COMMUNICATIVE CONSTITUTION OF THE SOCIAL ORGANIZATION: ISSUES OF IDENTITY, CONVERSATION, AND TEXT IN THE SOCIAL MEDIA CONTEXT

by

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ABSTRACT

Ever since its emergence in the early 2000s, social media has been subject to a multitude of interpretations. One of these is as purveyor of participatory culture. Yet, when it comes to how organizations use social media to interact with various digital stakeholders and what, if any, impact this interaction has on organizing, academics and practitioners alike still poorly understand participation. This dissertation is a qualitative study of the impact organization-stakeholder social media interaction has on organizing, and the co-construction and presentification of organizational identity. Through in-depth interviews, meeting observations, and document analysis, I engage with 21 organizations and their representatives to understand how interactions with stakeholders on social media communicatively constitute organizational practices around identity, decision-making, and strategy.

Using general organizational identity theory and the Montreal School Approach to the communication constitutive of organizing field of inquiry, I explain how organizational identity and presentification are co-constructed through conversations on social media platforms. Further, I show that stakeholders of various interests participate in the communicative constitution of the organizations they engage with on social media. This is achieved through the role of the *identity hub*, or social media professional, who acts as an interpreter of conversations and intermediary texts, scaling up the organization. I focus particularly on the identity confirming and disconfirming messages virtual communities share with the organizations online and the effect of these messages on

sensemaking, knowing, and resulting organizational identity statements. I look at how social media conversations laminate into organizational practices of decisions-making, strategic representation and ultimately, identity. The imbrication of conversations on and about social media platforms into organizational texts represents the final co-constructive step I engage, toward the *social organization*–discursive entity constituted by stakeholders and organizational members alike.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

On November 13, 2013 The New York Times reported on a failed social media marketing attempt by financial giant J.P. Morgan Chase who had just helped take the social media platform Twitter public (De La Merced, 2013). A few days before the report, the banking organization had announced an upcoming Twitter Q&A with one of the company's representatives, Vice Chairman Jimmy Lee. The attempt to engage customers in a brand-related dialogue turned sour when Twitter participants presented J.P. Morgan Chase with their version of the organization's identity.

As reported by the newspaper, the original idea behind the Twitter Q&A campaign was to try an unorthodox use of social media as a career advice tool. Mr. Lee was supposed to answer questions primarily from finance students active on the Twitter platform. What J.P. Morgan Chase apparently did not realize was how the organization was socially perceived. In minutes, a prolific Twitter crowd had gathered around the hashtag #askjpm asking decidedly noncareer related questions, poking fun at the organization or worse, criticizing its involvement in the financial crisis of 2008.

Audience tweet examples mocking the organization, their business, and involvement in various social events and structures were subsequently published in The New York Times, among other publications:

> @jpmorgan where do I send my resume? I am smart and have very flexible morals.

> When will you all go to jail? @jpmorgan #askJPM
>
> @jpmorgan How far do you and your financial gang members think you can push things before you are driven off the continent? #askJPM
>
> What is it like working with Mexican drug cartels? Do they tip? #askJPM (De La Merced, 2013)

In one afternoon, thanks to questions similar to the provided examples, J.P. Morgan Chase decided that the Q&A was detrimental to the organization's image and tweeted: "Tomorrow's Q&A is cancelled. Bad idea. Back to the drawing board." While many have discovered that asking for user-generated and submitted questions on social media opens them up for jokes, according to The New York Times, J. P. Morgan Chase had had a truly rough experience. In fact, even after the digital "closing" of the conversation by the company (there is no technical way to close a conversation on Twitter and other social platforms), the Twitter audience continued to ask mocking questions under #askJPM for days (De La Merced, 2013).

The closing tweet provided by J.P. Morgan's social media team suggests that at least some of the feedback from this Twitter conversation was taken back to the organization to analyze internally (inferred from the statement "Back to the drawing board"). As it stands, we have no idea how the organization interpreted the feedback from their digital stakeholders, nor do we understand how, if at all, this feedback impacts organizational identity representation over time. Additionally, The New York Times reported that no one had lost, or would lose, their job over this social media "blunder," further suggesting that unsuccessful or problematic social media interactions have organizational and individual consequences (just not in this case).

In the remainder of this introductory chapter, I provide an overview of this study's

background, purpose and specifically, more detail on the organizations that allowed me a peek into their use of social media and subsequent internal processes that illuminate the example above. A detailed description of the research context is provided in Chapter 3: Methods. In the second part of the current chapter, I state the study's general problem and aim at contributions. Finally, I explain each dissertation chapter's content and purpose.

Background of Study

As the J.P. Morgan example suggests, organizational presence on social media platforms is ubiquitous. The thing that is significantly less clear is what, if any, internal organizational processes become affected by an organization's use of social networking channels to reach a variety of stakeholders. The proliferation of social media since the early 2000s has given rise to investigations about the individual and collective use of digital social networking[1] as conduits for personal fulfillment and expression, social support, and collective action. Some critique, predominantly from cultural studies (see Fuchs, 2014; Fuchs, Boersma, Albrechtslund, & Sandoval, 2013; Lovink, 2007; Lovink, 2011; Lovink & Rasch, 2013) has been written on the ways corporations use personal data made available on social platforms to enrich themselves. Most notable in this cultural critical line is the exhaustive treatment of the complexities of meaning making in the age of social media (Langlois, 2014). Some praise has been given to digital and social

[1] Social media and social networking should not be confused. Social media is a way of sharing information with a broad audience, where every participant has the opportunity to create and distribute (i.e., Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and Google+). Social networking is a behavior indicating an act of engagement. Social media often facilitates social networking. Dhiraj Murthy's work (2011, 2013) is most informative in respect to the complexities of defining the relationship between social media and social networking.

media organizational use for providing greater access to information, transparency, and accountability (Anderson, 2009; Bertot, Jaeger, & Grimes, 2010a, 2010b; Fuchs, 2006). How-to approaches to social media use by organizations also abound with engagement, community building, and authenticity being in the center of public relations research (Curtis, Edwards, Fraser, & Gudeslky, 2010; Diga & Kelleher, 2009; Eyrich, Padman, & Sweetser, 2008; Kelleher, 2009). Lastly, corporate communication studies are concerned with the external image an organization portrays and manages in digital environments. Although some connections are evident between corporate communication and organizational communication, especially when it comes to either the conceptual connections between organizational image and identity, or the idea of communication as constitutive, neither addresses the digital explicitly (Christensen & Cornelissen, 2011; Cornelissen, Christensen, & Kinuthia, 2012; Cornelissen, Haslam, & Balmer, 2007; Remke, 2013).

Organizational communication has, however, remained mostly silent on the study of organizations and social media. One reason for this could be the fact that all of these other areas are looking into social media use and providing enough information on the subject. A second reason could be that organizational communication tends to analyze the "inside" of the organization and its processes, leaving external processes to corporate communication (Christensen & Cornelissen, 2011). A third reason could reside in the nature of social media—one notoriously difficult to study because of the media's characteristics as collective, distributed, and fluid, making it susceptible to rapid technological changes (Scott & Orlikowski, 2012). There are three recent exceptions in the work of organizational communication scholars—Scott (2013), who investigates

anonymous and clandestine organizations' use of the internet; Bimber, Flanagin, and Stohl (2012) who explore digital collective action in organizations; and Treem and Leonardi (2012) who summarize seven uses of social media within organizations. Although useful in contextualizing some of the issues surrounding organizations and social networking platforms, the research in this general area indicates a lack of an interpretive perspective that is concerned with the ways in which organizational users of social media make sense of their communicative experiences with various external stakeholders. Specifically, I refer to a missed opportunity to analyze what effects, if any, interactions with external stakeholders such as the ones described in the opening case have on organizational identity (co-)construction and other internal organizational processes and practices, such as decision-making practices, identification, and strategy. Additionally, I propose that addressing the impact of social media interactions on organizational processes and practices is best achieved through an interpretive qualitative investigation of the organizational members who do social media on behalf of the organization. These would be the individuals in the J.P. Morgan case who designed, implemented, and received the feedback from the failed Twitter campaign.

Problem Statement

In this dissertation I explore if and how an organization's (digital) identity is co-constructed through organization–external stakeholder interaction in social media contexts (i.e., Facebook and Twitter). Stemming from this interest, I look at if and how this online interactivity impacts the communicative constitution of the organization. I explore the impact of online interaction on identity and, more generally, the communicative constitution of the organization through an in-depth analysis of the role of

the social media professional in these processes. My focus on the social media professionals is theoretically and empirically driven and justified. The social media professionals in this study do social media on behalf of their organizations and thus, following Taylor's (2011) logic, when the organization "says" something about "who and what it is," its spokesperson, agent, translator, or—in this case—social media writer, says "who and what it is." The organization is constituted in this online conversation defining who and what it is: its presence and identity is realized in the communication between its spokespersons and its stakeholders. Although in theory these relationships and processes are described well by James Taylor from the Montreal School Approach to CCO—the main theoretical framework for this study—empirically we know little about the process of becoming through interaction and transaction. For example, in respect to becoming a specifically organizational identity, Taylor (2011) posits:

> The organization is made real, a "self" in communication. And it is that "making real" in communication that enables it subsequently to *become* real, materially, as a distinguishable actor, in the sense of enabling and negotiating the complex coordination of a very large constituency of members who, with the intermediacy of their technologies, have become its effective agents, identifiable as its representatives—its emissaries. It now exists in the world, materially, as well as discursively. Its identity is affirmed. It has its own narrative, where *it* is the hero, and it is enabled to undertake great tasks. (p. 1278)

But how this ensues empirically is more difficult to say. In other words, how is an organization's identity made "real" in communication, especially online communication with stakeholders? Answering this question empirically would require an inquisitive look "outside" because an organization would assume its identity *only* if and when as an entity it enters in interaction and transaction (the building blocks of identity) with others who are *not* part of it. So, even more importantly, how does this communication, multidirectional interaction and transaction, constitute the organization as a material

entity empirically? These are the general problematics that this study addresses.

Interactivity can be defined as the degree to which two or more communicative parties can act on each other, in the communication medium, and in the messages, and the degree to which such influences are synchronized (Liu & Shrum, 2002). Appropriately for the social media context, interactivity is characterized by many-to-many communication between companies and stakeholders, as well as between stakeholders themselves (Goldfarb & Tucker, 2011). Interaction/interactivity is a key term in my work, and it also represents a significant part of the theoretical framework used, so it is of note that when I refer to interaction in social media and organizational contexts in this project, I interpret it to mean a process of negotiation in the form of (online and otherwise) conversations. Further, I see this process of negotiation as one taking place between organizations (and their spokespersons) and various, often conflicting, external stakeholders. These negotiative interactions, Taylor (2011) claims, are always within a transactional framework (i.e., the framework of communicating in a social media context). For example, the hiring of a new social media writer is a transaction which establishes “a scene of interactions” which is necessary to carry out the work of a social media professional. It is in this interplay of interaction and transaction between organizations and their stakeholders that organizational identity is established.

I take on the premise, put forth by Kuhn (2008) in his communicative theory of the firm, inspired by the Montreal School Approach to communication constitutive of organization (CCO) (Taylor & Van Every, 2000), that organizations are social and embedded in discourse, their sociality accentuated by the question of how companies operate internally *and* externally. Stemming from this sociality, I see organizations as

subject to negotiation by internal and external actors, balancing on the verge of the social and material (what Orlikowski (2000) called socio-materiality). Thus, organizations are generated, sustained, and continually modified through communication (Kuhn, 2008; Scherer, 2003). As such, I see communication as constitutive action that flows internally and externally in organizations and I specifically focus on the constitutive online interactions of employees and various stakeholders with sometimes conflicting interests.

This study explores how organizational identities are social, or negotiated, in inherently interactive contexts like social media. Given that organizations use social media as a tool for engagement with stakeholders (Kelleher, 2009; Kelleher & Miller, 2006), I contend that all social media interactions between organizations and their stakeholders could be seen as negotiating an organization's identity and its representation online. The consequences of this negotiation are not to be taken lightly as suggested by Kuhn (2008) in his analysis of GM: Without a clear vision of the whole organization (which can be problematized in a process of negotiation with various stakeholders), routine organizational practices and activities become meaningless. It is in this sense important to investigate how organizational members such as social media professionals take on these negotiative interactions, interpret, and "scale them up" to identity-constituting organizational practices.

As a result, I assume that organizations are socio-material entities (Orlikowski, 2000; Orlikowksi & Scott, 2008) (vs. digital entities existing on social media platforms only). This means that while discursively generated in the interactions of employees and stakeholders, I understand that organizations also may have material boundaries: they do exist as firms, corporations, nonprofits, universities, banks, etc. Finally then, using the

language of CCO, in my analysis I seek to explore if and how everyday social media interactions scale up to become, or incentivize the creation of, organizational text (routine practices, decisions, rules, policies, strategies). Some specific areas I am eager to investigate are:

- In what ways do organizational representatives and external stakeholders participating on social media platforms negotiate an organization's identity representation?
- Do these identity conversations and negotiations impact internal organizational processes, such as identification and decision-making?
- How do organizations (or their social media representatives) attempt to communicatively control the organization's identity and image in an environment which is characterized as one inherently difficult to control?
- How can the relationship between organizations and social media be described? And in relation to this, how do organizational employees who work with social media make sense of their jobs and work?

The scope of this dissertation encompasses three large theoretical and conceptual areas: organizational identity, social media, and one approach to the theory of communication constitutive of organizing—that of the Montreal School (Taylor & Van Every, 2000). As I show in the literature review immediately following, theoretical links between organizations, identity, and social media are lagging behind compared to more practical and prescriptive orientations that address how organizations should use social media platforms. Responding to a common challenge within organizational communication—that we should not fill theoretical gaps just because they exist, I specify

that the theoretical gap in the relationship between organization, identity, and social media is one that needs filling. While we know that identities, organizational or otherwise, are always to some extent socially co-constructed, we don't know how, and if at all, organizational identities are co-constructed online. I contend that social media, as a novel interactional context for organizational identity creation and representation, fundamentally changes these very processes making them more explicitly co-constructive. By applying a CCO lens to this empirical study of organizational identity, I extend the application of the Montreal School framework specifically to a new organizational realm—social media, and thus also emphasizing both the role of the external organizational stakeholders and the role of the social media professionals as agents of communicative identity constitution. Although the constitutive influence of external stakeholders (e.g., Kuhn, 2008; Kuhn & Ashcraft, 2003) and the role of the marketing professional in identity processes (Alvesson, 1994) have been suggested, both remain a continuous challenge to show empirically.

Organizations Involved in the Study

The research for this study was carried out in the larger Rocky Mountain region (Utah and Colorado), but primarily within the Salt Lake Valley. In total, representatives of 21 organizations were involved in this project, with two organizational entities providing me with more extensive access to create what I call 'vignettes' for this story. One of these vignettes comes from the greater Denver area in Colorado, effectively extending this project to the Rocky Mountain region. For the rest of this chapter, I provide an overview of the organizations involved in this dissertation.

When setting off to study the empirical impact of social media interactions on

organizational identity and related internal organizational processes, a good place to start looking for participants is in the immediate community. Consequently, I found the most helpful facilitator in this search to be the local community of social media professionals (marketers, strategists, managers, and writers) within the Professional Social Media Club (PSMC).[2] While not all participating organizations came from the PSMC, the club provided research, learning, and a social outlet for me during the past year.

