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THE PR PYRAMID AS MODEL FOR MANAGING ORGANIZATIONAL SOCIAL MEDIA PRESENCE?

Abstract

This paper explores social media as a new tool for Public Relations and also the implications of having a social media presence for organizations, confronting a literature review with empirical findings on emergent practices in organizations and exploring more particularly an example of best practices. Departing from the agreement shared by Public Relations academics and professionals on a profound shift in Public Relations as a consequence social media use, this paper intends to clarify 1) whether social media are tools that redefine PR practices or a contextual factor that redefines the role of Public Relations within organizational communication; and 2) which are the implications for organizations of deciding to manage a social media presence based on an exploratory and trial-and-error logic, vis-à-vis the implementation of concrete strategies.

The paper presents an exploratory study that identifies a relevant case study: TAP Portugal, the Portuguese airline company. This organization is present on different social media and found its own strategy for successfully managing such presence. Based on this example, we propose a model for managing organizational social media presence – the PR Pyramid – that articulates a combined structure involving Public Relations, Marketing and Customer Care. In times of crises, the Public Relations assume a pivotal role as the orchestrator of integrated communication.

Keywords: public relations; social media; organizational communication; integrated communication; crisis communication

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

SOCIAL MEDIA AS PR TOOLS OR CONTEXT FOR PR PRACTICES

Digital technologies have become pervasive and ubiquitous in contemporary daily life. Social media in particular have been exponentially growing both in users and diversity in increasingly shorter periods. In addition, social media, which were primarily devoted to communication and sharing within one's personal networks of relationships, are currently also *locus* of professional interactions.

Addressing the social changes related to the integration of social media in daily life needs to be contextualized in the more profound discussion about the relationship between technological development and social change, which can be summarized in three main perspectives (e.g. Ihde, 1990; Fuglsang, 2001): a) technological determinism, that claims that technological features and affordances shape use practices, thus having strong social impact; b) social constructivism, arguing that, on the contrary, users appropriate technologies and put them to use in function of their needs, goals or desires; and c) interactionism, that tries to synthesize the previous opposite views by considering that use practices and consequences result from a dynamic and ongoing mutual shaping between technology and human agency. Other contributions for addressing this phenomenon come from sociology: macro-sociological theories such as Gidden's structuration theory (1991), Bauman's liquefaction concept (2000) and Castells' network society theory (2005) understand social change as a result of the interaction between digital technologies and users.

Within Public Relations, most authors have been more focused on the particular and concrete changes that the social media as alternative or complementary communication tools have introduced in the daily practices and tasks of the PR professional. Literature abounds on specific strategies and practices for concrete social media such as the most used Facebook (e.g. Levy, 2010; CIPR, 2012) and also Twitter (e.g. Israel, 2009; Micek, Micek & Whitlock, 2009) or YouTube (e.g. Evans, 2010; Scott, 2010). Other contributions approach social media in general but are equally focused on their conceptualization as tools whose specificities require whether adaptations of the most common PR practices such as press releases, media kits or publicizing, whether brand new practices such as 24/7/365 availability or mastering editing and publishing software (e.g. Bratton & Evans, 2008; Hay, 2009; Brogan, 2010; Halligan & Shah, 2010; Wilcox & Cameron, 2010). Somerville, Gilham & Wood (2007) add that

PR practitioners tend to feel powerless in what regards social media in the sense that they are forced to adjust their professional practices in order to adapt to the technological requirements of these fast changing media, and also to the practices and preferences of their users. In fact, the concepts of public and of stakeholder are also changing, as digital users tend to be more active and more demanding in what concerns their communication with organizations (e.g. Tapscott & Williams, 2006; Castells, 2009).

Contiguous scientific fields such as Marketing, Organizational Communication and Organizational Theory present broader perspectives on the effects of social media on communication, organizations and society in general. More recently, these broader approaches can also be found among public relations' academics. The main consequences of the proliferation of social media identified within these broader approaches are the increasing complexity of organizations themselves and their context (e.g. Davis, 2009; Cornelissen, 2011), as well as the blurring of boundaries between the organizations and their exterior (e.g. Miller, 2009; Cheney, Christensen, Zorn & Ganesh, 2011). Davis (2009) highlights the increase of information circulating in digital networks, resulting in organizations having to struggle to get their stakeholders' attention in an environment cluttered with messages and stimuli. The possibilities of empowerment that social media provide to their users, who are becoming *prosumers* (Castells, 2005; Tapscott & Williams, 2006) or producers (Bruns, 2008) able to mass self-communicate their own contents (Castells, 2009), are one side of the coin, meaning that the other side is a severe loss of control of the organizations over their communications. This loss of control is considered by many scholars and practitioners as the main problem that social media poses to organizations and to PR professionals in particular (e.g. Postman, 2008; Scott, 2010).

