

Corporate Image Management through Social Media: Literature Review of Research before and during the Covid-19 Pandemic

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Abstract

The continuity of a company's business processes that have a good image will have an impact on a good company reputation. This article attempts to provide a literature review on the role of information and communication technology in building corporate image through social media before and during the Covid-19 pandemic. During the pandemic, reputation is an asset that can help a company to get through any difficult times. In addition, reputation will add to the market value of a company. As an element of reputation, corporate image needs to be built so that it can be beneficial for the company and can increase market value, especially amidst the Covid-19 pandemic. The discussion about corporate image developed since Abratt (1989) and Nguyen & LeBlanc (1998) offered a new approach in corporate image management. The study conclude that in certain ways companies need various strategies in building their image including by using social media power to deliver positive information to publics.

Keywords: *Image; Corporate Image; Covid-19; Social Media*

INTRODUCTION

The concept of image or image is a concept debated by experts. Kotler defines an image as a collection of beliefs, opinions, and impressions that an individual has towards an object. Meanwhile, Cutlip considers the image to be a reproduction or imitation of people or goods and prefers to use the word reputation in public relations. Grunig himself never uses the word image because it contains many denotative meanings making it difficult to define, measure, and observe (Grunig, 1993). Doorley and Garcia took a middle path from the image and reputation debate by defining reputation as a collection of images consisting of performance and behavior and communication (Doorley & Garcia, 2007). Doorley and Garcia emphasized that the image of performance, behavior, and communication is a component of reputation.

Corporate image according to Jefkins is the image of an organization, so it's not just an image of its products and services (Syahputra, 2018). Veljkovic and Petrovic also said that corporate image is formed based on history, beliefs, business philosophy, technology, ownership structure, people in the company, as well as ethics and culture, and value systems (Shekari & Ghatari, 2013). However, those several definitions and

approaches to the image are not much different from those initiated by the preceding experts. Starting from the consumer side, namely the study of the correlation between image and people trusts toward the company, which must be able to present its image through several assets.

Tangible assets include quality, reliability, service, price, and the emotional meaning of the company. These assets are very close to the subjective taste of the company's stakeholder audience. Abratt (1989) in detail lists the notes of several experts who define more details about the image. Among them are that the company's image must be based on facts, the company's image still considers internal and external stakeholders, and the image continues according to company policy. In addition, another important note is that the company's image must be able to keep up with the development of the situation, including communication technology that takes place at any time.

That necessity faces a challenging situation since the Covid-19 pandemic outbreaks. Reported firstly in December 2019, the viruses then spread out until Indonesia's first detection in March 2020. The pandemic affected many aspects from politic, economic, social, security, until nation welfare in almost countries in the world. And corporation need to adapt with this situation to keep the corporate image against the pandemic. Refer to the previous discussions of image, it can be said that corporate image is the public's beliefs, ideas, and impressions of the company through knowledge and experience formed based on a history of trust, business philosophy, technology, ownership structure, internal company organs, and ethics and cultural systems. Therefore, the discussion in this article will lead to the improvement of information and communication technology which makes it easier for companies to reach the public, one of which is by utilizing social media and regarding corporate image management through social media.

METHOD

This article is a literature review of several studies and research that have focused their investigation on corporate image and social media as a part of the development of information and communication technology. Research collected in this review range from 2014 until 2022, including during the Covid-19 pandemic. In the discussion, the authors refer to corporate image management approaches by Abratt (1989) and refers to the conceptual framework for corporate image of Nguyen & LeBlanc (1998) to analyze the development of corporate image to a discussion about the use of social media in building corporate image before and during the pandemic. According to Machi & McEvoy (2022), a literature review aims to describe the analysis starting with determining the topics, collecting, and analyzing related scientific articles, and making conclusions about corporate image and social media use prior to and during the pandemic.

DISCUSSION

Values in Social Media

Social media is a communication medium that is made possible by the existence of an internet network that connects all devices around the world in a network. Social media is defined, among others, as follows:

“social media as a set of mobile and web-based platforms built on Web 2.0 technologies, and allowing users at the micro-, meso- and macro-levels to share and geo-tag user-generated content (images, text, audio, video, and games), to collaborate, and to build networks and communities, with the possibility of reaching and involving large audiences” (Ouiridi, et al, 2014).

Ouiridi, et al (2014) in Belgium, conducted a content analysis on 179 articles on the Web of Knowledge and took 23 samples of the academic explanation of social media. The results of the analysis concluded that social media is a set of network-based tools that are built on Web 2.0 technology, and enable users at the micro, meso, and macro levels to share content, collaborate, and build networks and communities, and enable to achieve and involve large audiences. In this analysis, it was found that the content shared can be in the form of images, text, audio, video, and games, which are self-created, and can mark the user's position geographically.