The PSMC is a local branch of a worldwide organization, headquartered in San Francisco, California. The large organization and its local branches focus on four main areas: 1) expand media literacy, 2) share lessons learned among practitioners, 3) encourage adoption of industry standards, and 4) promote ethical practices through discussion and action. The goal of the PSMC as stated on the branch's website is "to provide a local forum and networking opportunity for social media practitioners, or those interested in learning more." The PSMC was founded in January 2009, has hundreds of paying members, thousands of social media followers,[3] and meets monthly (most of the year) for casual networking happy hours and/or educational events that are free of charge for members or paid for nonmembers. Overall, the club has a welcoming and friendly atmosphere which corresponds with its main, yet unwritten, focus area of being social.

For months I probed interview participants about the possibility to study their organizations more closely. Eventually, I was allowed in two very different, yet similar in

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[2] In accordance with the Institutional Review Board, all individual and organizational names have been altered to maintain anonymity.

[3] Specific membership numbers were not available at the time of writing. PSMC has a strong following on social media: Facebook (1,398); Twitter (4,533); Instagram (177); Google+ (77, 8,288 views).

certain ways, organizations. One, a Salt Lake Valley family farm, which had hired a local social media marketing agency to help them through the process of getting onto social media platforms and learning how to manage their own accounts at a later time. While nontraditional, farming is an organizing process and today's farms, even small family ones, are highly functioning organizations in many respects (Dougherty, 2011). The owner and staff of Small Family Farm (SFF) welcomed me for 3 months in the summer, while I observed the workings of the farm and saw how this translated onto the social media platforms the farm used. During this time I also interviewed the owner, Farmer Larry Small, and his "right hand" employee Tanya, who practically ran the business of the farm, including its marketing efforts. Because SFF had hired an agency to help with their social media efforts, I also spent time interviewing the agency representatives, who I met during events at the Professional Social Media Club. Finally, I was invited to sit in during meetings between the agency and the farm, and during meetings of farm employees relating to social media strategy and learning.

The second organization I received access to was physically located in Colorado and had no connection to the PSMC; their involvement in this research was achieved through a personal connection. The company, Nature Sweets, was going through a process of rebranding, making it especially appropriate and interesting in the context of this study. Additionally, during data collection it became clear that Nature Sweets was doing a few things for the first time on social media (i.e., running a contest), which presented an opportunity for me as the researcher to observe and ask questions about identity and sensemaking when it came to these novel practices. Nature Sweets also worked with a marketing agency that ran all interactions for the organization on their

social networking platforms. In my work with Nature Sweets I spent 3 months negotiating access, interviewing employees, interviewing agency employees who spoke on behalf of Nature Sweets online, sat in on meetings about social media, and organized a focus group with both organizations with the specific goal of discussing organizational identity and its representation online.

Lastly, this study background would be incomplete without mentioning the organizations that participated by giving me access to some of their representatives, the social media strategists, writers, entrepreneurs, and consultants, whom I call in this dissertation social media professionals. As already mentioned, most of these participants I came to know through the PSMC, where I attended monthly events for 9 months. These were people as passionate about social media as for the organizations for which they worked. Some participants I met through snowball sampling (i.e., once I spoke to a participant from the PSMC, I would ask for a referral to someone the participant thought might be a good match for this study), and others I met through personal contacts. In all, for this study I conducted one-on-one interviews with 27 individuals from 21 organizations and sat in meetings and focus groups where I talked to and listened to another 10 individuals brainstorm, evaluate, frustrate over, and strategize about the representation of their organizations on social media platforms. In the span of these conversations and meetings, I brought up 6 months' worth of interactional social media observations (specific posts and comments, and/or specific events) that pertained to the conversation at hand or could otherwise illuminate my insight into a particular individual's or organization's take on the ongoing social media happenings. I present the make-up of my study sample in more detail in the methods chapter of the study.

Organization of Dissertation Chapters

This dissertation is organized to provide a background of past research and methodological choices and then offer original results followed by analysis. Chapter 2 offers a literature review where I explain the conceptual and theoretical framework for this dissertation, combining organizational identity, CCO and the Montreal Approach postulates, and definitions of the social media context. I discuss the existing and potential connections that can be drawn between these three distinct literatures and focus on opportunities to extend theory. First, I argue that the organizational identity concept has been somewhat neglected within CCO literature and offer suggestions for its incorporation. Second, I argue that through social media platforms, stakeholder interactions have the potential of influencing organizational identity when interpreted through the conversation-text dialectic of the Montreal School Approach. And finally, I suggest that current research does not offer insight into the theoretical and practical relationship between the doing of social media and organizing. In light of these opportunities, I situate my research and specific research questions.

Chapter 3 outlines the methodology I used for this research, providing a rationale for qualitative work in a field of research where quantitative approaches tend to dominate. Then I explain my specific approach to data collection and also give a more detailed background and description of the organizations, participants, and context. Finally, I explain the specific methods employed to gather data: interviews, observed meetings, social media interactions, and organizational documents. With each method there are specific details about the process including the participants, the data collection, and the process of data analysis. At the end, I also offer an explanation of my role and

perspective as a researcher.

In Chapters 4 and 5, I present the results and data analysis. The chapters are similarly organized, each focusing on one of the research questions and providing the results obtained while answering the question. In Chapter 4 I discuss findings pertaining to organizational and individual identity and, importantly, the role of sensemaking in identity co-construction as an overarching theme. In Chapter 5 I focus on findings pertaining to organization-stakeholder interaction in the social media context and its impact on organizational processes and, importantly, the theoretical and practical role of the conversation-text dialectic as one way of translating online conversations to organizational text.

Finally, Chapter 6 offers a discussion of the findings and concluding comments. In this chapter I broaden the focus of the research and specific findings and turn the lens back to the conceptual and theoretical framework. In this process of going back to the literature, I discuss a model of co-construction that emerged from the findings of this research. This model incorporates stakeholder feedback on organizing in general and organizational identity co-construction in particular. At the end, I review theoretical and practical implications along with limitations of the study.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

In this literature review, I outline the conceptual and theoretical framework for this dissertation research. I begin by introducing the theoretical framework used in this study, communication constitutive of organizing (CCO) (Ashcraft, Kuhn, & Cooren, 2009; Cooren, 2000; Cooren, Matte, Taylor, & Vasquez 2007; Cooren, Taylor, & Van Every, 2006; Putnam, 2013; Putnam & Cooren, 2004; Putnam & Nicotera, 2009; Robichaud & Cooren, 2013; Taylor & Van Every, 2000, 2011), including the general conceptualization of CCO as a field of inquiry, rather than a theory. Also, I discuss the applicable approaches and emphasize the key postulates of this theoretical field of inquiry important to my work. Since the CCO framework provides a unique perspective on what an organization is and the role of communication within and around it, I use the opportunity to define what I understand under both organization and communication within this discussion as well. Then I continue with a review of the organizational identity concept, which demonstrates how the concept has evolved over the years, and conclude this section with a brief discussion on where the concept is today, within the CCO framework. Lastly, I cover the social media context wherein I briefly discuss the emerging reconceptualizations of digital organizing and organizational membership and suggest that while informative, these reconceptualizations might be insufficient in explaining the connection between “boundaried” organizations, such as corporations,

nonprofits, universities, and even family farms, and the interactions they have with (external) stakeholders on social networking/media platforms.

Through this literature review I argue that the concept of organizational identity could be empirically influenced by the structural and communicative characteristics of the social media context. I suggest that external organizational stakeholders have the communicative power to constitute an organization's digital identity through online interaction by incenting intra-organizational decision-making and action. As with other human behaviors, to some extent the effects of this communicative power might only be facilitated by social media platforms, not created completely anew. Yet the whole process of communicative constitution as contextualized by digital media appears to be poorly understood at this time.

So, for the purposes of this research, I define an external stakeholder as a various someone who has an interest in the organization sufficient to prompt (digital) interaction where the interaction might be of supporting or conflicting nature but is no less directed at the organization. My definition is purposefully broad, because it attempts to account for a wide range of communicative processes overlooked in a more traditional understanding of the role of the stakeholder. For example, Freeman (1994) theorized the role of the stakeholder in the organization in significantly more specific terms in his stakeholder theory. In the context of this research it is worth mentioning that stakeholder theory is management focused, encouraging managers of organizations to create and articulate a shared sense of value that brings core stakeholders together, in addition to articulating what kind of relationship the organization is to have with stakeholders. There are two issues of note with this traditional understanding of the role of the stakeholder.

While the ongoing communication between organizations and stakeholders is implied in Freeman's theorizing, communication is not in focus beyond the mention that managers must create relationships with stakeholders and develop communities "where everyone strives to deliver the value the firm promises (Freeman, Wicks, & Parmar, 2004, p. 364). Further, in Freeman's view, the stakeholder is also someone who works inside or in close relation to the organization and thus has a direct effect on its profit.

My definition aims to encompass a wide variety of stakeholders, both external and internal to the organization, and sits in between Cheney's (1991) definition of anyone who is affected by or can affect the actions of the organization, and Scott and Lane's (2000) more specific one of stakeholders as groups and individuals inclusive of employees, customers, suppliers, shareholders, and in general all those who have expectations of gain based on organizational success. This study is inspired by Deetz's (2001) stance that the interaction between stakeholders and organizations is negotiative and thus communicative; Kuhn's (2008) CCO-driven conceptualization of the "social side of firms," which is accentuated by questions about the internal and external functioning of organizations, and the role of external stakeholders in organizational processes; and Taylor's (2011) theorizing that organizational identity emerges from the "imbrication" of discursive domains. In this dissertation I conduct an empirical study that solidifies and expands on these claims. Below, I present the theoretical framework guiding the study.

Communication Constitutive of Organizing (CCO)

Communication constitutive of organizing (CCO) sees organizations as discursive constructions. For example, Taylor (2006) defines organization as emerging "in the

intersection of a) an ongoing object-oriented conversation specific to a community of practice, and b) the text that names, represents, or pictures it" (p. 156). I understand organizations as discursive in a sense commonly engaged within the general CCO framework, as linguistically authored in daily interaction (Fairhurst & Putnam, 2004; Taylor & Van Every, 2000). It is because of this understanding that I assume that an organization's identity can be discursively co-constructed. This perspective is especially useful in a project like this one, which looks at organizations as virtual discursive entities made up of conversations addressing and negotiating the organization's identity in the context of social media platforms. This discursive link continues through my interest in the social media professionals leading these conversations on behalf of the organizations, and in the organizational practices emerging from such interactions.

Organizations as discursive constructions (Fairhurst & Putnam, 2004) are conceptualized on the premise that "discourse is the very foundation upon which organizational life is built" (p. 5). Two sets of distinctions are important where discursivity is concerned. Fairhurst and Putnam (2004) contend that discourse and communication ought to be viewed as different, with discourse generally referring to "the study of language in use" or social interaction, including conversation. Communication is conceived of as a much broader concept, which goes beyond the linguistic and discursive to encompass research streams such as network analysis, message flow, and information processing. The other helpful distinction within the narrower realm of discourse occurs between *discourse* and *Discourse*. Offered by Alvessson and Kärreman (2000) and adopted by communication scholars interested in language and discourse, *discourse* stands for the study of talk and text in social practice, such as everyday conversation, and

Discourse stands for the enduring system of thought that is historically situated and characterized by power/knowledge relations, such as the assumed ideologies governing everyday talk.

The link between the concepts of organization as discursive construction, communication as constitutive, and the interest of this project in online conversations becoming organizational text is well explicated through Taylor and Van Every (2000), who theorize that interactions or conversations represent the "doing" of the organization through discourse (with small "d"), while the text they "tile up" to is the "done" organization or the material representation of recorded forms of interaction (for example, meeting minutes, emails, memos, organizational policy, etc.). These recorded forms of interaction eventually become part of organizational Discourse. While the concepts of imbrication and lamination are perhaps most easily situated under the subheading of the Montreal School Approach, they are concepts that have outgrown the approach itself and are actively used within the general discursive and CCO approaches, plus other literatures influenced by the constitutive approach, such as organizational materiality (Ashcraft et al., 2009; Leonardi, 2010; Leonardi & Barley, 2008; Leonardi et al., 2012). Hence, I define and explain the concepts here.

Both imbrication and lamination are best understood in the context of the discursive organization, as both concepts relate to the scaling up of everyday conversation to organizational text. The notion of imbrication (Robichaud, 2006; Taylor & Van Every, 2000) in discourse resembles the practice of tiling a roof—it is the structure that emerges from goal-oriented organizational interaction over time and space. Taylor (2009) describes imbrication as stemming from organization anchored in practice

where “the object becomes clear, and roles are not for the moment up for negotiation” (p. 161). I understand imbrication as the process by which coorientation systems (i.e., two communicators’ orientation toward an object of importance) become translated into infrastructure (Taylor, Groleau, Heaton, & Van Every, 2001). Alternatively, lamination can be understood as the result of imbrication that explains how complex organizations are fundamentally different from fleeting social relationships created in a single conversation (McPhee & Iverson, 2009). Fairhurst and Putnam (2004) write of “laminating accounts,” suggesting that in the heart of lamination is the narration of experience. Lamination was first described by Goffman (1974), then Boden (1994), Taylor and Van Every (2000), and Fairhurst and Putnam (2004), all in relation to social interaction, and denoting the same process—lamination of conversations or experiences for future reference and coorientation. These conversational references become organizational text, where text is used in a sense of organizational rationalities, or rules and structural forms that are immediate and locally relevant to organizational member behavior. Both the process of imbrication and the resulting lamination are important for this study because they have the potential to explain how everyday online interactions become constitutive of an organization’s identity when this identity is conceptualized as a form of organizational text. Further, this project aims to extend the theoretical application of the processes to include nonorganizational members.

Viewing the organization as a discursive construction implies at least two assumptions that are important in the context of this proposal with its theoretical framing and claims. The first one has to do with a meta-theoretical view of communication as action (Cooren, 2006; Putnam & Nicotera, 2009), an underlying assumption of the CCO

orientation, which (as already suggested) sees the act of communication as constitutive of the organizational process. Translated into the realm of organization as discursive construct, this means that most organizational communication scholarship, which sees communication as constitutive, agrees that organizations are grounded in action. If we were to think of communication as constitutive action, then online interaction can easily, albeit abstractly, be conceived of as constitutive as well. Indeed, online interaction has spurred the birth of organizational social media policy and various practices designed to govern and control online interactions on behalf of organizations. Further, two useful elements stem from the organization grounded in action perspective: One, there is little or no tension between bottom-up and top-down approach to organizational communication in general, and identity creation in particular; and two, there is an explanation showing how everyday talk can become organizational text. This perspective can be summed up through the observation by Ashcraft and colleagues (2009) that communication is not a process that simply expresses organizational reality, but also creates it.

Fairhust and Putnam (2004), in their conceptualization of the organization as discursive construction, first distinguished between organizations as object, as becoming, and as grounded in action. Emphasizing the act of organizing instead of the result of organization was an important step in the early conceptualizations of organizations as grounded in action. Weick (1969; 1995; 2001) first suggested that organization should be studied as the reflexive process of organizing where individuals collectively make sense of the world. Weick's organizing has gained a lot of traction with organizational communication scholars, particularly because of its implied emphasis on action (organizing being a verb) and the communicative and collective backdrop of

sensemaking. Weick (1969, 1995) famously captured the spirit of this concept with the question: “How can I know what I think until I see what I say?” Within the view of organizations as discursive constructions, the grounded-in-action organization is the most relevant and theoretically advanced form (Fairhurst & Putnam, 2004). It is also in the grounded-in-action organization where the general perspective of organizations as discursive constructions meets communication as constitutive of organizing. A focus on flattening the micro-macro dichotomy, language and interaction, and the process of organizing are all important here and of note in the next section.