This argument is the main grounding for authors who, following Grunig & Hunt (1984), relate social media and a change from the traditional asymmetric models of public relations to more symmetric practices and models (e.g. Kunsch, 2003; Solis & Breakenridge, 2009; Scott, 2010; Macnamara & Zerfass, 2012). Although the Public Relations practices of many organizations still rely on asymmetric and linear communication models and processes such as creating and publicizing information (e.g. press releases, press conferences, advertising campaigns, sponsored actions), without considering feedback or the relevance of this information to its publics, and these asymmetric communication models are appealing to organizations because they seem to enable them to control the messages publicized through the mass communication media (i.e. press, radio

and television), they are no longer suitable to emergent communication practices enabled by interactivity of social media. Thus, the changes in power balance between organizations and their publics are in fact brought about by the nature of online communication itself, which is horizontal, immediate, interactive, participative and engaging (Kelleher, 2009).

This change is affecting all sorts of organizational publics and even creating new publics and influencers. For instance, journalists question more the accuracy of press releases, and the internet and social media provide them the tools to thoroughly scrutinize the information publicized by the organizations. The linear model of communication invites communication and PR agencies to publicize press releases to the mass media without pondering if the information they are sending is relevant to them. According to a survey conducted in 2008 by Brazilian journalists for the association *Mega Brasil Communication* and *Comunique-se* website (a news website dedicated to media professionals) (Rossi & Azevedo, 2008) the vast majority of journalists think that the press releases that reach them: have little relevant information; are misspelled; are too long; and sound like they were written by lawyers. The most important new organizational public is consumers. Traditionally, direct communication with consumers was within the scope of Marketing, but consumers are increasingly engaging in non-promotional communication with organizations, such as corporate communication, recommendations and customer care. As these types of communication affect reputation, they are often managed by Public Relations. Another example of an emerging digital public is bloggers and reviewers, a new type of influencers in whom consumers trust more than in direct communication with organizations (Qualman, 2009).

Facing these changes, organizations have realized that they must change. Organizational communication is no longer linear and top-down but it requires more participatory and enabling communicative flows. This change in mind-set encompasses not only communication with the mass media, but also with other media and with internal stakeholders. Thus, the technological characteristics of social media as tools and their increasing pervasiveness and ubiquity as contextual features of our daily lives require more symmetry in Public Relations and Organizational Communication in general. However, others (Edwards & Hodges, 2011) point to the fact that organizations are collecting massive amounts of information about their clients (and other stakeholders) through social media – the so called big data – thus arguing that this should be taken into account when considering the power balance between organizations and clients. The more particularized

approaches (e.g. Breakenridge, 2012; Theaker & Yaxley, 2012) focused on the adaptations required in Public Relations practices and also on the emergence of new practices, both according to social media technological features and usage patterns, which although apparently innovative, do not represent a paradigmatic change in the nature of Public Relations.

Miller (2009), arguing that Public Relations are assuming a preponderant role in organizational communication due to the fact that social media are related to more frequent communication crises (Coombs, 2012), is no longer focused solely on Public Relations themselves but on their relationship with other types of organizational communication. Cornelissen (2009) also suggests that the blurring of boundaries between organizations and stakeholders results in the same blurring between Marketing, Public Relations and Internal Communication, contributing to the widening of functions of each and also the overlapping among them. These observations are the departure point to a reflection on the changes in the nature of public relations, besides its concrete professional practices, brought about by social media.

Broader approaches that conceptualize social media not as tools but as contextual and structuring features of contemporary society offer more grounding to the notion that Public Relations are undergoing a paradigmatic change, both as a professional area and as an academic field. Li and Bernoff (2008) suggest the term 'groundswell' to describe the exponential growth of both the number of users and the scope and depth of effects of the social media. Also, Qualman (2009) highlights that social media are not a fad, and therefore it is unavoidable for organizations to deal with social media as a structuring feature of their environment and of themselves. Tapscott and Williams (2010) claim that we are living in a macrowikinomics, as the effects of social media are felt not only in economy but in all spheres of society.

Concerning Organizational Communication, several authors emphasize the need for greater coherence and consistency in communications, required by the increasingly information-cluttered environment and by the multiplicity and complexity of the communication channels available for organizations, including social media. The concept of Integrated Communication has been suggested to describe the coordination and articulations between traditionally different organizational departments and/or functions, such as Marketing, Communication and Public Relations, which often communicate the same issues (or different aspects of the same issues) and share the same targets. This increasing need for consistency is grounded on the assumption that multiple and diversified yet coherent ways

of communicating will result in a more consolidated organizational image and reputation.