Then Carr and Hayes (2015) published an article that was previously disseminated at the National Communication Association meeting in Chicago, United States. In the article, social media is defined as:

"Social media are Internet-based channels that allow users to opportunistically interact and selectively self-present, either in real-time or asynchronously, with both broad and narrow audiences who derive value from user-generated content and the perception of interaction with others" (Carr & Hayes, 2015).

Carr and Hayes said that social media is an internet-based network that allows users to relate opportunistically and present themselves selectively, both in real-time and indirectly, with a broad audience and can derive value and perceptions from user-generated content. The definition by Ouiridi, et al. emphasizes the features contained in social media, namely creating content, collaborating, building networks and communities, and being able to tag people geographically. While definition of Carr and Hayes places more emphasis on the psychological aspects of its users, namely interaction, selective self-presentation, and perceptions with other people. Even though they highlight different aspects, the two definitions agree that social media allows content to be self-made and can reach a wide audience. In other words, the main key in social media includes at least selective self-presentation with self-generated content transmitted through channels that can reach a wide audience. For a company, these values can help in building the desired image. This is very likely to be practiced by

companies because social media can effectively be used as a tool to assist companies in shaping public perceptions and impressions. Therefore, further discussion is needed about strategies for building the corporate image through social media.

Management of Corporate Image through Social Media

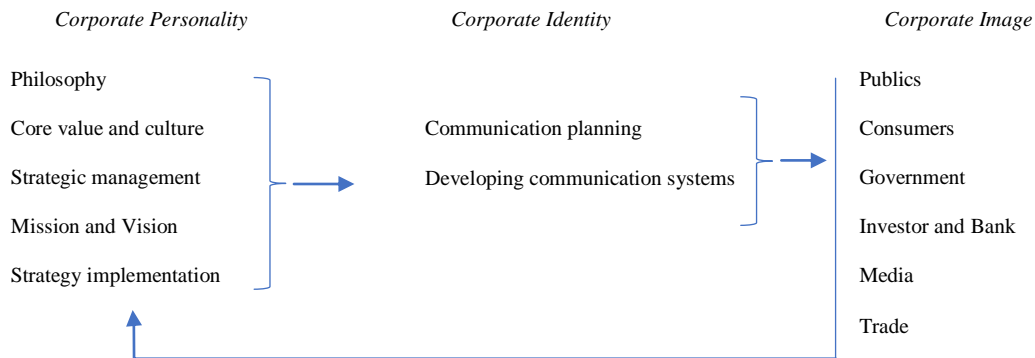


Figure 1. Corporate Image Management Process (Abratt, 1989).

Abratt (1989) offers the concept of corporate image management through three stages that tend to be oriented toward management science. As described in Figure 1, first, the company must have specific personal values that characterize it compared to other competitors. This value will usually appear based on company philosophy, strategic planning, to the implementation of company plans. This stage outlines the activities of the company, the objectives and purposes of the company, and the planning to achieve these goals. Second, there needs to be a formulation of corporate identity. This formulation includes the activity of reviewing the management system that has been running to see the impact on the company's image and, if necessary, the need for design modifications and the addition of certain activities that have a good impact on the company's image. Then in the third stage, the company observes the experiences of stakeholders on the management system that has been running. The image management concept developed almost ten years later. In 1998, Nguyen & LeBlanc developed the concept of image related to customer satisfaction. In their concept, in Figure 2, consumers are the main characters that need attention because they can assess the level of service and quality of the company, not just as agents of buying and selling transactions.

Nekmat, et al (2014) conducted an image management study published in various research journals, especially public relations, management, business, strategic communication, and communication journals. The research was conducted by content analysis of 261 research journals based on the criteria of research focus, application, country, methodology, theoretical application, or conceptual framework. The research results show that discussions about image are increasing in the literature for public relations. However, in this study, there is no specific organizational image management theory used, except for using Benoit's image improvement theory. The application of

Benoit's theory focuses more on managing image and reputation in crises and does not provide a good understanding of image management in steady organizational environments. Nekmat, et al also discovered that the theories and concepts associated to images used in various investigations are generally about process-positioned so the impression management papers in public relations is more directed toward rhetorical and descriptive analysis. Nonetheless, most of the studies conducted are normative and still plan goals and suggestions that are useful for organizations to improve image and reputation, but still lack a results-oriented approach to determine the influence of strategies used in image enhancement.