The Montreal School Approach to CCO

The relevant basic concepts of the Montreal School Approach within the communication constitutive of organizing framework are the dialectics of conversation-text and micro-macro flattening, coorientation, agency and action, and materiality. I present these below. CCO scholars all agree that communication constitutes organizations, but they differ in their understanding of the organizational properties of communication, approaching embodiment from different perspectives (Bisel, 2010). The Montreal School Approach (MSA) is one such perspective. According to Putnam (2013), MSA is “one of the most comprehensive, generative, and robust theories of what an organization is.” (p. 36) Further, she contends that being “grounded in communication, rooted in characteristics and features of language, this approach provides sophisticated ways in which metaconversations connect, transcend, and reframe the dialectical tensions between text—conversation, organizing—organization, and the univocal and multivocal” (p. 36). MSA is the specific theoretical framework of this study precisely because of these characteristics. Its unique flattened perspective of the macro and micro dialectic, its

view of organizations as the products of constant interaction between everyday conversation and the reflexivity of a text, and its grounded-in-action view of organizing (vs. the object of the organization), are particularly appropriate for the study of organizations, identity co-construction, and social media contexts.

The Montreal School Approach to CCO (Taylor & Van Every, 2000) is rooted in ethnomethodology (where meaning is found in everyday practices such as conversations), and speech act theory (where words perform actions). This approach to the constitution of organizations is particularly useful to my work because of its emphasis on everyday conversations (such as online interactions) and their "translation" (Brummans, Cooren, Robichaud, & Taylor, 2013) to a more global, organizational text (such as practices related to social media and even policy designed to address such conversations). The concept of translation is integral to the process of organizing according to MSA. It is useful to think of translation in this case as sort of upgrading and downgrading. The upgrade is from everyday practices, through collective experiences, which are then transformed into organization through the processes of distanciation and textualization (these are the more permanent discursive and material structures of the organization). Taylor, Cooren, Giroux, and Robichaud (1996), explain distanciation as the consequence of the dialectic of speaking and writing. By writing the discourse down (textualizing it), fixing it of sorts, discourse is objectified and it becomes part of practice. Distanciation and textualization thus allow for local interactions to "transcend themselves," establishing links with past and future events and guiding actions accordingly (Cooren, 2006). This upgrade process of translation can be downgraded going backwards to conversation and everyday local practice.

As a result of its focus on everyday practice and experience, discourse, and its grounding in action (Fairhurst & Putnam, 2004; Putnam, 2013), MSA, and CCO in general, are often critiqued as approaches focusing too much on the micro, social interaction perspective. One concern with this approach is that it may neglect larger organizational processes for local interaction (Chaput et al., 2011; Cooren, Matte, Benoit-Barné, & Brummans, 2013). This concern should be addressed here because the focus of this study, organizational identity, is one that often oscillates between micro and macro perspectives of the organization and, in addition to this, the way I choose to study organizational identity heavily relies on the perspectives and interpretations of individuals (social media professionals). Typically, to resolve the macro-micro tensions, macro scholars treat organizations as distinct and dominant over local interactions, and micro scholars collapse the macro into the micro or vacillate between the two poles in stages or at different levels (Putnam, 2013). In organizational communication we have come to see an organization's identity as one such vacillation—an act of persuasion achieved through the collective action of all members, targeted both internally and externally.

In the realm of this research on organizational identity in digital contexts largely from the interpretive perspective of individuals, working with a theory that flattens the micro-macro dialectic, such as the Montreal School Approach, is useful. Putnam (2013) states that the MSA reframes the micro-macro tensions of organizational theory and recasts them as "scaling up" and "scaling down" the organization. This reframing entirely drops the notion of levels and instead focuses on how bottom-up processes (such as everyday online interaction) link with top-down practices (such as organizational rules of

social media interaction) and vice versa. Such a perspective effectively assists me in unifying the claims of macro-oriented fields such as public relations and corporate communication that have looked at how and why organizations use social media as tools of persuasion, while also allowing me to use these claims in constructing a two-way communicative argument in which an organization's identity emerges from social interactions online where the conversations eventually become part of the organization's text through the translation practices of social media professionals. In other words, organizational identity in a social media context emerges in the tension between organizational persuasion, stakeholder interaction, and ongoing interpretation and action by authorized organizational representatives.

But what does this conversation–text dialectic[4] have to do with organizing, and why does it matter here? As noted, I view online, social media interaction as a form of everyday conversation. Conversations, and the situated activities and experiences they address, make up what Brummans and colleagues (2013) call a network of practices. It is this network of practices that constitutes the organization or what MSA calls the organizational text. This interplay between conversation and text can be described as recursive, thus effectively reframing "the age-old tensions between stability and change" (p. 29) and suggesting that conversations produce texts and texts mediate conversations (Putnam, 2013). A good example to illustrate this is when ideas regularly expressed in conversation lead to organizational rules, policies, norms, and expectations derived from

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[4] In a recent essay on the existing tensions in the Montreal School, Linda Putnam (2013) delineates conversation–text, univocal–multivocal, macro–micro, and subject–object as dialectics, seeking to emphasize the ongoing creative tension characterizing these relationships within the framework.

earlier conversations. These policies are then frequently used as discussion topics and action items during meetings and other coordinated organizational functions.

The translation between conversation and text, or the lived experience and its narrated abstraction, is reconciled through the process of coorientation. Already mentioned, coorientation is a key element in James R. Taylor's theorizing about the process of organizing, particularly because it is through coorientation that the act of organizing and the physical organization come to exist. The beginnings of coorientation can be found in Weick's (2001) explanation of action. To him, action is almost always social, and is almost never solitary, meaning that individual action is (in fact) interaction. Similarly, Taylor (2006) sees coorientation as never solitary and always interactive. Coorientation is the root of organizing because it implies action, but also collectivity, and a common object, something, a common goal, to be oriented towards. An interesting example of coorientation is the concept of "organizing without organizations" (Shirky, 2008), often used within social media and networking literature. This concept, which I elaborate on more extensively later, is the only theoretical touchstone between social media and organizations currently.

The basis of the "organizing without organizations" concept stems from what various social media platforms seem to afford us in terms of collective action without formal organization leadership or management. Unlike this study, the concept explicitly negates the usefulness of formal organizations to organizing in the social media context. Similarly to this study, it suggests a process I apply to the study of formal organizations: the ability of individuals to coorient toward something that has to get done—whether that involves bringing down an Arab government or achieving a production goal. However,

there is useful insight in the ability of social media to organize without organizations that applies to the present argument. If organizational boundaries and membership are no longer a prerequisite for organizing, then empirically demonstrating Kuhn's (2008) theorizing on the social organization becomes even more relevant.

Kuhn (2008), in his communicative theory of the firm, suggests that organizational interaction with external stakeholders has a constitutive effect of the so-called "authoritative (yet never monolithic) system of cooriented and distributed action" within and around the organization. *In other words, the process of organizing, which is generally understood as one taking place between organizational members, can be "extracted" and extended to external stakeholders.* This conclusion is entirely consistent with the understanding that organization is achieved through a series of textually mediated practices—such as online conversations. This view is well suited to the social media context, which even in its theoretical rejection of formal organizations, is still governed by the idea of the organizing process and thus, coorientation of multiple stakeholders toward a common goal. Yet, this process of "extending" the organization to the external stakeholder has not been described in the field of formal organizations. Because the social media context is characterized by heavy interaction between organizations and their stakeholders, it presents an excellent opportunity to do so.

One last relevant note coming out of the Montreal School Approach to CCO is that of agency, or who can act. In general, drawing on Latour's actor network theory and Bakhtinian dialogism, the MSA theorizes agency as a process, taking place in interaction. Similar to Austin's (1975) conceptualization of doing things through language, *Montreal scholars understand agency as making a difference, and having an impact, through and*

in, conversation. A brief articulation of the agency concept here is important for two reasons. First, for the Montreal School Approach, agency can be found in both humans and nonhumans (Cooren, 2006; Cooren, Fairhurst, & Huët, 2012), particularly in the relationship between two entities. Taylor (2006) posits: "agency is not the property of a subject or actor, but is a relationship between individuals" and further, that "agency from a coorientation point of view is a concept that takes on meaning only in the context of a communication event." (p. 150) Human and nonhuman agents matter in how organizations are discursively and materially constituted leading to the organization mobilizing these agents (in the current case, social media marketers, agents in boundary spanning roles) to act on its behalf through interaction (Brummans, 2006; Cooren, 2006). Such understanding of agency suggests that the interactions between organizations (and their authorized representatives) and stakeholders in digital contexts are constitutive of the formal organization and its processes.

Once an organization is authored through the conversation–text or text–conversation constitutive dialectic (Taylor allows for constitution in either direction), the organization becomes capable of representing the collective comprising it. This is what Cooren (2006) calls "organizational presentification," perhaps the closest idea to organizational identity and image that exists within CCO. Alternatively, this representation allows for the organization to make itself present to its stakeholders. These relationships are important because they can effectively explain how online organizational presence can act simultaneously as presentation and representation of the organization's identity and image, thereby discursively linking and equalizing identity and image.

Additionally, understanding agency as a hybrid between human and nonhuman entities (this, CCO borrows from Bruno Latour and his actor–network theory here) allows for better conceptualizations about the effects digital media have on organizing and organizational life. Importantly, the proliferation of the digital in organizing may have problematized the very role nonhuman, nonmaterial entities have on organizational processes. Just as social media (as one example of digital media), afford us different perspectives toward the construction of organizational identity, the digital world has material implications on organizational life and identity in particular.

A brief explanation of my use of material is in order here. Materiality is a new area of study within organizational communication, which primarily (but not exclusively) addresses technology use in organizations. Within this area of research, materiality is defined in three distinct ways which are helpful for context here. Leonardi (2010) delineates the following: materiality as tangible object; materiality as technology-in-use, emphasizing the performativity of the object (here I am already using "object" loosely as what really matters is how the material can act); and lastly, materiality as significance, or the ability of something or someone (as in material witness) to make a difference. It is precisely in the interaction between agents, individual and (digital) technology, where materiality and significance emerge in the organizational context. A particularly useful term here, emerging from the second and third definition of materiality above, that has also influenced theorizing about the links between individual and technological agency, is sociomateriality (Orlikowksi, 2000, 2007), which is the intersection between practice and technology. The concept of sociomateriality enlightens organizational use of social media as it asserts that the meaning of (digital) technology around work is defined equally by its

technological affordance (what it lets us do) and by the way we put those affordances into practice.

The relevant basic concepts of the Montreal School Approach (MSA) within the communication constitutive of organizing framework are the dialectics of conversation–text and micro–macro flattening, coorientation, agency and action, and materiality. The details of this approach build on the general idea presented earlier that organizations are discursive constructions. One characteristic of the organization that is shared by the more general discursive perspective and the particular CCO approach is that organizations are grounded in action, namely, the action of interaction, or communication. In MSA the idea of communicative action is an important part of the concept of coorientation, which posits that action is always social and interactive, in addition to having a goal or object. The root of the grounded-in-action organization for MSA is in the conversation–text/text–conversation dialectic, which interprets the organization as emerging from everyday conversation reflexively imbricated and laminated to create a semipermanent organizational text. From the perspective of the MSA, agency, or the potential and ability to act, to make a difference, resides in the realm of interaction, a position which when applied to digital technology and social media in particular, suggests that online interactions can, in fact, be constitutive of organizational identity. This constitutive ability of social interaction is one aspect of the materiality of digital technology.

Organizational Identity

The concept of organizational identity is a complicated one and with a long history. For one, organizational identity has been defined and conceptualized in a number of ways depending on the field and approach. Here I trace relevant conceptualizations of

organizational identity, focusing on organizational communication that might facilitate how we come to understand identity co-construction online. For organizational communication scholars the topic of organizational identity has gained prominence in the past 25 years due to a shift in understanding communication as solely "within" the organization to include how organizations communicate with and within their environments (Cheney & Christensen, 2001). With this shift, a communicative understanding of identity has emphasized a processes-based understanding of organizational identity (vs. outcome or product), one that ebbs and flows, and involves multiple identities.

A popular understanding of organizational identity is as "unfolding and stylized narratives about the soul or essence of the organization" (Ashforth & Mael, 1996, p. 21). Put simply, it is that which represents the organization—either from the "inside" or "outside." Organizational identity, in this sense, is at least partially dynamic, a point of reference, and with multiple facets (Cheney & Christensen, 2001). As scholars have suggested (Cheney & Christensen, 2001; Cheney, Christensen, Zorn, & Ganesh, 2010), the turbulent organizational and communicative environments in which people operate today have challenged any completely stable notion of identity. As a result of this challenge however, both "individuals and organizations are in hot pursuit of solid, favorable, identities even as such identities become harder to capture and sustain" (Cheney & Christensen, 2001, p. 241). Influenced by communication and Cheney and Christensen's work in particular, management scholars Hatch and Schultz (2002) posit that in this pursuit of identity, organizations already seek to draw external stakeholders into forms of personal relationships that expand organizational boundaries and thereby

change organizational self-definitions. One notable result of this is not only a co-constructed identity, but also external stakeholders who are in fact encouraged to think of themselves and behave as members of the organization.

Yet, in their seminal essay on organizational identity, which still dominates management-driven thinking about the subject, Albert and Whetten (1985) described the concept as what is central, distinct, and enduring about an organization. In this sense, an identity is something that both organizations and their members "have," suggesting the relative endurance of identity that makes an organization distinct from another. Along with its claim to endurance, Albert and Whetten's conceptualization of organizational identity has been well used in identity scholarship because it also emphasizes that which is the "unique nature of the organization" (p. 123). From this perspective, the central, distinct, and enduring elements of an organization are what organizations use to answer the question "Who are we as an organization?" relying on the idea that identities are stable and consistent over time. Additionally, the notion of stable and unique identity was developed under the assumption that an organization's identity was the creation of the leadership (Albert & Whetten, 1985).

The idea of organizational identity as "central, distinct, and enduring" has been challenged throughout the years. For example, Gioia, Schultz, and Corley (2000) note that the Albert and Whetten (1985) definition is insufficient in accounting for the dynamic, fluid, and unstable nature of an organization's identity and its environment. The authors suggest that "adaptive instability" is a better way to understand the dialectical nature of the concept because it relates the idea that organizations (along with individuals and stakeholders) are constantly negotiating the need to communicate a consistent

identity and the need to stay adaptable to change. Gioia and colleagues (2000) suggest that the perception of stability and durability of organizational identity is a persistent illusion because it is rooted in the labels organizational members use to describe the organization, when in fact the meaning behind those labels constantly shifts and changes over time. This notion of identity is especially useful for this research and the rest of this discussion as it suggest that the nature of identity is negotiated.