Cheney et al. (2011) describe integrated communication as follows:

(...)‘integrated communication’ is the notion that organizations, in order to establish their presence and legitimacy in the marketplace, must communicate *consistently* across different audiences and different media. By coordinating and aligning all messages from the organization (including visions, strategies, and identity themes), organizations pursuing integrated communication hope to create a unified impression of what the organization is and what it stands for. (Cheney et al., 2011, p. 126).

Kunsch (2003) argues that a new organizational communication mix is needed in order to incorporate, in an integrated manner, new communication tools and practices. The author highlights the role of Public Relations in Organizational Communication arguing that this new communication mix should be strategically integrated and interactive although centred in Public Relations in order to promote mutual benefits for the organization, its different stakeholders, the public opinion and the society in general. Kunsch describes Integrated Communication as a “ philosophy that drives the convergence of different areas and enables synergetic action” (Kunsch, 2003, p. 150), adding that “corporate communication, marketing, public relations and internal communication are joined in an organizational communication mix” (Kunsch, 2003, p. 150).

Breakenridge’s (2008) concept of PR 2.0, although apparently focused on the impact of the technological features of social media on Public Relations practices, is presented as a shift in the mind-set of the PR professional rather than in the professional practices. In addition, this shift in mind-set is precisely from an asymmetric relationship with the stakeholders to a more symmetric interaction, from publicizing to conversation.

Having confronted these two perspectives present in the literature – one more focused on technological features and PR practices, the other more focused on contextual factors and PR conceptualization – our empirical study aims to identify which of them is more often found among Portuguese organizations present in social media.

PR FUNCTIONS IN SOCIAL MEDIA

The early work on social media and Organizational Communication reports on an initial exploratory approach by organizations, whose main

drivers of adoption were mimicking the competition, trying to communicate with clients with the tools they were already using, and a general sense of 'not lagging behind' (e.g. Li & Bernoff, 2008; Postman, 2008; Qualman, 2009). This exploratory approach followed, in most cases, a trial-and-error logic, and was not based on a full comprehension of the technological features, use patterns and implications of social media.

At this stage, several authors suggested different uses for social media and inherent benefits both for organizations and customers. Tapscott and Williams (2008) highlight collaboration, regarding customers and potential customers as an unexplored resource for organizations that could be applied to innovation, promotion and even labour. Thus, social media are considered the ideal tool for crowdsourcing. Another perspective is presented by Li and Bernoff (2008) and Qualman (2009) both arguing that the main use of social media is for Marketing. These authors emphasize the potential of social media for promotion, branding and reputation. Qualman (2009) talks about a shift from word-of-mouth to world-of-mouth, referring to the exponential ability of viral spreading of information on social media. The author adds that the return on investment for social media remains active for over five years when directed to brand reputation. Branding and reputation management are also referred by Newlin (2009), who suggests the concept of 'passion brand' to describe the state of becoming a fan of a brand. When a customer has become fan of a brand, it means that he will not only promote and recommend it, but also try to 'evangelize' others into buying it and becoming fans themselves. In addition, social media are also effective tools for relational marketing, mainly for building social capital and for enhancing the durability of relationships (customer loyalty), as their technological features propitiate proximity and engagement (Postman, 2008; Qualman, 2009). Qualman (2009) even argues that, after building an engaging and consolidated relationship with customers and potential customers, social media are effective tools for selling.

Concerning Public Relations in particular, social media are often associated with the emergence of new influencers besides journalists and celebrities, such as bloggers and highly participative people with big and diversified social networks (e.g. Gillin, 2007; Breakeyridge, 2008; Hunt, 2009). Reputation management is also referred by several authors whom highlight the loss of control of Public Relations over their messages and the need to evolve from an asymmetrical communication model grounded on broadcasting to a dialogue based on personalization (e.g. Scott, 2010; Theaker & Yaxley, 2012; Breakeyridge, 2012). Due to this control loss, social

media are also often associated to communication crises, both as the locus of the crises and as the appropriate tool to respond and manage it (Coombs, 2012). The arrival of new digital technologies brought about constant access to a great amount of information, simultaneously, anywhere in the world. This has advantages and disadvantages when it comes to managing a crisis. The biggest drawbacks are the ability to multiply a simple fact, to turn it into an event of unprecedented notoriety. Moreover, there are many problems that are the product of rumours circulating the internet through forums, mailing lists, virtual communities or social networks. Among the advantages, we can highlight the ability to maintain a crisis management telematics through dedicated access nodes globally, in which updates about the course of events are available to leaders in real time and it is possible to follow what is published subsequently, as well as the ability to distribute information immediately. As a consequence, journalists are increasingly turning to the companies' web pages when seeking information (Orduna, 2004). It should be noted that organizations need to be alert to the development and evolution of new technologies of information and communication when it comes to communication crises management. Managing organizational crises 20 years ago was, in a sense, a simple, cheap and slow task. Today, the various forms of communicating online go beyond a simple space and time, creating more frequent communication crises with potential for viral spreading (Andrade, 2009).