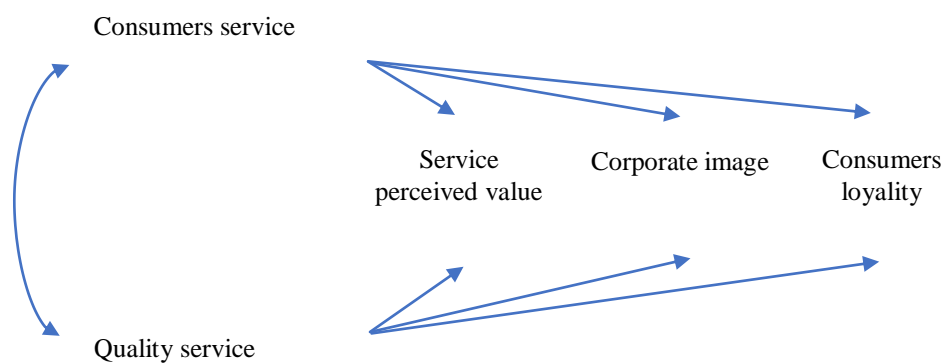


Figure 2. Corporate Image Conceptual Framework (Nguyen & LeBlanc, 1998).

Based on the findings of Nekmat et al., two recommendations are recommended for upcoming studies of organizational image management. First, research and image management theory need to think about determining organizational image as perceived by individuals as an outcome of the research. For this reason, image conceptualization and measurement need to be extrapolated from other fields, especially from organizational and corporate studies which have the highest awareness of outcome-dedicated image research. Second, recommendations for conducting studies in the online domain. Research by Nekmat, et al revealed that research on the image in public relations mostly focuses on how the internet is used as a one-way communication tool for corporations and groups to manage their image. Therefore, in the future, the phenomenon of online communication as a dynamic communication process capable of exerting social influence will further contribute to building individual perceptions of organizational image.

In addition, Iacob (2015) added that building a corporate image requires a long process and must be sustainable. The results of the management system that has been run and published through the media, advertisements, and relations with stakeholders will become a process of forming a corporate image. And at the same time, the company's image began to be seen and fostered public perception. Therefore, the image will be manifested at the individual level represented by the mind. Yin, et al (2015) in China examined how Chinese people cope with and interpret the ecological crisis from

the ConocoPhillips oil spill and ConocoPhillips' reaction to the impact of social media. In this case, of course, the Chinese people show criticism and anger through microblogs. The researchers organized a thematic analysis of 932 blog and microblog accounts about the ConocoPhillips oil spill case in China published on leading Chinese social media between June 2011 and February 2013. Research showed that the oil spill triggered uproar, anger, and criticism in the Chinese virtual communities. Most posts on the blog are concerned with discovering the causes and blame for oil spills. Most of the Chinese public attributes the crisis to legal errors and inaction on the part of Chinese government regulators towards ConocoPhillips, and the failure of its Chinese joint venture partner, China National Offshore Oil Corporation, to carry out its due responsibilities. In response to increasing online criticism, ConocoPhillips showed little interest in engaging with the Chinese public and pointed out the failure of the communication process through Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). The theoretical involvement of this research lies in combining CSR and Stakeholder theory with Discourse Power theory. The practical implication for multinational companies wishing to develop long-term business in developing countries, such as China, is that managers need to engage in reactive listening, actively participate in online discussions, and constantly monitor social media developments to be able to manage relations with the public. Companies experiencing a crisis will gain public emotional support by communicating emotionally charged messages via social media.

Rim & Song (2016) in the United States conducted an experimental study to determine the impact of negative consumer comments and how companies respond to them. 124 consumers participated in an experiment to understand consumer attitudes toward the Coca-Cola company. This research examines the effect of negative public mentions on social media and the best ways to respond to increase perceived altruistic motives for CSR while reducing negative perceptions caused by negative public comments. This study confirms that the comments made by virtual peers significantly affect how people associate messages and shape their attitudes. This study shows that when public statements are negative, two-sided CSR messages will be more effective in increasing altruistic motives for CSR, reducing negative perceptions in public comments, and eliciting favorable attitudes.

Interestingly, the partiality effect appears when public comments are positive. These findings demonstrate the potential for two-sided messages in persuasion, especially when dealing with public criticism or negative evaluations of CSR campaigns. Two-sided messages play an important role in reducing the negative perceptions induced by exposing people to the negative comments of their peers. The level of one's involvement in information processing can explain the interaction effect. That is, negative information is more likely to motivate individuals to evaluate information with greater attention than positive information, thereby increasing individual elaboration efforts. Two-sided messages that contain both positive and negative information require more cognitive resources than one-sided messages and,

therefore, result in better persuasion. These findings provide interesting insights into the way communications managers should deal with publicity on social media.