Organizational Identity as a Rhetorical Construct

Organizational rhetoric, part of the organizational communication field of inquiry, takes on organizational identity as a rhetorical, linguistic, and symbolic construction. Foundational for this perspective, Burke (1969) suggests that identity is the product of the identifications/divisions in society and that these relationships are influenced by the setting and symbolic resources available in this setting. Due to this constant process of identification/division, identity is always in process, a state of conflict and change. Drawing on Burke but through a structurationist frame, Scott, Corman, and Cheney (1998) view identity and identification as recursive and dual processes where identities are being appropriated in the expressions of identifications that in turn serve "to reproduce, regionalize, and unify identities (p. 306)." One of the primary concerns of this study resides in the understanding that identity is always in process, conflict, and change as it is negotiated through interaction between the organization and its internal and external stakeholders. This negotiation through interaction happens within a context of constant tension where identity is both seen to serve as an "anchor" for the individual and collective self, yet is also dependent on the contingent character of situations.

Organizational rhetoric emphasizes an element of communicative cooperation

clearly seen in Burke's (1969) statement that organizational rhetoric is primarily interested in "the use of language as symbolic means of inducing cooperation in beings that by nature respond to symbols" (p. 43). Meisenbach and McMillan (2006) posit that this emphasis on cooperation "leads naturally to issues of organizing and organizations" (p. 102). Further, "an organizational rhetoric perspective suggests focusing on messages created within and/or on behalf of organizations that seek to create identification, solicit cooperation, and/or persuade" (p. 102). This view of organizations as persuasive entities is taken up by the Montreal School Approach in the concepts of representation and presentification where a "collective entity can be *made present* through a variety of entities that appear to materialize or incarnate it" (Cooren, 2006, p. 91). For Montreal School scholars, the idea of organization as presentification through communication is central. "In the domain of language-mediated cognition, there is no syntactic discrimination between individual and collective actors: Bill 'decides,' but so does Microsoft" (Taylor, 2006, p. 153).

However, for CCO there are also no restrictions on who may be counted as an actor as long as that actor is part of the conventions of language and the process of communication (Taylor, 2006). This notion refers back to one of the central ideas of the Montreal School Approach toward organizing—that communicative constitution depends on and is rooted in coorientation. This means that if two actors engage in cooriented communication, one on behalf of the organization and one as external stakeholder, then their interaction could be constitutive of the organization itself. Similarly, organizational rhetoricians suggest that audiences can "talk back" to the organization and we ought to study this process because of its potential to "blur boundaries" between the internal and

external rhetoric of organizations and their relationship (Meisenbach & McMillan, 2006). This connection between the main postulates of CCO and organizational rhetoric is essential for this study, because it suggests that the communicative processes surrounding organizational identity can be both persuasive (on behalf of the organization) and co-constructive (on behalf of various stakeholders).

Yet, the idea of "talking back" that emerges from organizational rhetoric is complicated by the idea of identification as unobtrusive control, which Tompkins and Cheney (1985) see as inherent in understanding identity, and the process of identification in particular, as persuasive. If an organizational identity represents what an organization stands for, the process by which members and sometimes, arguably, nonmembers, take on aspects or attributes of the organization as their own is identification. The act of persuasion aims at facilitating identification through controlling perceptions, interpretations, opinions, and actions (Cheney, 1983a, 1983b; Cheney & McMillan, 1990; Meisenbach & McMillan, 2006). Identification has long been considered a prerequisite for decision-making aligned with organizational values (Simon, 1976) and as such it is no surprise that organizations aim at fostering identification in the ranks of their members and spend great resources to accomplish it (Cheney & Christensen, 2001).

In reference to control, Tompkins and Cheney (1985) call identification "the internal source of organizational influence." This internal source of organizational influence holds an aspect of individualized, internal form of persuasion, which members perform themselves. The notion of "self-managing teams" (Barker, 1993), teams of workers who are not expressly monitored by a manager, but instead regulate team processes themselves, is rooted in this internal form of persuasion. Referring back to the

Weberian concept of the “iron cage” of rational control, Barker shows that control among these highly identifying employees is much more rigorous than in conventional teams, comparing the condition to a tightening iron cage. Accordingly, this form of unobtrusive, or concertive, control is seen as the highest form of organizational control, a fourth form after Edward’s three (simple, technical, and bureaucratic) which does not require the involvement of leadership.

So, in organizational communication the process of identification (as a state of continuously reinforced and co-existing feelings of belongingness and autonomy) is critically connected to the concept of control. However, identification is also a process that is very much internal to the organization—as we see above, it is an “internal source of organizational influence,” which affects organizational members. What happens to this control process when the organization is represented in social media platforms where external stakeholders have the ability to talk back and maybe even co-construct part of the organization? After all, control in the organizational context is a “double interact” (Weick, 1969; Tompkins & Cheney, 1985): organizations control through directing, to which members respond through their work processes. Organizations then monitor, reward, and punish members accordingly.

One method of organizational control that informs the notion of control in social media contexts is that of the enthymeme (Tompkins & Cheney, 1985). The enthymeme is a rhetorical syllogism from the time of Aristotle, which the authors use to connect Simon’s (1976) decisional premises to audience persuasion. For Simon, decision-making in organizations is based on the process of drawing conclusions based on decisional premises inculcated by the organization in its members over time. Tompkins and Cheney

(1985) define the enthymeme down the same line of inculcated decisional premises with one major distinction: The enthymeme is audience-focused and based in interaction. In the notion of the enthymeme it is assumed that the audience's premises (the audience can be external or internal to the organization) are "given" to them by the rhetor/organization. An organization's identity, or the representation of what an organization stands for, plays an enormous role in the meaning inculcating process of the enthymeme. For Tompkins and Cheney (1985) this role culminates in the concept of identification.

For this study, the concept of the enthymeme as a link to identity, identification, persuasion, decision-making, and attempts to control identity through interaction on social media platforms, is central, albeit somewhat problematic. Consider the example in the beginning of this dissertation for a moment. If J.P. Morgan Chase had had a better idea about what their organization stood for in the minds of many stakeholders (its identity or image), it would have handled the interaction better and perhaps even controlled it. *However, social media creates an infinite organizational audience, one difficult to conceptualize and hence inculcate with premises, which suggests that the enthymeme does not work as well as an organizational tool in a social media world of interaction.* Additionally, the structure of social media platforms is such that interactions are highly visible, creating the possibility that one "bad apple" can spur endless conversation quickly spiraling off-topic, and out of organizational control. In this sense, social media ideologically and structurally forces and challenges the management of multiple identities (Cheney, 1991), while further complicating the situation with demands of transparency and authenticity (Cheney et al., 2013; Gilmore & Pine, 2007; McCorkindale, DiStaso, & Sisco, 2012).

Organizational Identity as "Social"

What does it mean to like, follow, and at least apparently associate with an organization as an external stakeholder? Organizational identification has been mostly studied as a process within the organization (one that comes with and after socialization). Yet, organizational identification largely depends on how attractive the organization's identity is to the individual and how well it resonates with personal needs (Mael & Ashforth, 1992), a process that does not have to be confined within the formal boundaries of the organization. Further, Pratt (1998) suggests that one path of organizational identification is affinity, or similarity, a path that does not require organizational membership. In fact, branding scholars have studied customer–company identification through the same definitions and theories and have shown that outsiders do identify with the brands of organizations of which they are not members (Aaker, 1996; Ahearne, Bhattacharya, & Gruen, 2005; Hughes & Ahearne, 2010; Scott & Lane, 2000). Nevertheless, the study of identification outside the organization remains underdeveloped (Elsbach, 1998).

Ahearne and colleagues (2005) suggest that customers, much like organizational members, develop deep cognitive bonds with organizations. Hughes and Ahearne (2010) assert that brands people choose to *like* and *associate with* have a symbolic power over the construction of people's social identity and are used to appropriate meaning for the self and to communicate this meaning to others. These scholars define brand identification (I equate brand to a conceptual mix of organizational identity and specific product) as a social construction, which involves the integration of perceived brand identity and/or perceived brand image into self-identity. Brand identity then refers to the

associations a person derives for functional, emotional, and self-expressive benefits. This recent theorizing on brand identity appears especially relevant when considering the benefits of membership itself, such as self-enhancement and belonging. Further, expressed in the context of social media, it seems that the characteristics of brand identification can be easily applied to facilitate our understanding of nonmember identification processes online.

Self-enhancement and membership/belonging are two elements of social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979, 1986) that closely relate to and explain the cognitive aspects of identification (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Dutton, Dukerich, & Harquail, 1994; Elsbach & Kramer, 1996; Mael & Ashforth, 1992). Social identity theory focuses on the individual and postulates that a person's social identity is determined by their group(s) membership(s). As a result, individuals seek to become and remain members of recognized and well-regarded groups, because this kind of membership provides for self-enhancement and positive perception by others. Although social identity theory is only marginally used in organizational communication (Scott, 2007), the framework is widely used to explain identification processes in organizational behavior and has been found useful by branding scholars (Hughes & Ahearne, 2010) when explaining why customers identify with companies.

Dutton and colleagues (1991, 1994) extensively studied how New York Port Authority organizational member identification was enhanced by the positive perceptions outsiders had of the organization's identity representation, calling the processes "construed organizational image." Construed organizational image was the identity organizational members constructed about the organization they worked for, based on

perceptions of what outsiders thought of it. The ideas that 1) social identity and self-enhancement are determined by group belongingness and 2) member identification processes are affected by an organization's image left with outsiders and thus is the organization's identity, are two valuable contributions to this argument.

Expanding on the role of the outsider in the construction of organizational identity, Hatch and Schultz (2002) argue that external stakeholder perceptions of the organization are *not* completely internalized by organizational members (as Dutton and colleagues suggest), but instead, traces of these perceptions "leak" into an organization's identity directly as a result of stretched organizational boundaries. As observed by branding scholars, customer–company association in part determines the customer's social identity and suggests that individuals associating with organizations online may be experiencing the same benefits (especially when stakeholder–organization relationship is visible to others). As observed by management scholars, member identification is greatly influenced by how the organization's identity representation is perceived by outsiders going as far as claiming that these outsiders might have an even more direct influence on an organization's identity, in all suggesting that forces within an organization's environment might influence internal processes such as identification and likely decision-making.

The goal of this research is to explore the communicative aspects of these processes in digital contexts by focusing on the daily interactions between organizations and external stakeholders and their possible internal organizational implications.

Organizational Identity and Identification—CCO View

As a final step toward my account of organizational identity, I focus on how the concept has been discussed within the communication as constitutive of organization field. Not much has been said about organizational identity and identification processes from the perspective of CCO, so this is where the present study looks to make a main contribution. Useful for this project is the recent work of Taylor (2011) who treats organizational identity somewhat in passing when discussing the communicative constitution of the organization. Identity in this case emerges from the imbricated discursive practices of members; a treatment effectively suggesting that an organization's identity is indeed the organization. Importantly, and similar to Kuhn's (2008) work on the communicative theory of the firm, Taylor (2011) contends that the primary mechanism responsible for the coherence of organizational purpose and identity is authority or what we already know as authoritative texts, which result from conversations over time. But how does identity emerge from these authoritative texts?

Recent work addressing organizational identification specifically from a CCO perspective contributes to an understanding of the processes as constituted in daily interaction (Chaput, Brummans, & Cooren, 2011). From this view, organizational identification in particular is seen as a process of "consubstantialization" (from Burke's concept of identification as "consubstantiality") that plays a central role in the co-production of organizational substance. According to the authors, thinking of identification as a communicative process in which, through interaction, "individuals collectively produce the organization's 'substance'" (p. 254) is a precursor to definitions that have emphasized an individual's feeling of oneness with an organization (Mael &

Ashforth, 1992), or even self-definition through organizational attributes defining the organization (Dutton et al., 1994). The difference here resides primarily in the alternate focus CCO scholars assume: one that aims to analyze the individual–organization relationship based on how the "common substance" of that relationship is negotiated and renegotiated in everyday interaction (Chaput et al., 2011; Cheney & Tompkins, 1987).

While the history of the organizational identity concept within CCO is a brief one, it does feed off of the extensive identity work done by organizational rhetoricians, and adds a flavor of its own in exclusively focusing on the lamination and imbrication of everyday interaction to the level of organizational text. The only study specifically focused on identity (Chaput et al., 2011) demonstrates relationship both to the traditional and the novel in 1) that organizations are represented—as in made present or "presentified" (Cooren, 2006)—by the individual members who speak on their behalf and in 2) that organizations are consubstantialized especially when organizational members find themselves in situations where "*they have to restate what identifies them as an organization by negotiating who or what substantiates it"* (p. 268, *italics* in original). This organizational "substance" or identity is always "under construction" within conversation, only made temporarily stable and present in organizational texts (in line with CCO, text here is understood very broadly as in anything from organizational policy, name, history, to agreed-upon nonwritten basic principles of "how things are done around here").

While CCO scholarship has not been prolific in the study of organizational identity and identification, scholars outside of the CCO field of inquiry have suggested the perspective's potential in the study of the two concepts. For example, recent studies

from corporate communication (which is relevant to this study in that it focuses on unified organizational representation to all audiences) have argued toward a more constitutive move in the field, which effectively seeks to bridge macro and micro perspectives toward organizational image and identity, and interpret them as based in interaction (Christensen & Cornellisen, 2011; Cornelissen, Haslam, & Balmer, 2007). In these studies, corporate communication scholars argue, in respect to organizational image and organizational identity specifically, that corporate and organizational communication scholarship should "cross-fertilize," a possibility they see realized through a framework of communication as constitutive of organization and specifically the Montreal School Approach (Taylor & Van Every, 2000).

Corporate communication is a field of study that focuses on how organizations manage communication with various audiences. Specifically, Riel and Fombrun (2007) propose that corporate communication encompasses "the set of activities involved in managing and orchestrating all internal and external communications aimed at creating favorable starting points with stakeholders on which the company depends (p. 25)." This quote suggests *the importance of projecting a favorable organizational image, which is often done through social media channels (among others), yet is also challenged in that context*. A striking similarity exists between the concepts of organizational identity and organizational image as far as corporate communication is concerned. This is so much so that some have suggested that the two represent one and the same, at least as far as external stakeholders are concerned (Christensen & Askegaard, 2001; Hatch, Schultz, & Larson, 2000). The goal of corporate communication then is to project "a consistent and unambiguous image of what the organization 'is' and stands for" (Christensen &

Cornellisen, 2011, p. 387). In essence then, the difference between corporate communication and organizational communication, as far as identity is concerned, can be summed up under the tension-ridden belief that a corporate identity should invoke and represent the whole organization, while organizational identity is tied to identification and thus is often also situationally dependent.

According to Christensen and Cornellisen (2011) the relationship between corporate and organizational views of identity is not necessarily one of tension, and they see that the connecting element between the two resides within co-construction. *For example, organizational members and external stakeholders alike co-construct (and de-construct) meanings of corporate messages in ways not intended by management, suggesting that the ones communicating on behalf of the organization "are not the masters of meaning able to control reception" (p. 391).* To control and minimize "messy" interpretations from leaking out into the public, many organizations implement "policies of consistency." Yet, the authors suggest, we ought to understand these interpretive processes through a communication as constitutive lens where organizing, and its elements, such as identity, are viewed as a collective process of sensemaking and coordination. By 'collective,' Christensen and Cornellisen (2011) mean "people inside and outside organizations" who "pay attention to certain things, like 'gaps' and inconsistencies in corporate messages" (p. 403) and proceed to interpret, negotiate, and co/de-construct these messages accordingly.

This extension of CCO into corporate communication is important for the current project because it recommends the application of CCO toward all organizational stakeholders, internal and external. Further, it suggests that disregarding whether we refer

to organizational identity or organizational image, they both are processes and products of stakeholder co-construction. At the same time, organizations continuously attempt to control this process, most often through some kind of governance, which according to a CCO perspective, is also a product of interactional co-construction.