Besides identifying particular practices that are changing or emerging, some authors present a strategic approach to social media. Among the earliest suggestions is Postman's (2008) insight on the relevance of having a social media strategy being equivalent to having a MS Word strategy, thus claiming that social media are merely communication tools and that their use should follow the general communication strategy of the organization. The most recent work on the issue, although recognizing the specificities of social media, agree on the need of an integrated communication strategy that encompasses not only the social media and public relations but all communication tools and communicational practices of the organization (e.g. Kunsch, 2003; Cornelissen, 2011; Cheney et al., 2011).

Thus, the empirical study also intends to find out which of these approaches is being adopted in Portuguese organizations regarding social media – exploratory and trial-and-error or integrated with the overall communication strategy – and which specific communication types and outcomes are more commonly being found by organizations through their social media presence.

METHODOLOGY

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS

This empirical research intends to contribute to the analysis and understanding of the issues discussed above, namely: 1) determining if Portuguese organizations are dealing with social media within a technology-focused perspective or according to a broader conception of social media as a contextual factor; and 2) identifying the communicational types and functions performed in social media and determining if they vary whether they result from an exploratory and trial-and-error approach or from a strategic approach.

This research project is characterized by a longitudinal nature, accompanying the adoption and use of social media by Portuguese big organizations since the beginning of 2011. The research design encompasses an initial exploratory phase and a posterior phase of deeper explorations of the relevant preliminary results. This design includes different methods, both quantitative and qualitative, according to the goals and requirements of each phase.

The exploratory phase studies a sample of 15 Portuguese organizations present in social media, selected among members of the Portuguese Association of Organizational Communication (APCE). The criteria for selection were: 1) being present on at least one social platform (back in 2011); and 2) having the highest amount of followers. Relevant agents of each organization were interviewed in order to get more information and re-define the questions to be addressed on the second phase of the research. Interviewees were senior level Public Relations, Communication and Marketing professionals (depending on who was responsible for managing social media presence), and they were asked their opinion on the general impact of social media and their particular effects for organizations and Public Relations. They were also questioned about their organizations' presence in social media and the way they manage it, as well as about their assessment of social media as PR tools. Each interview consisted of 12 predetermined questions. Most interviews were performed face-to-face, with the exception of two who expressed preference for answering via email. The face-to-face interviews were semi-structured, following the 12-question script but also offering relative freedom of expression and reasoning apart from the questions themselves. The interviews took place between May and July 2011. All interviews were transcribed and organized in analysis tables

according to the main issues discussed. The main categories created were the following: 1) social impact of social media; 2) effects of social media for organizations; 3) effects of social media for public relations; 4) presence in social media; 5) use and management of social media; and 6) assessment of social media as PR tools.

Subsequently to this exploratory phase, a relevant case study was selected for further exploration: TAP Portugal, the Portuguese airline company. The criteria underlying this selection were the following: a) it is one of the organizations which has been present in social media for a longer time (since 2009); b) the organization is present in different social media (e.g. YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Pinterest, LinkedIn, and also has a mobile app); and c) the presence of this organization in social media and its management has been considered successful by the organization itself and several stakeholders such as clients, investors, mass communication media and social media experts (e.g. it has consecutively been considered the Portuguese 'most socially devoted brand' on Facebook by Socialbakers since 2012 and was awarded the same title on Instagram in 2014). Following Yin's (2003) guidelines on case studies, a longitudinal approach was adopted, combining quantitative and qualitative methods. The quantitative study consists on the content analysis of TAP's Facebook fan page, being Facebook the social media where the presence of this organization is stronger. The *corpus* of the content analysis was TAP's Facebook fan page, accessed once a day from August 2nd to September 2nd 2012. The categories analysed were: 1) number of likes; 2) information content; 3) promotional content; 4) responses to comments; and 5) time to respond to comments. The qualitative study encompassed interviews to three relevant agents identified: the heads of the public relations, marketing and client support departments, also with a longitudinal character as the same interlocutors were also interviewed in two different moments in time. The first two were interviewed twice, in October 2011 and in July 2012, and the latter was only interviewed once, in July 2012. The first interview consisted on a repetition of the script applied in the exploratory study, and the second interview was more focused on TAP's strategies and practices concerning social media. The second interview followed a script of 10 predetermined questions, but also following a semi-structured flow. All the interviews were conducted face-to-face and, as the previous ones, transcribed and organized in analysis tables according to the main issues discussed. The main categories created for the second interview were: 1) TAP's presence in social media; 2) TAP's management of social media; 3)

evolution since October 2011; 4) crisis situations; and 5) the role of public relations concerning social media and the organization.