In another research, Amegbe, et al (2017), in Kenya, observed how companies build corporate images through social media advertising and studied consumer responses to social media advertising. Data collection was carried out using a survey method through a structured questionnaire to 512 students at the University of Nairobi who had worked and knew the meaning of the corporate image. Research shows that advertising on social media mediates the relationship between behavioral response and good corporate image. Furthermore, Amegbe, et al revealed that a positive consumer response to advertising on social media will lead to a good corporate image which will ultimately lead to company performance and competitiveness. Therefore, companies in Kenya need to take advantage of and learn the stages and processes of making messages on social media so that they are easily liked by consumers.

In the United States, Zaharopoulos and Kwok (2017) researched Organizational Impression Management (OIM) strategies carried out by law firms on Twitter. Their research compared the OIM strategies of successful law firms based on high financial performance with those of law firms with lower financial performance. The law firm is drawn from an annual list of the hundred highest-grossing law firms in America. Of the six law firms sampled, three law firms were taken from the top of the list, and three other law firms from the bottom of the list. The research was conducted using the text analysis method on nearly 10,000 tweets taken in March 2014 and backward to February 2009. This research examines OIM strategies which include optimism, confidence, activeness, realism, and commonality. The results of the study confirm previous research that firms with higher earnings communicate higher levels of optimism and confidence to the public, but the hypothesis test shows that this does not show statistical significance.

A statistically significant difference is seen in OIM's strategy of activity and realism which may be due to the housing crisis. Law firms appear to be using more action speech in 2011 than in 2014 to stimulate consumer engagement during tough economic times. This is indicated by aggressive language, name change, achievement, movement, and rejecting inertia. This study shows that firms with high reputations demonstrate a direct communication style, not employing a high level of “nonsense” style on conviction. These variables indicate persistence, tenacity, self-reference, and polish, and are associated with direct assertiveness in OIM's taxonomy. Successful firms also use attractive language and show group values which indicate high community, and high commonality is positively associated with financial performance. The results of this study can be used by practitioners to formulate Organizational Impression Management strategies on social media. Successful organizations display more messages of optimism and commonality and use a variety of OIM strategies to demonstrate positive qualities while reducing negatives.

Still in the United States, research by Greer & Ferguson (2017) studies how to promote corporate image through Instagram using Goffman's theory of self-

representation. The research was conducted by observing 4,300 Instagram content from 383 local television stations in the United States. This study wants to know the impression shown by television stations on Instagram uploads, the relationship between the screen (front) and behind the scenes (back-stage), and audience involvement through the number of likes and comments, as well as the number of television stations that express themselves in self-promotion and personality visually and with professional content. This research uses the content analysis method on Instagram uploads between October 2015 and January 2016. The uploads are coded based on Goffman's categories, namely in front of the screen and behind the scenes. The front of the screen or frontstage is defined as Instagram posts that focus on news and community. Behind-the-scenes or backstage is defined as uploads about promotions, lifestyle, behind-the-scenes, and general visualizations that are not related to the news.

Their research found that the impression shown in television stations' Instagram posts was more on news content and that more posts were coded as front-screen than behind-the-scenes. Audiences also like and comment more on uploads in front of the screen than behind the scenes. Television stations also do more self-promotion on Instagram compared to social media Pinterest. This research also shows that television stations with larger markets have more visual appearances on Instagram compared to television stations with medium and small market sizes. Smaller markets use more visual features associated with promotions. Larger markets show more visuals in the form of lifestyle, community, and news. on tv stations, the ideal image that should be displayed in lifestyle, community, and news. And those three types of content are preferred by audiences.

Nguyen and LeBlanc (2018) examine further the impact of collaborative production and delivery services on a company's reputation. The research found that the two services had a significant effect on the company's reputation. Therefore, service companies are advised to strengthen training programs to increase employee competency. The increase in competence is quite crucial to avoid mistakes and conflicts that have the potential to cause losses. Smith & Sissons (2019) in New Zealand examines linguistic strategies used for image restoration through apologies on social media, namely Facebook and Twitter. The urgency of the apology stems from the New Zealand Herald's mistake in identifying a photo of a New Zealand-born Israeli soldier shot in Gaza in 2014 as an American character. Using the Critical Discourse Analysis method, Smith & Sissons' research shows that online tools provide enormous opportunities for news dissemination and discussion of organizational misconduct that allows more damage to the New Zealand Herald's reputation. At the same time, the media deliberately uses social media to convey an apology for image restoration and paradigm improvement. The linguistic strategy used is the use of verbs that show regret which indicates apology. The New Zealand Herald also promised to conduct further investigations and ensure the process in the newsroom so that this does not happen again.