Organizing and Organizations in a Social Media World

In this section I discuss possible connections between the processes of organizing, the kind of boundaried or formal organizations addressed in this study, and the social media and networking literature. I do so primarily because connections between the two general areas of organizing and digital media are just beginning to emerge in the literature and for now are neither explicit nor popular, yet provide a reliable way of explaining organizational identity processes online even for formal organizations. To note: A sole reason to distinguish organizing from organization in this section resides in the difference between informal and formal organizing implied by social networking scholars. For the guiding theoretical assumption behind this dissertation, the communicative act of organizing is in itself organization. In other words, according to the grounded-in-action approach to organizing, organization emerges from organizing (communicative) action.

Organizing and Social Media

Collective action, and the closely linked collective identity, are of primary concern to organizational communication (Bimber et al., 2012; Corman, 2006; Koschmann, 2012; Mumby & Stohl, 1990) and have become two of the primary research areas for social media studies (Ganesh & Stohl, 2013a, 2013b). Koschmann (2012)

defines collective identity as, “a collective sense of itself—a communal property that cannot be reduced to any particular individual” (p. 62). Collective identity is of interest to organizational communication scholars because it has the capacity to incite and organize collective action. It is in collective identity and action that I see the strongest theoretical link between organizing and social media at this time. After major social movements like the Arab Spring and Occupy Wall Street used social media platforms to organize action (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012; DeLuca, Lawson, & Sun, 2012; Shirky, 2011), the phenomenon can no longer be considered a terra nova. New social tools, such as social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter, help users to coordinate action by facilitating the collective, interactive process at the heart of organizing, without formal leadership (Shirky, 2008). It is on the basis of these new social tools that the idea of “organizing without organizations” (coined by Shirky, 2008) emerged.

Digital organizing, as understood by social media and network theorists such as Clay Shirky, Yoshi Benkler, and Evgeny Morozov, can be interpreted as grounded-in-action. It emphasizes the power of social interaction to produce informal (yet powerful) social organization, suggests a communicative coorientation toward a specific goal or object, and results in the organizing of some form of digital organization. These organizations are ultimately brought into existence by discursive processes online. The appropriateness of a general constitutive perspective is undeniable in the social media context as space where organizing occurs. However, most social networking theorists, including the three above, focus on the informal organization (i.e., grass roots, social movements) and steer clear of formal organizations (i.e., commercial, nonprofits) on the internet. This study is interested in the exploration of how formal organizations, and their

identities in particular, are constituted through social interactions online. It is in the establishment of a connection between theories of informal organizing online and the formal organizational representation online, that I find the Montreal School Approach theoretically useful, its sole interest in the constitutive processes that translate social interaction in organization being one grounded in action and communication. And while an empirical CCO example of linking informal, digital organizing and formal organization does not yet come to mind, Bimber and colleagues (2012) assist in imagining this link through an interpretation of collective action theory.

Traditional collective action theory is flexible and easily makes individual to organization-level jumps, while balancing individual agency against structure (Bimber et al., 2012). Linking collective action theory, social media, and the organization, allows for the introduction of formal organizations (because the theory emphasizes structures as well as individual action) in the social media space. As I have shown earlier, much of organizational communication theorizing comes down to the complex relationship between individuals and organizations and their abilities to act independently or in concert toward a common goal (coorientation). In the realm of the communicative construction of organizational identity online, both individual agency and organizational structure play important roles. However, one problem consistently harangues formal organizations in the digital world—that of stretched, permeable boundaries.

When organizational communication considers formal organizations, one of the traditional metaphors we use is that of the container (Deetz, 2001). Even though the container metaphor is one of many, and it has been argued extensively in recent years, the associated idea that organizations have some kind of symbolic boundary delineating them

from the environment is a fairly dominant one. For example, in this study, I use the notion of "boundary" to help me conceptualize the formal organizations I am studying. Yet, I would be amiss not to admit that organizational boundaries – the structural, material attributes of the formal organization – are stretched if not collapsed by contemporary digital media (Bimber et al., 2012; Stohl & Ganesh, 2013). What the complex situation suggests is that in a context that problematizes the very notion of formal organization or at the very least, its boundaries, an organization's identity can be negotiated. This is also consistent with the grounded-in-action approach to organizing in CCO, especially the notion that if organizing happens through communication, then anyone who plays the organizational (and communicative) game, including external stakeholders, can negotiate the organization and what it stands for (Kuhn, 2008).

Organizations and Social Media

While the concept of coorientation provides a conceivable connection between the ways in which informal organizing in social media and communicative constitution of formal organizations are conceptualized, we still know very little about the empirical ways in which online interaction communicates organizations (and organizational identities) into existence. In fact, organizational communication scholarship is hardly present in the intersection between organizations and social media. Two recent predominant examples come from Treem and Leonardi (2012) and Scott and Orlikowski (2012) who focus on the public and internal, respectively, organizational use of social media networks and platforms.

Unlike scholars of social networks and media, Treem and Leonardi suggest that social media use in organizations affords new types of behaviors that were previously

difficult or impossible to achieve without new technology, thus suggesting that social media do *change* organizations. The authors take on a sociomaterial approach to technology (Orlikowski, 2000) and focus on four affordances they envision social media to provide in organizational contexts (instead of focusing on any specific technology or its features). These internal (nonpublic) affordances of social media are visibility, persistence, editability, and association. They resemble what Scott and Orlikowski (2012) found to be the affordances of a public social networking site for travel reviews, TripAdvisor.com: editability, public, persistence, and immediacy. Both studies suggest that the effects of social media within and for organizations are mostly dependent on how the media are used by stakeholders, be they employees or not. The individual and organizational realization that social media afford certain behaviors, unique to the technology's context, is the key to their widespread (successful) use. This implies coorientation between individuals and their organizations when it comes to what and how social media is *doing.*

Scott and Orlikowski (2012) make an argument focusing on public organizational use of social media (they view TripAdvisor as organization). Similarly to Treem and Leonardi (2012), the authors claim that social media are indeed game changers. However, their perspective is more relevant to this study. Because Scott and Orlikowski look at the effects reviewer feedback has on organizations represented on TripAdvisor's website (hotels mostly, but also other business establishments), they are able to discuss the material consequences social media interactions (as in ratings and reviews) had on businesses in the tourist industry. The eye-opening example here is of a hotel going out of business due to bad reviews. While in itself a correlation between bad reviews and losing

business is not surprising, what the authors claimed as interesting was the specific structure and rules of TripAdvisor that allowed for the material consequence of going out of business to occur. The technological feature was simple: although hotels could respond to negative comments (or positive ones), the rating based on the original comment could not be changed, effectively pushing a hotel's image down, when in fact all the negative issues could have been addressed in the follow-up interaction.

In their review of social media affordances, Scott and Orlikowski (2012) suggest that organizations today are almost entirely dependent on how these affordances are interpreted by the users. Whether employees or external stakeholders, the sociomateriality (Orlikowski's original terminology) of social media is dependent on how well these individuals understand its characteristic affordances: editability, public, persistence, and immediacy. The theorizing on social media affordances is useful when it comes to connecting the gap between organizing and organization that seems to exist in the social networking literature.

From the perspective of the organization as discursive construction (Putnam & Fairhurst, 2004), the social media affordances represent the very discursive constructs used to "organize" an organization. In other words, the very communication and interpretation of affordances as such is an organizing act, which continuously creates and re-creates organization in social media contexts.

In part with the goal to address organizational concerns about the affordances and material consequences of social media, the field of public relations has taken the lead in describing and prescribing how organizations (should) use social media. Notably, the public relations literature has promoted social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter

as organizational methods for relationship building (DiMicco, Geyer, Dugan, & Brownholtz, 2009; McCorkindale et al., 2012 Waters, Burnett, Lamm, & Lucas, 2009). Most commonly, organizations employ three strategies for relationship building online: disclosure or transparency, provision of useful information or message dissemination, and interactivity or involvement with the public. Disclosure or transparency is an essential feature of online communication as it ensures that an organization is perceived as a "responsible citizen" (Cheney & Christensen, 2001; Gilmore & Pine, 2007). Examples of communicating transparency are coverage of organizational history, mission statement, and hyperlinking to the organizational site outside of the social networking platform. It is notable however, that the "responsible citizen" emerges from interactivity as strategy in itself and one most often associated with social media platforms (Jackson, Yates, & Orlikowski, 2007; Kelleher, 2008, 2009; Kelleher & Miller, 2006).

Being a signature characteristic of social media use by organizations and one central to this study, I spend some time discussing what the public relations literature means by interactivity and review the prescriptions given to organizations about being interactive online. I do so as much as to showcase the importance of the interactive component as to describe how it is currently conceptualized and what seems to be missing. Public relations scholars have heralded the internet's potential for dialogue and two-way communication (Kelleher, 2009). However, what public relations scholars mean under dialogue in the context of the internet is far from the Habermasian definitions of dialogue as a negotiated exchange of ideas and opinion and a process of open and negotiated discussion, rather they focus on how dialogically oriented an organization *appears* to be (Kelleher, 2009; Kent & Taylor, 1998, 2002; Kent, Taylor, & White,

2003). This preoccupation with appearance is exemplified by a case reported by Taylor, Kent, and White (2002) where organizations that aimed at facilitating a "dialogic loop"—online calendars, downloadable information, regularly updated news feed on their websites, actually spent *less* time interacting with external stakeholders via email.

Kelleher (2009) is one prominent public relations scholar to claim that organizational blogs and other social media (participatory) platforms used by organizations actually facilitate conversation. In fact, his work suggests that organizations utilizing social media have a better chance at establishing what PR professionals know as "dynamic touch" of engaging with their stakeholders with "conversational human voice." Kelleher's claim seems to be based on the affordances of social media noted earlier, particularly immediacy, publicity, and visibility, allowing multiple organizational representatives to engage in conversations with dauntingly large audiences, while arguably communicating more effectively, and more adaptively. Kelleher (2009) and Kelleher and Miller (2006) go on to suggest that this type of conversational interactivity humanizes the organization, resulting in the following relational outcomes: trust, satisfaction, control mutuality, commitment. While all informative, the control mutuality outcome suggests a stakeholder relationship with an organization that is "dynamic and negotiable" and further exemplified by the stakeholder's perception that "the organization believes that opinions of people like me are legitimate" (Kelleher, 2009, p. 178). Thus, this outcome most readily informs my views on online interaction in this study.

While informative, the general problem with public relations literature remains its prescriptive nature. Much of the insight gained from this literature informed the pilot study for this project, which I carried out a year ago. In that project I interviewed a small

number of members of the Salt Lake City social media marketing community under the general topic of organizational identity representation online. I was interested to know how social media marketers represented their organizations online. Themes of engagement, community, authenticity/transparency, identity, control, and interaction came through in the interviews. Needless to say, a big part of the interest behind this dissertation resides within these initial interviews and insights.

However, I want to know more about the communicative processes taking place between organizations and their constituents in the context of social media. And more importantly, I am interested in examining if and how social media interaction constitutes the organization and its identity.

Research Questions

What makes this project unique is that it provides a rich description of how organizations use social media to interact with stakeholders, which helps us understand a previously unexplored context better. By explicitly focusing on how social media professional do their jobs: create, interpret, and "translate" social media platform interaction throughout the organization, I am suggesting that their insight, along with contextualizing online conversations, is an ideal way of exploring the stakeholder role in the communicative constitution of the organization and its identity. At the same time, I acknowledge that we simply don't know what social media and the interactive space look like in organizations, which necessitates a level of descriptiveness within this study.

As I have already shown, we know that organizations value the interactive aspect of social media platforms and we have a semblance of an understanding why: Social networking platforms facilitate communication and relationship building with

organizational publics. Social media seems to have the potential to create a sense of engagement and community among various organizational stakeholders online. Much of the research that has led to the above conclusions is also prescriptive, and often a-theoretical. As such, it rarely, if at all, aims to connect the daily conversations occurring on social media platforms with actual organizational processes, such as decision-making, policy-making, identification, and identity construction. By situating this study within the communication as constitutive of organization (CCO) field of inquiry and specifically drawing on the Montreal School Approach to CCO, I am in a better position to begin understanding the processes in which online conversations shape the organization and its identity. Specifically, the boundary role of the social media professional as organizational representative and member is essential in understanding the imbrication of social media conversations into organization and its identity. Hence, I seek to answer the following questions. These subquestions ensure my focus during data collection and analysis.

Research Question 1: How do organizations, their representatives, and stakeholders on social media communicatively co-construct the organization and its identity?

- Does online conversation affect statements of organizational identity?
- Does online conversation affect organizational identification processes among organizational representatives?

Research Question 2: How, if at all, do everyday conversations, taking place on social networking platforms, become imbricated into the organization?

- Does online conversation affect organizational social media strategy?
- Does online conversation affect organizational decision-making?
- Does online conversation affect organizational routines and practices?

Summary

In this review I outlined the communicative constitution of organization (CCO) field of inquiry and specifically, the Montreal School Approach to CCO as it applies to the study of organizations, stakeholder communication, and social media. Additionally, I reviewed the concept of organizational identity, which is central to this investigation but not well covered with CCO and the MSA approach yet. My main goal with this literature review was two-fold. Keeping in mind that organizational communication and social media theoretical perspectives have not been reviewed together before, I was careful to present not simply relevant individual concepts and theories, but more importantly, how they all make sense together. Organizational presence on social media platforms is ubiquitous, yet little has been done to study how this presence and ensuing interaction (conversation) with digital stakeholders affects the organization internally. I argue that one way to investigate this general area is by studying how these online conversations become organizational texts through the processes of imbrication and lamination. Furthermore, I specifically focus on the communicative constitution of organizational identity and what might be other identity issues surrounding this process. In the next chapter, I explain the methodology for this study.

CHAPTER 3

METHODS

As described in the introductory background of this research, to address the purpose of the study I examined the social media professional community of the Salt Lake Valley, the members of 21 organizations total, and 2 organizations (included in total) that provided member interviews and meetings about social media in Utah and Colorado, respectively. In this study I utilize semistructured interviews with organizational representatives in boundary roles, observation of social media marketing meetings, and interpretation of social media interactions (digital conversations) between organizations (i.e., the people who make them digitally present) and their external stakeholders. Below I explain the benefit of viewing the present phenomena through a qualitative lens and specifically the interpretive approach to qualitative research as an epistemological stance to which I adhere. Then I outline the specific methods used for data collection, including demographic data on the organizational and individual participants of this research. Finally, I discuss the data analysis.

Epistemological Stance

In line with the theoretical framework of this project, I take on an emic, interpretive approach to the study design, analysis, and interpretation of data. This approach is grounded in the understanding that both reality and knowledge are constructed and reproduced through communication, interaction, and practice (Tracy,

2013) and that this construction is a collective process, shared between the researcher and her participants (Fiol, 1998). Specifically, this dissertation explores communicative co-construction processes similarly to previous CCO research by focusing on the analysis of everyday interaction through a "grounded-in-action" approach focused on what is happening in and through communication (Cooren et al., 2013; Fairhurst & Putnam, 2004; Putnam & Nicotera, 2009; Taylor & Van Every, 2000). Further, I recognize that the meaning in communication is constantly renegotiated (Fiol, 1998), so as a result, the interpretation of my findings, of what is happening in and through communication, may not be the same as another scholar's.