RESULTS

STAGE 1: EXPLORATORY APPROACH TO SOCIAL MEDIA PRESENCE OF PORTUGUESE ORGANIZATIONS

This stage aimed to answer the following questions concerning the social media presence management by Portuguese organizations: 1) do social media ‘managers’ view professional practices as a consequence of technological requirements and features of social media, or instead as a contextual trend?; and 2) do social media ‘managers’ address this task based on an exploratory and trial-and-error logic, or do they have a concrete and specific strategy? In addition, we took the opportunity to more generally explore their take on how the social media are changing Public Relations and Organizational Communication.

The 15 organizations selected are the ones, among the APCE associates, with most fans on Facebook, which is the most important social medium in Portugal (96% of internet users, which are 62% of the Portuguese population, have an active Facebook account). Some of the organizations are present in other social media, being the most common YouTube, Instagram and Twitter, but they do not invest so much time, effort and resources as they do on Facebook.

Table 1 is a summarized analysis grid (Guerra, 2006) presenting the thematic categories identified, the main findings for each one, and representative quotes from the participants.

In sum, most of the interviewed professionals focus on social media as concrete tools, and feel somewhat overwhelmed by their complexity and by the challenges that they pose. However, almost half of them have a more general view of the phenomenon, considering this new way for organizations to communicate with their publics – more interactive and close – as a lasting trend. Concerning their approach to managing social media presence, only a minority claims having a well-thought strategy, and in most cases it is specific for social media. In two of the cases, the social media presence is managed by communication agencies specialized in digital, different from the agencies that work other media. Only one of the interviewees refers the need for social media strategy to be coherent with the overall business strategy of the organization. Looking at these results with our theoretical framework in

mind, we would argue that the more exploratory and trial-and-error approach is characteristic of an earlier stage of social media presence, while a more structured strategy, preferably integrated with the overall strategy, enables organizations to get more benefits from their social media presence.

THEMATIC CATEGORIES	MAIN FINDINGS	EXAMPLE QUOTES
SOCIAL IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Most interviewees agree that digital technologies in general, and social media in particular, are changing the way we live, and in doing so have profound implications for Organizational Communication. 	<p><i>“Life will never be the same because of digital technologies.”</i></p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Four interviewees emphasized the increasing importance of mobile devices as opportunities for organizations to develop new ways of communicating. 	<p><i>“Mobile devices will be even more important than social media. Its the only channel with 24/7 exposure and with enormous personalization potential.”</i></p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Two interviewees considered Facebook specifically a fad, predicting its decline and subsequent emergence of other platforms for organizations to communicate with their publics. 	<p><i>“Facebook will come and go as has happened to other platforms. Tomorrow we may very well be communicating with our publics in completely different ways.”</i></p>
EFFECTS OF SOCIAL MEDIA FOR ORGANIZATIONS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Most interviewees refer that corporate reputation is more exposed 	<p><i>“People are merciless on social media. They can say what they want about a brand, true or false.”</i></p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Most interviewees refer that the consumer has changed profoundly, becoming more active and demanding, but also that organizations have better tools to understand their behavior and influence them 	<p><i>“Contemporary consumers are completely different. They know what they want and how to get it. And organizations see themselves forced to attend their every wish, otherwise competitors will.”</i></p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Some interviewees highlight that eCommerce is still underexplored 	<p><i>“Social media are still in a very early stage. People tend to be more rational purchasing online. But social media have a great potential to explore impulse shopping.”</i></p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Some interviewees refer the need to think about new ways of advertising 	<p><i>“Internet users hate advertising. And they know how to avoid it. So marketers need new ways of advertising.”</i></p>

