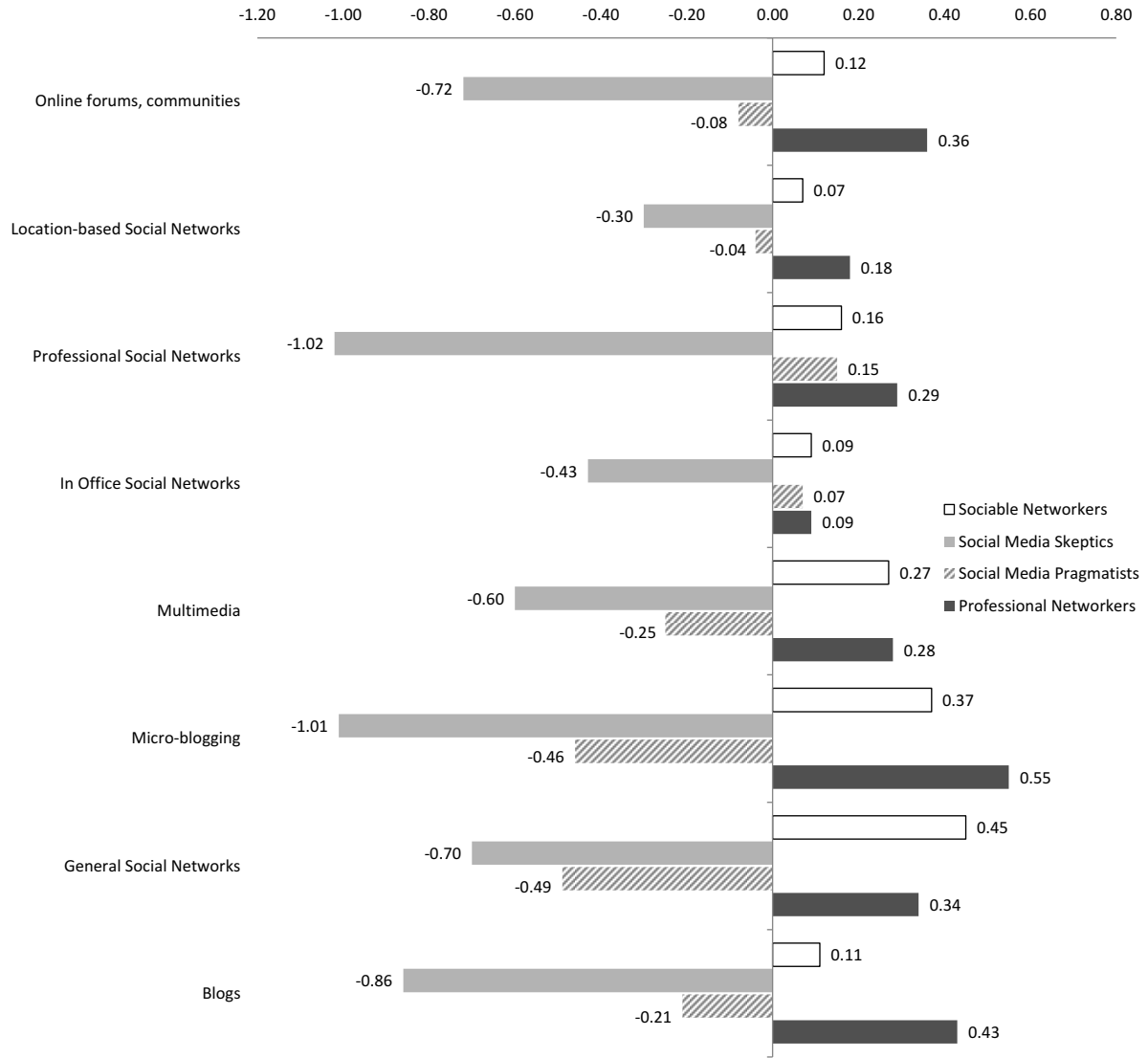# FIGURE 1: USE OF DIGITAL MEDIA PER CLUSTER, COMPARED TO SAMPLE AVERAGE

TABLE 4 MEAN COMPARISON OF IMPRESSION MANAGEMENT TECHNIQUES PER CLUSTER

	Self Promotion	Assistance Seeking	Peer Support	Authority
Professional Networkers	.2	.2	.2	.3
Social Media Pragmatists	-.3	.0	-.2	-.2
Social Media Skeptics	-.4	-.4	-.6	-.3
Sociable Networkers	.2	.0	.2	.0

Topic	Items
How frequently do you use social media for the following reasons?	Talking about your personal success, or that of your organisation.
	Making salient your virtues and positive traits.
	Talking about your participation in group achievements.
	Minimising bad news involving your organisation or team.
	Complimenting people on their achievements.
	Trying to make others happy.
Likert Scale 1= not at all, 5= very much	Looking for opportunities and actively involving people.
	Paying attention to people's needs and concerns.
	Showing others how hard-working you and your organisation are
	Stressing your professionalism, and that of your company.
	Highlighting how dedicated you are to your work.
	Stressing your willingness to make an extra effort in order to achieve results.
	Signalling thought leadership towards your contacts.
	Showing your annoyance when someone pushes you too far.
	Addressing people who limit your ability to get the job done.
	Sanctioning contacts who behave inappropriately.
	Trying to be a role-model for others.
	Avoiding being intimidating while sharing your knowledge with others.
	Showing vulnerability in order to achieve people's assistance or sympathy.
	Pointing out the limits of your knowledge so that others will help you.
	Asking directly for assistance.
	Underplaying your knowledge to avoid unpleasant assignments.
For what purposes do you use social media professionally?	To stay up-to-date with market trends.
	To collect information about your competitors.
	To stay up to date with your organisation's internal news.
	To communicate information to your colleagues.
Likert Scale from 1= Never – 5= very often	To stay in contact with other organisations in your sector.
	To share information about with your clients.
	To learn more about the salience of issues among your stakeholders.
	To delegate tasks.
	To organise appointments and meetings.
	To tap into the knowledge of your stakeholders.
	To engage in dialogue with stakeholders.
	To negotiate issues with stakeholders.

	To negotiate favourable outcomes for your organisation.
	To decide on possible courses of action.
	To provide information regarding the organisation to external individuals.
	To reply to information requests from people outside the organisation.
	To provide information regarding the organisation's products and services.
How active are you on the following social media applications? for Private use & Professional use: Likert Scale 1= not at all, 5= very much	Blogs
	Social networking sites (e.g. Facebook)
	Microblogging services (e.g. Twitter)
	Content networks (e.g. Youtube)
	In-office social networks (e.g. Yammer)
	Professional social networks (e.g. LinkedIn)
	Profiles (e.g. google profile, about.me)
	Location-based networks (e.g. foursquare)
	Virtual worlds, online gaming (e.g. MMORPG)
	Online forums, communities of interest
For what purposes are your online personae, profiles and identities helpful? Likert Scale from 1= Never – 5= very often	To keep in touch with my friends and family.
	To advance my career.
	To keep up with everybody else.
	To acquire information I wouldn't otherwise reach.
	To maintain a social life outside of work.
	To provide a fitting image of myself as a person.
	To provide a fitting image of myself as a professional.