As an interpretive researcher, my goal in this study has been "to explicate and, in some cases, to critique the subjective and consensual meanings that constitute social reality" (Putnam, 1983, p. 32). I sought to understand how social media professionals negotiate identities with stakeholders and the ways these identity conversations impact their organizational and professional identities and the identity of their organizations. Further, I sought to extend understanding of the impact of online conversations to the communicative constitution of organizations. As an interpretivist I must acknowledge that part of this understanding had to do with the subjects of this research and another part with myself as the researcher (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). As an interpretive scholar I focused on the centrality of intersubjective meaning created in language and the ways this meaning making contributed to phenomena such as identity and organization. Thus, I find the role of meaning making, and sensemaking in particular, to be central to this study. This means that I prioritize an ethnomethodological view toward the described phenomena.

Ethnomethodology is “the science of sensemaking” (Heap, 1975), a sociological investigation of the everyday life and conversational and social practices through which the members of a society socially construct a sense of shared meanings for that society and its institutions (Garfinkel, 1967; Gephart, 1993). Sensemaking and ethnomethodology form a significant part of the rich intellectual history of The Montreal School Approach to CCO, the theoretical framework of this dissertation, which in turn warrants my interest in investigating the conversations and practices through which an intersubjective organizational world is produced and maintained. From an ethnomethodological perspective, social actors (organizational members and stakeholders in this case) are actively engaged in sensemaking—interpreting the social world through conversational and textual accounts, creating ongoing discourses that describe and make sense of the world. A key assumption of ethnomethodology is that sensemaking occurs and can be studied in the discourse of social members (Gephart, 1993). Although sensemaking is not the phenomenon of study in this dissertation, it is a theoretically solid concept related to both identity co-construction and communicatively constituted organizing, hence justifying an ethnomethodological slant to my already interpretivist position.

Finally, the data in this dissertation emerge from the participants and their interactions between one another and with the researcher, but the researcher interprets the meanings that arise and the resulting knowledge is a product of the interactions between participants and researcher (Putnam, 1983). This type of research then aims at a richly descriptive and contextualized understanding of phenomena, sites, and interactions, setting up for multiple, complex, and contingent interpretations of reality. This study is

one such multidimensional qualitative project examining the communicative constitution of the organization in social media contexts, with focus on organizational identity processes through the eyes of the social media professional. It is my contention that understanding and interpretation of the meanings organizations and their representatives attach to social media interaction and their role in the organization and its identity is best achieved through qualitative methods. Qualitative research can be understood broadly as "any type of activity that produces findings not arrived at by statistical procedures or the means of quantification" (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 10-11). Stated as such and as noted in the literature review, this project is somewhat unique in its approach to the study of social media specifically, which thus far has been empirically studied by mostly statistical means.

Study Design and Procedures

As an interpretive scholar interested in how organizations and external stakeholders communicatively co-construct the organization and its identity through interaction, grounded theory influenced the conceptualization of my research design (Charmaz, 2006; Glaser & Strauss, 1967, Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Until recently, literature that connected the sensitizing concepts (the jumping off points for qualitative analysis in this study), were unavailable (Charmaz, 2006; Tracy, 2013), which justified a grounded approach. Organizational identity, social media, and the communicative constitution of organizations were each concepts and theories that were explored separately in the existing literature. In this study, I combine them in an iterative approach inspired by grounded theory (Miles & Huberman, 1994, 2002; Tracy, 2013). The iterative design approach emphasizes the consideration of existing theories on one hand, and the

emergent qualitative data on the other. The rationale for applying an iterative approach to this study design is guided by my acknowledging that the concepts and theories I use in this study have a long history, yet the relationships between these concepts in the context of social media might be new and/or unexpected.

Casing the Field

Empirical qualitative organizational communication research requires data taken from the lived organizational experiences of individuals. For this project, getting access to at least a few organizations and their members was not only necessary, but also vital to the quality of the research. Despite the advantages of gaining greater insight into the context and lives of individuals and organizations, this type of research also presents a few challenges.

First, acquiring access to specific organizations proved to be difficult. Even though the topic of this study did not appear to deal with threatening or risky perspectives, initial interviews with potential participant organizations proved unsuccessful. One such failed negotiation in particular stands out as a learning experience, which provided me with further insight into the topic that I was about to study and perhaps facilitated my future conversations about access. During this early negotiation I came to realize that organizational adoption of social media, and its discussion intraorganizationally, was not an unproblematic subject. In fact, much emotion and organizational politics were involved in the process and the discourse surrounding it.

A second challenge was to get social media professionals to interview with me. While all participants were interested in the project, a few, when approached, expressed concern that their expertise would be questioned either by the researcher, or later on as

the study was written up. This concern was at first surprising and then, upon reflection, became quite telling: The novelty of social media and its still-contested best practices, in addition to the fact that organizational adoption of social media was in itself also contested, caused uncertainty among some social media professionals. As a result, a few people I approached declined to interview for this project due to the expressed sentiment that the field is still too new. After employing two different approaches to gaining organizational and participant access: asking my personal network of friends and colleagues about organizations and people that might be interested in this project; and acquiring a membership to the Professional Social Media Club in order to get to know the context of people in this industry, I gained access to two organizations (I was allowed to sit in on social media marketing meetings and interview some employees), and 27 individuals from various organizations.

The organizations and social media professionals that participated in this study came from the larger Rocky Mountain geographic region and were mostly located in the Salt Lake Valley in Utah. One organization, which I travelled to visit, was located in the Denver area of Colorado. I entered the field at the Professional Social Media Club monthly meetings in early 2014. Due to Institutional Review Board (IRB) and club restrictions I was not able to acquire digital recording of the meetings. In retrospect, a recording of the talks and presentations during these gatherings would not have been helpful. The field notes acquired from the meetings provided me with enough observational and reflexive data to facilitate useful conclusions. At first, I simply attended the meetings, which consisted of organized presentations by social media experts and subsequent discussion, introducing myself as a graduate student in

communication studying social media and organization. During these first meetings I did not inquire about participants. After about four meetings, the regulars who had seen me attend, mostly from the club's leadership, began engaging me in conversations. As a result of one such conversation, the club's president offered to post a research announcement seeking participants on the club's blog, which was linked to their website. Since such method of recruitment was already approved by the IRB, I did not hesitate to create a post. While the announcement did not generate organizational cases, it peaked the interest of the Club members, who began seeking me out, interested to know what the project was about. This is how the first participants for the study were recruited.

From this first recruitment effort, which resulted in 9 participants, 1 woman and 8 men who either did in-house social media for their organizations, or worked on client accounts as part of advertising agencies, snowball sampling continued. The 9 individuals from the Club agreed to introduce me to industry connections they knew, including one that resulted in organizational access to a local family farm (Small Family Farm), which was reportedly making advances with social media use. The farm's owner, who had hired one of the local agencies to do social media for his farm while simultaneously educating his employees on how to do social media on their own, agreed to let me sit in on their social media marketing meetings with the agency. I visited the farm on several occasions, recording 3 hour-long meetings over that time, conducting 2 recorded interviews, and engaging in casual conversations about social media with the farm's employees during farm activities. Only one document was exchanged during the meetings I attended, which was the social media guidelines presented to the farm by the agency (see Appendix B). Data and interpretations from my work with the Small Family Farm (SFF) are presented

as a vignette in Chapter 4. Additionally, the data acquired from my work with the farm have also been incorporated throughout the results and analysis of this research.

A second organization that presented possibilities for a more in-depth organizational look was a natural sweeteners company out of Colorado. This organization came to my attention through a personal contact that assisted me in making initial contact with the marketing director. From this point on, I explained the purpose of the study and negotiated terms of access on my own. Similarly to the farm, my access to Nature Sweet was limited to attending social media marketing meetings, which I did via telephone every time but once, recording interviews with marketing employees, and to any documents that they were willing to share (i.e., social media guidelines, meeting minutes, and social media reports[5]). My interaction with Nature Sweet was not limited to electronic and phone communication—I had the chance to visit with the organization and their social media marketing agency once, toward the end of the data collection period. For this visit, I emailed my marketing contact and we set up a couple of meetings between myself, the marketing director and another marketing employee, and the marketing agency employees Nature Sweet worked on social media initiatives. I present the data and interpretation of my work with Nature Sweet as a vignette in Chapter 4. Like SFF's, the data acquired from my work with Nature Sweet have been incorporated throughout the results and analysis of this research.

A total of 21 organizations participated in this study, a list of which can be found in Appendix C. The organizations varied from small to big, national to international, for-

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[5] Due to anonymity agreement with the organization and IRB regulations, I am not able to share direct examples of these documents.

profit and nonprofit, public and private. My research interest in this study dictated the selection criteria (or lack thereof) of organizations. While some public relations research that looks at how organizations use social media focuses on specific organization type (i.e. nonprofit) (see Lovejoy & Saxton, 2012), due to this research's interest in the intraorganizational impacts of social media as a new organizational context, distinctions between types of organizations were not deemed useful.

Data Collection

Interviewing, observing meetings, social media observation, and document review were the four main methods of data collection for this study. These methods are consistent with generally accepted methods in interpretive and qualitative studies (Creswell, 2009; Kozinetz, 2009; Marshall & Rossman, 2011; Tracy, 2013). In addition, these methods complement CCO theory and the Montreal School Approach specifically in their ability to get at the interactional, interpersonal, organizational, and discursive components of the phenomena explored in this study. In this section I explain how each method of data collection provided me with the best opportunity to answer my research questions.

Interviews are an intimate and privileged opportunity for a researcher to learn more about the way an interviewee experiences the world. Interviews provide space for learning and for transformation of meaning. In this sense, interviews do not simply uncover information, but produce meaning (Tracy, 2013). The resulting narrative is co-constructed by interviewee and interviewer to create a rich description of the studied phenomenon and emerging themes.

Kvale (1996) suggests that good interviewers are knowledgeable about the topic

and person they are working with. They are gentle and forgiving, allowing the interviewees to pace and respond the way they desire. Interviewers are sensitive and open-minded, yet ready to probe and be critical about inconsistencies. And lastly, interviewers are attentive, ready to interpret the interviewee's answers, and probe for clarification. Interviewing enables complexity and inherent sociality while, at the same time, interviewing is a challenging method of data collection and inquiry. For this study the interview guide was carefully developed from a pilot study. The interview guide for this study is provided in Appendix A.

The interviews I conducted for this study were what Kvale (1996) calls "semi-structured life world interview" or an interview whose purpose is to obtain descriptions of the life world of the interviewee with respect to interpreting the meaning of the described phenomenon. I interviewed a total of 27 informants, including employees of the two illustrative organizations. Twenty-five out of the 27 interviews were carried out in person, in both formal and informal contexts; the remaining two interviews were carried out over the phone and followed up with an in-person meeting. Two of the interviews had an in-office and phone component (I called back for clarification). The interviews allowed me to get at how participants made sense of their organizational and professional contexts, how they lived and worked with social media (Creswell, 2009). For each interview, I went to a place chosen by the informant, which offered good opportunity to contextualize the interview and the person. For example, I met with participants in offices, cafes, and restaurants.

The semistructured interviews lasted between 30-60 minutes each. During the interviews I wanted to build rapport by conveying that the participants' views were

valuable and useful (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). In fact, I was inquisitive and tried to relay that the participants were the experts in this field. My concern stemmed from earlier recruiting experiences that suggested many potential participants felt uncertain about their expertise and value of their work. I felt that this was necessary in order to reduce uncertainly and get people to open up about their experience and feelings. In Appendix C, I list each person I interviewed, their organizational affiliation, the location of the interview, and interview length. Due to Institutional Review Board restrictions, names of participants and organizations have been changed to maintain anonymity.

I also collected data through social media marketing meeting observations. Research-attended meetings have become a common method of data collection for the scholars of the Montreal School, because they allow the researcher to record and analyze communicative co-construction in situ. For example, Chaput and colleagues (2011) recorded and analyzed a political debate during the meeting of a young political party in order to study identity consubstantialization among members. The main argument for observing, recording, and analyzing organizational meetings when studying the communicative constitution of organizations is perhaps best explained by the concept of coorientation, which always involves at least two people interacting at a time (Taylor, 2006).

I attended and recorded meetings both in person and over the phone (two out of six meetings were recorded over the phone). The six meetings to which I was invited were held by the two organizations serving as vignettes for this study (three meetings for each organization). The meetings lasted about 60 minutes each and discussed predominantly ongoing social media interactions. In Appendix C I have provided a list of

the meetings, organizations, and participants. During my meeting attendances I generally kept to myself unless it was previously arranged. I would usually start the recorder in the beginning of the meeting and take notes while sitting in a noncentral location. There is one exception to this practice: During a meeting with Nature Sweet, which I call here the "Deep Dive," a description I adopted from the meeting participants, I was expected to ask questions and lead the conversation in focus group style. With this said, the organizationally-set goal for the meeting was to discuss social media strategy and reflect on the brand, not have a focus group. All meetings took place at the office locations for each organization.

Attending these meetings provided me with insight into the daily planning and execution that went into social media work. Further, it allowed me to gain a perspective on how organizational identity is indeed consubstantialized by organizational members in respect to observed social media interactions. Finally, the meetings allowed me to grasp how organizational members talked about online activities, which was an invaluable step toward understanding the sensemaking processes taking place organizationally when it came to social media.

As previously noted, observed social media interactions provided key cross-reference data between the interviews and meetings where I could refer to specific online occurrences to initiate or back up questions, or to prompt stories. I have described the social media presence of the organizations that participated in this study in Appendix C. Social media interactions (posts and comments) on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Pinterest, and LinkedIn (where applicable) were recorded for each participant organization over a 6-month period. There isn't an established standard for digital data

collection timeframes as those are usually dependent on the goal of the study and the level of activity of the poster. A study seeking to examine discrete personal relationships (one-to-one) on social media might follow participant interactions for 2 months (Kanter, Afifi, & Robins, 2012), while another study exploring broader interactions involving more participants and exchanges might need to collect data for a shorter period before it reaches saturation (Lovejoy, Waters, & Saxton, 2012). For this study, I determined the timeframe according to the overall time I spent collecting interview data from organizational representatives. In other words, I monitored social media while I was interviewing.

The interactional data provided a valuable context (Kozinetz, 2006), especially when it came to understanding what kinds of posts and conversations organizations engaged in. The number of active platforms, frequency of interaction with stakeholders, and post and comment content were noted and referred to during conversations with the participants of this study. Interactional data proved useful in interviews and meetings alike, but in meetings I was surprised to find out that the organizations pulled reports of online conversations for reference and situation analysis also. These reports, which were shared during meetings, became the basis for various organizational decisions and actions—from strategy to policy—and thus contributed to a set of results and analytical claims below. I was able to acquire sample reports during my meeting attendance, which due to Institutional Review Board regulation I am not able to share. The reports contain sensitive and proprietary information, which also identifies the participant organization in a number of ways.

A last method of data collection was through organizational documents and texts.

In line with the general CCO framework, the expression “organizational texts” refers to both the written and unwritten practices of members that come to author the organization (Boden, 1994). Exploration related to the authoritative texts of organizational decision-making, routines, practices, and policies provided an informative clue to understanding processes of communicative constitution and organizational identity co-construction influenced by organizational interactions with external stakeholders on social media platforms. These organizational “texts” (as in processes and artifacts more permanent than conversation) reinforce the logic of scaling up from every day conversation to organizational text (lamination and imbrication), established by the theoretical framework used in this project.