THEMATIC CATEGORIES	MAIN FINDINGS	EXAMPLE QUOTES
EFFECTS OF SOCIAL MEDIA FOR PUBLIC RELATIONS	- Most interviewees refer a change from disseminating information to dialogue	<i>"We have always done clipping and follow ups, but now we have immediate feedback to consider."</i>
	- Most interviewees refer that organizational reputation is more exposed on social media, and fear crises	<i>"Social media can be extremely dangerous. If there is one thing that I fear is a communication crisis on Facebook."</i>
	- Some interviewees refer the emergence of new publics, such as bloggers	<i>"Bloggers and journalists cannot be treated in the same way. Bloggers don't have a code of ethics, so you have more margin to act."</i>
	- Some interviewees talk about the profession becoming more demanding, being 24/7 on call and having to learn how to create and publish digital content	<i>"As if PRs didn't have enough work already, now we have to created and edit pictures, videos, you name it. And we are kind of the firefighter of the organization. We have to be always on duty."</i>
PRESENCE IN SOCIAL MEDIA	- Most interviewees manage their organization's social media presence based on intuition and experimentation	<i>"Nobody really knows how that thing [Facebook] really works. It's so unpredictable and fast-changing. So the best thing to do is go with the flow."</i>
	- Only three interviewees claim having a specific strategy for social media, one of them saying that it is integrated in the overall strategy	<i>"We have a concrete strategy for social media. We use it to reinforce the emotional connection to our brand."</i>
	- Four interviewees claim they decided to be on Facebook because they wanted to reach the publics on the media they were already using	<i>"You need to get people's attention where they are. There are so many messages, people are not going to look for you."</i>
	- Most of the interviewees decided to create a Facebook Page in order to follow a general trend and/or not to lag behind competitors	<i>"We decided to create a Facebook page because all our main competitors were already on Facebook. We didn't want to 'lose the wagon'."</i>
USE AND MANAGEMENT OF SOCIAL MEDIA	- Most interviewees post both corporate and promotional content, while some of the interviewees publish only promotional content	<i>"We post content related to our brand and also to specific products. And we post things that people like to share, quotes and stuff, funny pictures..."</i>
	- Some of the interviewees do customer care through Facebook	<i>"We answer all the questions. Sometimes we ask people to continue the conversation by private messaging."</i>
	- Most interviewees stress the need of answering questions and requests	<i>"If you don't answer a question fast enough, you'll have ten times more complaints and criticism to deal with later."</i>
	- Interviewees have different opinions for dealing with negative posts from fans, ranging from deleting them to complete transparency	<i>"We don't delete fan content, but when a comment is really bad, we ask collaborators and friends to comment, so that the bad one disappears upper in the feed."</i>

THEMATIC CATEGORIES	MAIN FINDINGS	EXAMPLE QUOTES
ASSESSMENT OF SOCIAL MEDIA AS PR TOOLS	- Most interviewees are more concerned with the dangers posed by social media than with the advantages they also recognize	<i>“Social media are useful for getting awareness and for building reputation. But one second can ruin everything you worked for during months.”</i>
	- Social media are portrayed, in general, as indispensable tools, but also as demanding ones	<i>“Its impossible not to be on social media nowadays, but it comes with a lot of effort. You have to monitor everything that is going on all the time.”</i>

Table 1: Summarized analysis grid of interviews to social media ‘managers

STAGE 2: TAP PORTUGAL AS A BEST PRACTICES CASE STUDY

Among all the organizations from our sample, TAP Portugal stood out as the one with more fans on Facebook, present in more social media, and with higher engagement with fans (actually, most of the Facebook pages were still following a logic of dissemination, publishing content, while TAP answers every question and complaint, thus proving customer care via Facebook, and also creates conversations and fosters participation. In order to draw from TAP’s example guidelines for managing organizational presence on social media, the second stage of our research aimed to: 1) identify the main PR functions performed by TAP on Facebook (thought content analysis of TAP’s Facebook page); 2) understanding TAP’s strategy for managing its social media presence (through interviews to relevant agents); and 3) identify relevant guidelines for managing social media presence that can generally be applied to other organizations.

Concerning the content analysis, our results show the main functions that TAP conducts through its Facebook page, as well as the different types of communication present and the varied strategies followed by the organization to engage with clients and deal with crises. We found a high frequency of publications on TAP’s Facebook page, namely an average of two publications per day (including Saturdays and Sundays). These publications are a combination of information, photos Desk (TAP destinations) and promotions, thus revealing that the main uses of TAP’s Facebook fan page are for marketing, branding and relationship building. Most fans tend to be active, attributing ‘likes’ to several publications and commenting. On our first day of content analysis, TAP’s Facebook fan page counted 4.206 fans, as Figure 1 shows.



Figure 1: Number of 'likes' on the first day of empirical data collecting

Figure 2 highlights TAP's effort to articulate its presence in different social media, referring on its Facebook fan page to its 7.747 Twitter followers (most from Brazil).



Figure 2: Example of publication that tries to articulate the presence in different social media (Facebook and Twitter)

The actions that caused more engagement were games. Figures 3 and 4 present TAP's game "Test TAP's History", occurring from August 6th to 10th, which counted 1105 participants on the Facebook page and significantly increased the number of page likes.