Corporate Image during the Covid-19 Pandemic

The Covid-19 outbreaks significantly affected many aspects including societal and economic. Manalu, et al. (2020) investigate the effect of the Micro Small Medium Enterprise (MSME) aspect during the pandemic in Central Java. Their research concludes that despite the decrease in sales, most MSMEs started to improve their product quality to cope with customer expectations. By doing so, the customers will see the image of the company is good and satisfied. Samosir, et al. (2021) investigate the brand identity of Garuda Indonesia Airlines through social media during the pandemic. They found that the company during Covid-19 needs to boost information quantity about traveling safely, promotions, interesting products, and advertising by engaging opinion leaders in social media.

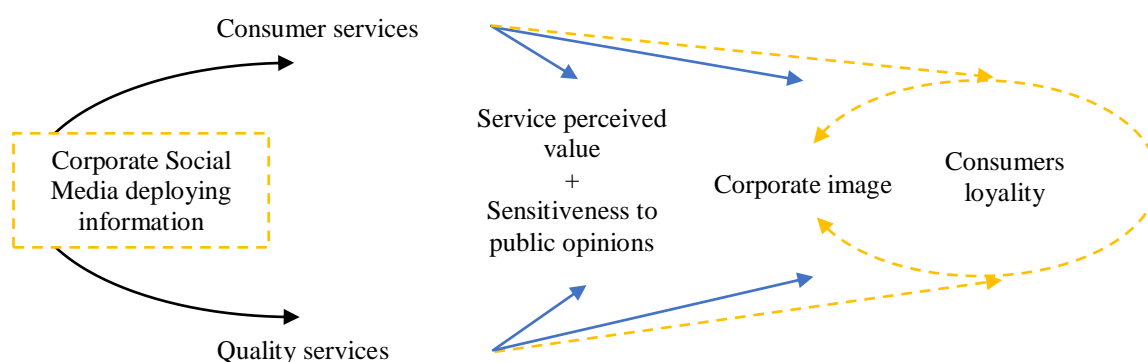


Figure 3. Author Imagination for Adapting Corporate Image Management through Social Media by Nguyen & LeBlanc (1998).

Further, this strategy will give an advantage to the company especially in building strong brand power. Specifically, in social media Twitter, Fahmi, Hartoyo, & Zulbainarni (2021) investigate the corporate image of the Indonesian mining industry through Twitter conversation. The mining industry sometimes becomes a trending topic on Twitter. They researched the conversation during ten days of its trending topic through Drone Emprit Academics tools. The findings are somehow interesting since they have less engagement from local communities, a lack of capability in handling negative opinions, and the lack of company sensitivity about issues spreading on social media. Savitri, et al. (2022) were also intensively study the role of social media marketing toward purchasing intention. They summed up that the more social media is used in marketing, it will positively increase the brand image and the purchasing intention. Hence, the use of social media along the Covid-19 pandemic, in a certain condition, will give the corporate a good and reliable image. It is applied if the corporate is sensitive enough to respond people's opinion on social media. Therefore, the author tried to imagine, in Figure 3, that during the Covid-19 pandemic corporate should take more attention to little detail of public opinion through sensitiveness action. This imagination is depicted since one opinion on social media can be a large snowball

if the corporate never considered it as important. Those are the two-sided consequences of using social media today in a corporation, it could become corporate image booster and the worse could deminish the corporate image in instant.

CONCLUSION

The study of corporate image develops following changes and advances in information and communication technology. The corporate image management concept approach offered in 1989 and 1998 was still relevant until 2019 when the world was familiar with internet technology and most of them had used social media. In 2014 research has begun to discover the significance of the benefits of social media in building a company's reputation. This is of course related to image management, especially in the aspect of corporate personality which includes the services provided by the company. Then from 2015 to 2016 companies are advised to be more responsive to comments, especially negative comments, and suggestions from social media audiences. This responsive attitude in social media has turned out to be an indicator of the corporate image as well as the corporate identity that influences audience perception. In 2017, companies have understood how to improve their reputation through advertising on social media. And therefore, companies with greater advertising capital tend to be able to display an image of optimism and trust in the audience, so that it can influence audience interest. And in 2018 and 2019, the company realized the need to evaluate the competency development of company employees to improve performance and corporate image while minimizing the occurrence of errors in disseminating information through the company's social media. As a result, if the development program of responsiveness and willness to consider every oipinion were accompished, along the Covid-19 pandemic, the corporate could maintain its image. Hence, it can be said that the management of corporate image cycle through social media using these two approaches remain relevant and can be developed according to company needs.

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