Additionally, I understand laminated processes, such as organizational practices based on past experience and imbrication, decisions about routines, practices, and policies to be part of the material culture of organizations. Material culture refers to the objects that are used, lived in, displayed, and experienced in an organization (O’Toole & Were, 2008). In the context of this research, material culture can be understood as the organizational artifacts (i.e., documents) humans create and imbue with meaning, hereby establishing mutual influence. Using material culture in research identifies how people make sense of their environment and experience. A great deal of knowledge about an organization’s culture can be inferred through official documents, such as policies and guidelines, and the meaning organizational members assign to those documents and the processes associated with them (Lindlof & Taylor, 2010).

The authoritative texts collected for this study consisted of practices described during the interviews that had become norms of doing social media, also written

guidelines and policies delineating rules of engagement, content calendars, detailing organizational themes and posts for the month, and social media reports—detailed descriptions of social media interaction and corresponding strategy. In the end, this method of cross-referencing interviews, texts and practices, and digital data allowed me to follow the constitutive process from the ground-up (everyday conversation to organizational text).

Data Analysis

To analyze the data for this project I used a method inspired by grounded theory, but better described as iterative (Miles & Huberman, 1994, 2002; Tracy, 2013). This approach alternates between emic, emergent readings of the data, and etic use of existing theory. In this approach, rather than grounding the meaning exclusively in the emergent data, I also reflected upon current literature, active interests, granted priorities, and various theories I recognize and bring to the study. The rationale for applying an iterative approach to my analysis resides in my commitment to communication constitutive of organization theory and the acknowledgement that organizational identity and identification are concepts with a long and influential theoretical history. At the same time, the context of social media brought some unexpected revelations, which provide for expanded understanding of concepts and theory. According to Tracy (2013), iteration is a reflexive process in which the researcher visits and revisits the data, connects them to emerging insights, and progressively refines her focus and understanding.

I analyzed the data according to the study's central concerns of understanding the organizational impact of stakeholders on 1) organizational identity co-construction and 2) the communicative constitution of the organization in the context of social media. All

interviews, meeting proceedings, and field notes were transcribed to produce printable text. This included 441 pages of interview data, 132 pages of meeting proceedings data, and 33 pages of field notes. After transcriptions were completed, all data were printed and also imported to the qualitative software NVivo, Version 10. NVivo, a software program by QSR International, is a platform for the organization and analysis of unstructured qualitative data. Then I shifted between reading the printed pages, taking notes on what might be *a* story here, and organizing the data in NVivo. In doing this review, I was trying to find patterns, generate initial codes, and search for themes, all activities included in the primary-cycle coding (Tracy, 2013).

The primary-cycle coding helped me generate first-level codes, which were fairly descriptive. For example, the words "CONVERSATION," "ORGANIZATION," and "COMMUNITY" were such first-level descriptive codes, which were often based on how often the word appeared in a small section of conversation (typically an answer to one of my questions). As I moved through the typed data, I tried to transform the general codes above into ones that are more specific and active (Tracy, 2013). So, I ended up with "HAVING A CONVERSATION," "REPRESENTING THE ORGANIZATION," and "CREATING A COMMUNITY." Once I had read through all of the data a couple of times, I moved toward a constant comparative method (Charmaz, 2006) where I compared the data applicable to each code and then modified the code definitions to fit new data. For this process, which requires moving around pieces of text and breaking up codes, I utilized NVivo heavily. The program proved especially useful when (re)-organizing the data, working with units of analysis derived from the research questions, and moving codes around.

For example, the two research questions for this study dealt with 1) organizational identity and 2) lamination and imbrication of conversation to text (i.e., practices). As a result I ended up with "piles" of codes related to "ORGANIZATIONAL IDENTITY," which included "BEING HUMAN," "PRESENTIFICATION," "COLLECTIVE IDENTITY," and "VULNERABILITY." Additionally, piles related to organizational identity and the subquestions I asked emerged, such as "ORGANIZATIONAL IDENTIFICATION," where I placed codes for "EMPLOYEE IDENTIFICATION," "C-C IDENTIFICATION" and "DISIDENTIFICATION." Similarly, research question 2 generated piles such as "CONVERSATION & DIALOGUE," which included codes on "FEEDBACK," "NEGOTIATION," "POSITIVE/NEGATIVE COMMENTS," and "UNPLANNED CONVERSATIONS." As I went through this process, I also took memos related to each individual interview, meeting, and text. This process allowed me to clarify my own ideas about the data and play around with concepts, similarly to what Hallier and Foirbes (2004) and later Tracy (2013) call prospective conjecture—the process of considering novel theoretical juxtapositions. In a moment of prospective conjecture during memo writing I realized that in every interview and meeting, it seemed that participants were trying to make sense of what social media means to them and to their organization. The code "EXPERIMENTING" kept coming back to me as I was writing, along with participants' simultaneous attempts during interviews and meetings alike to understand social media, their own place in it, and what it actually did for the organization. The meaning of social media turned out to be a subject of frequent musings, casual chats, and various learning and knowing experiences. As a result both MAKING SENSE OF SOCIAL MEDIA and KNOWING SOCIAL MEDIA emerged as important

concepts in the results, especially while answering research question 1.

Finally, once all data were coded according to common units, hierarchical code structures were established, and the iterative process was complete, I used Ellingson's (2009) approach to making claims, known as *crystallization*. Crystallization is defined as a qualitative approach that combines multiple forms of analysis and multiple genres of representation in a coherent text or series of texts. Crystallization builds a rich, openly partial account of phenomena that problematizes its own construction, highlights researcher vulnerability and positionality, makes claims about socially constructed meaning, and reveals the indeterminacy of knowledge claims even as it makes them. This approach to representing findings allowed me to make claims about what are messy, socially constructed processes of digital identity construction, representation, and communicative constitution within a context of nearly constant technical and social change. For example, in terms of my analysis, I found that although interviews and meetings generated very similar codes, they represented very different discursive situations and as a result, I couldn't treat them the same in my write-up. With this in mind, in Chapter 4 I write about the two illustrative organizations of this study and the meetings that took place there in a different tone than the rest of the results. I did this in an attempt to tell a more engaging story, which I think the experience asked of me.

Because I conducted the conception, data collection, and analysis of this research, it is important that I reflect on how my positionality could have affected the process and results of this dissertation. Qualitative research is subjective and partial by necessity (hence, this is not a limitation), and as a result, this research only shows a fraction of the always-developing organization–social media relationship and on a larger scale, the

organization–stakeholder relationship. To begin, I decided on studying organizations in the social media context, because this is an important context and relationship to understand. Before I embarked on this study, I had no personal experience of doing social media for an organization and, in fact, I knew little about what had quickly become an entire social media industry. When I first appeared at the Professional Social Media Club (discovered after a brief Google search), I knew no one, I had no idea what the club members did at meetings, what their talks were about, and I wasn't even sure how to identify myself on the sticky note one used to place on self for identification. Based on other people's sticky labels, I most quickly realized that I needed a Twitter account to be legitimate—everyone at the meetings had a Twitter handle under their name and affiliation.

So, for a few meetings I simply walked around, listened to people talk, and tried to stay invisible, which proved difficult. The club didn't have many regular members and new faces were quickly spotted. Once I shared my identity, as a graduate student at the University of Utah studying organizations and social media, people's interest was evident. However, I did not see myself as an expert and in a position to share any knowledge, so I listened, and I got to know people. This is how my research announcement made it on the club's website over the summer. In this early part of familiarizing myself with the context and recruitment process, I realized that in order to get this project on its way and hopefully finished, I had to socialize: make connections, follow potential participants on Twitter (this was the only reliable form of communication with some of them), and truly "own" this research topic, about which I still had little practical knowledge. In other words, I found myself in a social situation

that was wholly unfamiliar to me.

This research process has taught me innumerable lessons and I mention two: one pertaining to my relationship with the participants, and a second one pertaining to my relationship with the text. Throughout this research I had to learn how to balance my lack of practical and situational expertise with my extensive knowledge of organizational and new media theory. Theoretical talk often felt out of place and even intimidating to participants, and my lack of practice in their field I felt made them question my purpose and actions at first. Consequently, I had to actively work at gaining the participants' trust. I accomplished this by regularly attending the club meetings, interacting openly with members, following up on all communication, and being persistent, clear, and honest in my approach. Another lesson I learned during this research processes is that there is no final meaning and no report that I would ever write that would be the "final" word. I found it true that "qualitative researchers find meaning by writing the meaning into being" (Tracy, 2013, p. 275), as I meandered in my notes, and felt stuck more times than I care to admit, all the while thinking that I should *know* this—after all, I did do all the research.

Summary

In this chapter, I explained my approach to this research as qualitative, interpretive, and iterative. After the earlier introduction of the organizations involved in this study, I took the chance to provide more detail about them here. Then I explained the specific method of my study: interviews, observation of meetings, interactional data observation, and analysis of organizational texts. Eventually, I discussed how the data were analyzed and my role and position as a researcher in this process. In the next two

chapters I offer responses to the two research questions guiding this study. Chapter 4 answers the first research question and Chapter 5, the second.

CHAPTER 4

ORGANIZATIONAL AND INDIVIDUAL IDENTITY ISSUES IN THE SOCIAL MEDIA CONTEXT

As I observed in Chapter 2, identity is always to some extent socially co-constructed. Opinions regarding the level of co-construction when it comes to the identity of organizations greatly vary, ranging from the view of organizational identity as central, distinct, and enduring (Albert & Whetten, 1985), to the significantly more flexible perspectives of organizational identity as "adaptive instability" (Gioia et al., 2000), and a continually negotiated reality between internal and external stakeholders (Cheney & Christensen, 2001; Dutton & Dukerich, 1994; Hatch & Schultz, 2002). The already established characteristics of social media—public, editable, immediate, and persistent in its use of text, images and sound (Scott & Orlikowski, 2012)—and the results presented below, complicate these perspectives on organizational identity.

In order to understand how the organizations in this study conceived of their identities off and online, I used a combination of data resources: observed social media interaction, which was referenced in interviews with organizational representatives (social media professionals); marketing and social media meetings; and the documents reviewed during these meetings, which usually consisted of reports on current social media activity. In this process, I quickly came to the realization that I was observing sensemaking processes of constant change, experimentation, and partial understanding,

particularly in the identity space. Below, I demonstrate the themes and results that are part of this process and answer the first research question and two sub questions:

Research Question 1: How do organizations, their representatives, and stakeholders communicatively co-construct organizational identity in social media contexts?

- Does online interaction/conversation affect statements of organizational identity?
- Does online interaction/conversation affect organizational identification?

In short, social media interactions do communicatively co-construct the organization and its identity. However, the co-construction of organizational identity and identity processes in and through interactions on social media platforms is complex and ambiguous, affected by various communicative, meaning making events. The codes, stemming from the research questions this chapter focuses on, suggest this complexity: "MAKING SENSE OF SOCIAL MEDIA," "CONVERSATION & DIALOGUE," "ORGANIZATIONAL IDENTITY," "IDENTIFICATION," "IDENTITY DISCONNECT," "IDENTITY AGENCY OF PROFESSIONAL," "COMMUNITY," "AUDIENCE," "AUTHENTICITY," "TRUST," "TRANSPARENCY," "EMOTION," "KNOWING & LEARNING ABOUT SOCIAL MEDIA." Each of these codes had numerous subcodes that had emerged in earlier coding sessions. It should be noted that these codes were also iteratively generated and organized according to the research question. The rest of this chapter elaborates on the answer to the research question above and the codes presented here.

Sensemaking at the Professional Social Media Club

In this subsection I would like to introduce the concept of sensemaking and connect this concept to the rest of the results discussed in Chapter 4. A reason to perform such connection resides in the fact that sensemaking emerged only after I reflected on the data as a story. This is an appropriate revelation since sensemaking can only happen in retrospect (Weick, 1995). Sensemaking is also a communicative process defined as the attribution of meaning to some target (e.g., various social media events) by the placement of this target, or event, into a mental framework (Pratt, 2000; Starbuck & Milliken, 1988; Weick, 1995). This meaning attribution, especially when it comes to the theorizing of identity, happens through two additional subprocesses: sensebreaking and sensemaking. Sensebreaking is the opposite of sensemaking, involving the destruction or breaking down of meaning (Pratt, 2000), which often precedes the creation of meaning anew. Sensegiving involves looking for other people to help one make sense (Weick, 1995), often influencing the sensemaking process toward a preferred redefinition of organizational reality (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991). Identity construction is seen by many to be one of the two basic properties of sensemaking (the other is plausibility) (Weick, Sutcliffe, & Obstfeld, 2005). Here I focus on identity construction. Although sensemaking represents a basic form of meaning creation for individuals engaged in organizing, it also forms an important part of the CCO intellectual history, which emphasizes the value of sensemaking as an overarching concept. Sensemaking, like identity, is about organizing through communication—processes and connections that became clear during the events attended at the Professional Social Media Club (PSMC).

While sensemaking as a finding revealed itself in the data slowly, iteratively, and

only after I looked at the codes as a whole, rereading my data one more time, after all had been coded, here I discuss the process in the context of the PSMC meetings, which I attended and observed over a 9-month period. I noticed early on that during the monthly PSMC gatherings, club members talked about and reflected on the complexities and perceived challenges of social media work. During these events I would take detailed notes of the topics social media professionals gathered to talk about, the presentations they listened to, and the questions people asked after. I was frequently struck by the apparent balancing act, expressed in conversations and presentations alike, between the daily experience of doing social media work and also translating this experience to the organizational level. It was during my observations of the PSMC meetings that a story, in Weick's words, began to emerge. This story focused on the social media and organizational experiences of a new kind of organizational role, that of the social media professional.

I quickly realized that the PSMC meetings were only to a small extent about sharing novel information, but mostly they represented a space where collective sensemaking of this new and rapidly changing social media context could occur. For example, in these meetings even the most knowledgeable people asked questions. The questions were seemingly simple and at first I wondered why experts bothered to ask about such mundane things: "Is it OK to advertise your social media to stakeholders over email?" or "How frequently should one post on the various platforms?" and "What makes for a successful social media campaign?" Equally interesting were the questions never asked, such as "How do you handle negative comments?" or "Is it ever OK for an organization to purchase 'likes'?" As I sat in my chair during these conversations and

reviewed meeting notes later, it occurred to me that sensemaking, to the extent that it is communicative, happens in interaction, through talk, and as this occurs a situation is talked into existence, and so is the basis of action to deal with it (Taylor & Van Every, 2000). As a result, from an observer standpoint, it appears that the Professional Social Media Club members were more eager to talk certain situations into existence (i.e., a successful campaign) and not others (i.e., negativity or judgment).

Communication is a central component of sensemaking and organizing and it allows, in settings like these club meetings, for the articulation of tacit knowledge into more explicit or usable knowledge (Weick et al., 2005). For example, the theme of knowledge and knowing about social media and its function and role in the organization is a dominant one throughout my experience at the Small Family Farm, a vignette I use below to illuminate the subject in conjunction with identity. While Taylor and Van Every (2000) do not explicitly discuss knowledge in their work, knowing is certainly in the basis of organizing, achieved entirely through interaction between people, objects, institutions, organizations, “in a finite time and place” (p.34). The members of the PSMC, many of whom became interview participants in this study, gathered monthly to engage in knowing and collective, retrospective sensemaking through the communicative articulation of social media approved practice (i.e., frequency of posting) and its organizational relevance (i.e., ROI). The topics discussed during presentations and meetings were repeatedly constituted in conversations as the expert way of doing things. As a result, the club members clearly identified themselves as being experts because they participated in these conversations.