Figure 3: Game organized by TAP on its Facebook page



Figure 4: Publication with the game results

Finally, we highlight strategies used to gain more followers, posting in English (thus appealing to foreigners) and emphasizing the presence of Portuguese celebrities on occasions like the Olympics or Euro to publicize the brand on Facebook. Figure 5 is an example featuring Cristiano Ronaldo.

However, we also found evidence of crisis communication and reputation management, although much less frequent. Concerning comments, we point out as an example the photograph of one of its airplanes published by TAP on August 24th. This publication resulted in a large number of comments about the aircraft itself and a comment about flight delays, to which TAP answered as Figure 6 shows. Preventing a possible attack to its reputation, TAP answered in 15 minutes.



TAP PORTUGAL

4/6

EURO 2012 — TAP leva a Seleção / TAP takes the Portuguese Team (4 fotos)

A nossa tripulação, vestida a rigor, já está a caminho de Poznan com a Seleção Nacional e o Cristiano Ronaldo não conseguiu resistir aos encantos do Flip e do Flap! :) // Our cabin crew is already on the way to Poznan with the Portuguese Team and Cristiano Ronaldo just couldn't resist Flip and Flap's charm. :)



Figure 5: Publication with celebrity endorsement on Facebook featuring soccer player Cristiano Ronaldo

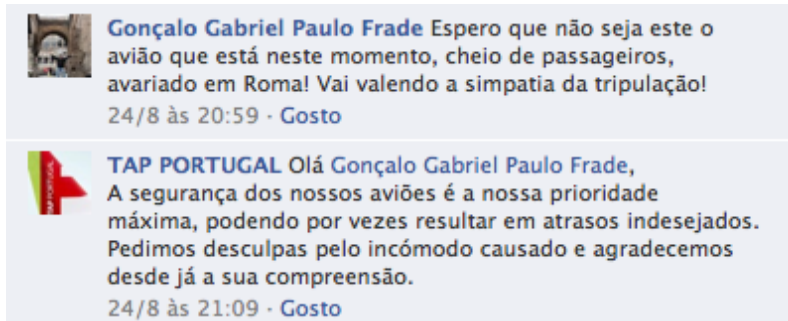


Figure 6: TAP answering negative comments¹

Regarding communication crisis shows a statement about an upcoming strike presented on July 4th. There were 71 comments about the publication and 332 likes.



Figure 7: Example of crisis communication²

In what concerns the interviews, the interviewees were André Serpa Soares, head of the Public Relations Department, Gilda Granja Luís, head of the Marketing Department, and João Santos, head of the Customer Care

¹ Gonçalo Gabriel Paulo Frade: *I hope this is not the plane that is currently full of passengers, broken in Rome! At least the crew is friendly!*

TAP Portugal: *Hello Gonçalo Gabriel Paulo Frade. The safety of our planes is our top priority, and can sometimes result in unwanted delays. We apologize for any inconvenience caused and thank you for your understanding.* (Author's translation)

² Strike announced by pilots' union was cancelled. The strike which was scheduled between July 5th and 8th and August 1st and 5th was cancelled by the Pilots' Union. Following the cancellation this strike, all TAP operations will be normalized. (Author's translation)

Department. Regarding the first interview, consistently with the results from the exploratory phase, all the interviewees agreed that social media have a profound social impact in all social spheres. About the effects of social media for organizations, Gilda Granja Luís referred to the importance of engaging with clients in social media, offering them value-added benefits in comparison to other points of contact. Specifically on Public Relations, André Serpa Soares highlighted the loss of control of the PR professionals in social media conversations, but argued that the way of regaining part of this inevitably lost control is engaging in conversations with stakeholders via social media. João Santos argued that having 15 employees to answer questions submitted by Facebook users in 15 minutes is a plus for Customer Care, as well as for the entire organization.

About TAP's presence in social media, the first experience was in 2009, when a flashmob was performed on Portela airport to celebrate Christmas. This flashmob was later posted on YouTube by the TAP marketing department and soon became viral, as TAP had a more conservative image and the flashmob was perceived as completely unexpected. The video was viral for a while, watched by over 2 million on YouTube, and it contributed positively to reposition TAP as a younger and fresher brand (the video was actually part of a rebranding process started in 2005). Following this successful experience, TAP's marketing department decided to create a Facebook page. This page was often updated with promotions and product information, being mostly an alternative and complementary marketing channel, but it did not gather many fans or motivate frequent participation.

TAP's use of social media changed drastically in March 2010, during the eruption of Eyjafjallajökull volcano in Iceland, when most European companies were unable to fly to several destinations because of the spreading of volcanic ash. As TAP's call centre was clogged with calls asking for information on flights and delays, many clients turned to Facebook looking for answers to their questions. At the time, the Marketing Department, unable to respond, articulated a mixed team with the call centre to deal with this crisis, under the supervision of the Public Relations Department. This solution was a win-win situation, as clients were able to see their questions answered and the organization was able to answer several clients with the same question at the same time, in a simpler and less time-consuming way than via telephone.

Less than a year later, the second interview showed an evolution from the early TAP's trial-and-error approach to social media to a consolidated strategy. André Serpa Soares presented this idea as a pyramidal structure to

describe the management of TAP's social media presence. The contents in the page are autonomously introduced by a dynamic articulation of Marketing, Public Relations and Customer Care, considering that looking for specific information is the most frequent action performed by the Facebook fans in TAP's page (TAP's call centre now has a specific Facebook Team). However, Public Relations occupy the top of this pyramid, as the responsibility of answering the questions that the others are unable to answer falls under their management. Besides, whenever a crisis situation arises, Public Relations immediately gain control over all the contents posted, centralizing information and concentrating the decision making power in what concerns social media. This second interview also revealed a change of perspective concerning Public Relations and social media from a more tool-focused and trial-and-error approach to a broader perspective on the interdependencies between social media and organizations and a more strategic view of public relations' new pivotal role in organizational communication.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

This paper shows the evolution from a tool-focused and trial-and-error approach to a contextual and strategic approach to social media on TAP's case study. It also highlights the consistency between a broader, more strategic and more integrated approach to social media that is being proposed by several authors (e.g. Kunsh, 2003; Breakenridge, 2008; Cheney et al., 2011) and the case study explored, which stands out for presenting an approach to social media that has brought concrete benefits for the organization, such as positive images and reputation, successfully dealing with communication crisis (such as the volcanic ash situation but also others as strikes and the possibility of privatization of the company), and a better management of time and calls in the call centre.

Considering the current context of economic crisis in Portugal, organizations have been focusing and taking maximum advantage of the online media at the expense of other existing means of communication, hoping that it will increase the visibility of the organization, improve the knowledge of customers without making large investments, prevent or answer to negative criticism from customers, and reduce the sales cycle. However, consistency among all communication channels is needed in order to achieve these goals. Concerning PR functions, this paper also shows that the shift in Public Relations resulting from social media use does not only affect concrete practices, but it has a more profound nature.

Drawing on TAP’s case study as an example of best practices, we conclude by presenting a model for managing organizational presence on social media that can be applied to other organizations: the PR Pyramid. We named the model as such because it proposed the articulation between three different organizational functions/areas in order to successfully manage social media presence, and because Public Relations play a pivotal role in times of crisis. Our model is represented in Figure 8.

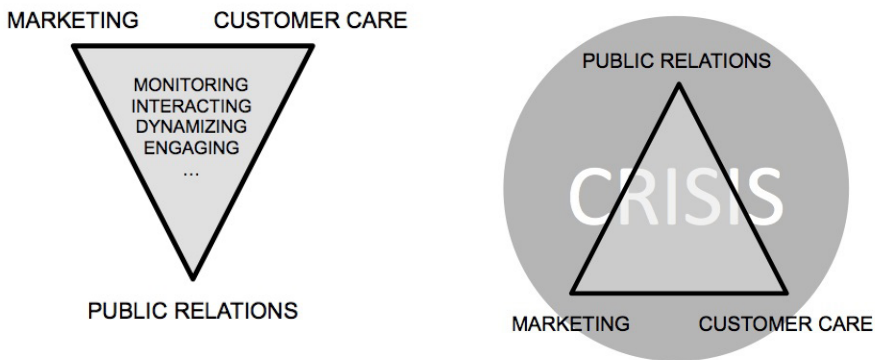


Figure 8: The PR Pyramid

We argue that the PR Pyramid is a relevant conceptual framework for fully comprehending the impact of social media on Organizational Communication, highlighting the preponderant role of Public Relations as its orchestrator and showing that Public Relations themselves are undergoing a profound change that goes beyond practices and techniques. As a consequence of the interactions between social media, organizations and stakeholders, Public Relations are emerging as more than one type of Organizational Communication, and assuming a crucial strategic role in assuring the articulation of all types of Organizational Communication, as well as the desired and required consistency, integration and coherence in a communication mix.

FUTURE RESEARCH

Concerning future work, we indent to follow two different lines of research. On the one hand, we are setting up an observatory of the use of social media by organizations in order to monitor the impact of social

media on organizations, communication and the market and also to identify case studies and promote benchmarking. This project is already in course but still at a very early stage. On the other hand, we also intend to further explore the concept of the PR Pyramid discussed in this paper. We aim to continue accompanying TAP's case, to find out whether similar solutions are being followed by other organizations, to further explore the potential of the PR Pyramid as a conceptual model, and also to test its correlation to the successful use and management of social media by organizations³.

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