While I use the PSMC context to introduce the relevance of the sensemaking

concept (and the concepts tied to it, like sensebreaking and sensegiving), the link between sensemaking and identity illuminates much of the ongoing processes described in this dissertation. From the perspective of sensemaking, who people think they are (identity) as organizational actors shapes both how the organization is enacted (organizing) and how it is interpreted, which in turn affects how outsiders think of the organization (image) and how these stakeholders then treat the organization (on social media and otherwise), which can stabilize or destabilize the individual and organizational identities. Filtered through identity, sensemaking to organize is shaped by Weick's now well-known question: "How can I know who we are becoming until I see what they say and do with our actions?" (Weick et al., 2005, p. 416)

Next, I explore a form of stabilization and destabilization of identities in a discussion of confirming and disconfirming identity messages. This is the first step I take in describing and analyzing how organizational identity co-construction occurs. In this step I begin my contention that interpretation and sensemaking about the interplay between an organization's identity, one's own identity, and the social media processes surrounding the two (posts, comments, likes, shares, responses, and retweets), combined with a subsequent "taking up" of these processes to the organizational level explicitly (to colleagues, supervisors, and managers through conversation and text) lead to a co-constructed organizational identity. The first level of this co-construction process dealing with an array of complex identity issues is presented as a number of headings below. The second level of higher order communicative co-construction of the organization is presented in Chapter 5.

Confirming and Disconfirming Identity Messages

This section of the chapter explores specific examples of sensemaking: I see the theoretical concepts of sensegiving and sensebreaking occurring in my data as confirming and disconfirming identity messages. This is important because the sensegiving and sensebreaking subprocesses of sensemaking have been implicated in identity and identification construction (Pratt, 2000). Additionally, in Chapter 2 I discussed the role of image in identity construction through the concept of identification, resulting in construed organizational image (Dutton & Dukerich, 1991; Dutton et al., 1994). Current results make it apparent that interaction between organizations and their stakeholders on social networking platforms complicates the link between image and identity even further. Specifically, this complication happens in a process of stabilizing/destabilizing identities, which is well articulated in the interviews. In my coding system this process came through two identity-related codes: "CONFIRMING IDENTITY" and "DISCONFIRMING IDENTITY," which consist of participant discourse about social media interactions: "likes," positive comments, and negative comments. To exemplify, I use the stories of two organizations: a farm actively using Facebook for engagement and education, and a transportation organization actively using Twitter for service updates and customer service.

The quote below comes from a meeting between the Small Family Farm (SFF) and the marketing agency that SFF's owner-farmer had hired to conduct social media efforts. The quote is from a meeting I observed where Tom, an agency employee, explains the meaning of "likes" from an expert position. The other person is Tanya, an employee of the farm, who posts on its behalf when the agency is not doing it.

> To: So this is from the 12th to the 18th, last week. Um, so total page likes, you are up to 2900, that's up by 4% and you've gotten a 111 new likes…Yes, from last week. Previous period, compared to the previous week. This page is all about weeks, so everything is compared to the previous week. So, don't get discouraged by the pluses and minuses, because sometimes you might have an awesome week where you get tons and tons of likes and tons and tons of engagement, and next week it is going to tell you that you are doing miserably, but that is in comparison to your amazing week. So, talks about post reach, and then engagement. So, post reach is great, but you guys don't need to worry about that, I can play with it. Um, Facebook has…
>
> Ta: But it is good for us to know what it means… before you guys leave…

This quote is a good example of frequent conversations happening around the meaning of Facebook "likes" and other social media activity. Tom's explanation of varying numbers (he is reading a computer screen) showcases the analytics functioning behind social media platforms such as Facebook and suggests their inherent ability to co-construct what it means to be a successful organization online. First, we learn that SFF has 3,977 "likes" as an organization: This many people associate with the organization on their own personal pages and receive its updates on their personal news feeds. Second, we learn that in the past week the farm has gained 111 likes, up 4% from the week before. This is an important metric, because it demonstrates again how successful identities are defined in the social media context. Then Tom continuous to explain what "likes" should mean to SFF depending on their frequency and quantity. More importantly however, he offers a platform for sensemaking based on the assumption that the number of likes achieved or not has an effect on how well an organization and its employees perceive themselves to *be doing and being*.

This state of temporary being (week to week) is important, because Tanya chimes in: "But it is good for us to know what it means… before you guys leave," referring to the service contract between SFF and the agency. Note that there is an expectation that

the fluctuation of “likes” feels personal in that they serve a confirming or disconfirming function, identified by words such as “discouraged,” “awesome,” “miserable,” and “amazing.” The process described above indicates deep meaning when it comes to organizational identity in that it is legitimizing, yet is easily dismissed as something “you guys don’t need to worry about,” suggesting once again that social media metrics, and by extension knowing about social media impact on the organization, is a fickle business. Additionally, the weekly ebb and flow in “likes” is not as personal to Tom, because he is an expert, and an outside consultant, someone who “plays with it.” Yet to Tanya, who is an employee of the farm, the number of likes potentially means livelihood and is as a result more personal.

The sensemaking of Facebook “likes” is an endeavor of coorientation and continuous negotiation. During the meeting, aspects of social media statistics were brought up and debated, their meaning for the organization uncertain. Eventually, the participants come back to “likes” and this is when Farmer Small looks up a specific post he had made the week before about a major event coming up at the farm. Once he sees that only two people have liked his post, he murmurs a row of expletives, running hands through his hair, annoyed. The farmer’s reaction can be explained by the context of the meeting—the team has been brought together to discuss an upcoming event, which surprisingly to everyone, has not been very popular on social media. As the team sits around the computer in the room, they question not simply the meaning of stakeholder communication (or lack thereof), but also the meaning of the event, and the meaning of the farm. It is interesting to note that in this sense, the gaining of a “like” is a confirmation, but the gaining of too few “likes” is a disconfirmation, hence the definition

of the right number is continuously renegotiated.

Later that day, after an hour of observing the group count "likes" for various entities: the farm, the competitors, the vendors, and an individual stakeholder who had commented on a post (a form of organization "following" discussed in the next section), I asked Farmer Small about the meaning of all this Facebook interaction. After a short minute of thinking he said:

> It makes me reconsider how I do my business. I guess it makes me feel bad sometimes, good other times. Anytime though, anytime I tell somebody about why I am doing what I am doing, or whatever, it always makes me think more about why I am doing what I am doing. I mean putting it to words or trying to write it down, it helps you formulate in your own mind what is going on. That's good about Facebook.

This quote is emblematic of the impact of social media interactions in general and the confirming and disconfirming messaging in particular when it comes to organizations and their members. While the meaning of interactions is often unclear, the reasons for having interaction on Facebook are clearer as expressed by Farmer Small—putting "why I am doing what I am doing, or whatever" in words and even more so, "writing it down," makes the farming experiences legitimate. Writing it all down, in a public forum, "helps you formulate in your own mind what is going on," making sense not just of the interaction at hand, but one's own ideas, plans, and business intentions. Reminding of Weick's sensemaking again, the words above are strikingly reminiscent of: "How can I know what I think before I see what I say?" Yet, discovering the meaning of the "like" is only a part of this process of understanding the self and the organization through sensemaking of social media comments. Below I discuss further a couple of confirming and disconfirming identity conversations.

First, I discuss a case of confirmed organizational identity and purpose. Lindsey, a

PR and social media strategist speaks on behalf of a local organization:

> You know, we—we really try hard to—to answer people's concerns. It's—it can be challenging some-, sometimes. Um, but uh, it's really rewarding when you hear back from somebody that said, you know, "Oh thanks for, um, getting me the information I needed to [use your product][6] for the first time. I had a great experience." Or, you know, "Thanks for answering my question. I didn't have time to call into customer service and I just needed a quick response and you guys were able to get it to me." So it can be really rewarding at times too.

Here, Lindsay refers to the multitude of conversations she and her other two writers engage in daily and the sheer sense of reward she feels when stakeholders (mostly customers) say thank you for the effort. The pride Lindsey feels in the work she does daily is evident in this quote and appeared to be also in the center of how she saw her organization (as one deserving to be proud of). The contribution that the speaker makes to the organization's identity, however, is senseless without the continuous confirmation by the product user community of stakeholders. Stakeholder positive comments *feel* good, but are especially valuable when submitted in an effort to protect the organization. Linda, a social media writer, gives an example of customers advocating on behalf of her organization, which *feels* nice in the midst of disconfirming messages:

> Linda: But we do get the people who will step in finally and say that, "Hey"… Or sometimes, they'll all be going and somebody will finally say, "This isn't against you guys. You guys are really good."
>
> Interviewer: That must feel nice.
>
> L: It does, because it lets you know that they realize you're trying. You as a person at least, are doing the best you can. And I think in the long run it also helps the company. Because I think they start saying, "Well, somebody is listening to me. Yeah, maybe they can't make the changes overnight. Maybe it does take a while."

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[6] Due to IRB restrictions regarding anonymity of the participants, some quotes have had to be altered so as to not reveal the identity of the organizations/speakers. However, the quote content has been kept as close to the original as possible. Alterations are bracketed with [].

Much of this quote again reminds one of an attempt to make sense of social media and its purpose: “it lets you know that they realize you’re trying,” and “I think in the long run it helps the company,” are thoughts exemplifying Linda figuring out what the conversations she has daily mean on a larger scale. Confirmed organizational identities are realized in this example in the acts of having an outsider step in defense, in listening, and in understanding that the organization is “trying” to be the best that they can for their stakeholders. Showing this in a social media context feels nice to employees because it confirms to them 1) that they are doing the right thing and 2) that they work for an organization that is doing the right thing, the two in effect giving sense to one’s job and role as a representative.

But, in a quote of two parts, Linda is also quick to provide examples of the disconfirming messages she deals with on a regular basis, especially as someone working for a well-known organization:

> Linda: Well, they care about the money in that they constantly bring up how much the executives are being paid! That would come up whenever we would have [product recalls]. It would be like, "Well, if you didn't pay your executives…" You kind of want to say, "I understand you may have a gripe with what they get paid, but let's be clear. Even if we paid them less, you're looking at their whole salary and saying, "Oh, $300,000…" but even that wouldn't do it. You want to say, "What if you took down to $200,000? Now you have $100,000. You think that's going to fund a whole day […]?" But you can't really react that way because, at that point, they don't really want to hear it.

In the first part, Linda explains that stakeholders frequently question her organization about executive pay. As a public company, her organization has to disclose executive salaries, which often creates storms on social media, especially Twitter, where they have a big following. Then she states a predicament shared by other social media professionals in this study: “But you can’t really react that way because, at that point,

they don’t really want to hear it.” Her words are emblematic of disconfirming conversations online—arguing with stakeholders does not pay off on social media platforms. Organizations, and their representatives, risk far less by giving up to negative comments. However, what this seems to create is an individual sensemaking process that is also emblematic of the context:

> Linda: Well, I moved out here from Connecticut, which is just outside of New York, so I was very used to [having this product] and everything. So, even when they bring up things sometimes—The ones who throw out, "Other cities do this, why can't we?" And you just want to say, "You obviously haven't lived in other cities," because even about the thing with the kid saying it closed and it was locked and the guy went on, you want to say, "You go [do this] in New York. They're not looking for anybody who still might get on. Those doors close, it's gone, and you wait 'til the next one?" So, here, on one hand they want, "Oh, yeah, it's so great! It gets here on time." But they also still want that laid-back […] mentality where you can wait for me for this long. And that's one of the hard things, too. But, again, I kind of like that on Twitter if you can educate and it's up to everybody, maybe a few people will get it. So, I try to look at it and say—I don't ever say it this way—but, "Today you're frustrated because it didn't wait for you. But tomorrow you'll be frustrated because it was a few minutes late because it waited for someone else." You can't have it both ways. Or even when they talk about our guy makes more money than the guy in New York. And I want to say, "Well, you do understand, don't you, that [their system over there is entirely different]?"

In this example, classic sensemaking is obvious. Copley and colleagues (1997) as cited in Weick, Sutcliffe, and Obstfeld (2005) note, when organizational representatives are faced with events that disrupt normal expectations (in this case, expecting this organization to compare to much larger and more powerful ones), they attempt to make sense of the ambiguity in ways that respond to their own identity needs, often drawing on personal experience. In Linda’s case, we see her negotiate between the present event (customer complaint about product) and her past experience as a user of product in another market. Thus she is able to in one way sympathize with complaining customers, questioning the identity of her organization, and at the same time rationalize, through

retrospective thinking of past experience, what these disconfirming messages mean in the context of her organization's identity. Linda's knowledge of her organization's product as an employee and of that product as a customer provides her with the resources needed to reconcile the disconfirming messages. Thoughts about the organization's presence in the social media context, and that context's characteristics as interpreted by Linda are part of this sensemaking, which in turn can be confirmatory or not:

> Linda: Social media, it feeds itself. It does. That's why I think it's funny that we have the *haters*. Because I also look at them and think you spend so much time looking into everything about Rocky Mountain Transit Authority (RMTA). Has this become your hobby? To sit and analyze? They probably have other ones too, but obviously RMTA is a big deal because they are tweeting every day. And you're just thinking, "I work for it and I'm not that interested in looking at it that way."
>
> Interviewer: Is it flattering?
>
> L: It is. Well, I say, I think it's better to be obsessed with us than drugs or something. "We'll just be mad at RMTA. We'll take it on. It'll be our cheap therapy." But they do seem to be really involved. There's a guy that tweets us twice a day…

Linda's consideration of social media as a structure that "feeds itself" with negative emotion is a way in which she eventually makes sense of identity disconfirming situations. To make sense of what is happening between her organization and its stakeholders, Linda retorts to the structure of social media platforms and offers her theory of why her organization has "haters." Again, she goes back to referencing her own experience and comparing others' actions to what she is feeling, "And you're just thinking, 'I work for it and I'm not that interested in looking at it that way,'" in an attempt to suggest that as an employee she has a lot more to scrutinize about her own organization than an outsider does. But at the same time, when I suggest that the attention is flattering, Linda agrees. My suggestion is not unprovoked. Throughout the conversation, much like the interviewee before her, Linda expresses pride she derives

from her work. Feelings of pride associated with one's organization or the work one does for that organization have long been considered components of organizational identification (Cheney, 1983; Mael & Ashforth, 1992). While I examine identification, which takes on unique characteristics for social media professionals, in the last part of this chapter, Linda's admittance that even haters' messages can be flattering is fascinating. *It exemplifies a way in which organizational members turn disconfirming comments on public social media platforms into confirming organizational identity experiences.*

As described here, sensemaking of organizational identity confirming and disconfirming messages on social media platforms is an equivocal process. Organizations interpret "likes" and positive comments as confirmations legitimizing certain actions; and interpret negative comments as potential signs that change is needed, that something in the current model of organizing is awry. This suggests that sensemaking in the context of identity co-construction in social media is incomplete without what Gioia and Chittipeddi (1991) and later Pratt (2000) call sensegiving and sensebreaking. In this discussion I liken confirming and disconfirming organizational interaction with stakeholders ("likes," positive comments, and negative comments) to the identity-centered processes of sensegiving and sensebreaking. *Thus, I suggest that one way of co-constructing organizational identity in the social media context is through confirming and disconfirming interactions between organizations, their representatives, and stakeholders. These interactions act as recurring moments of organizational identity "breaking" and "giving."*

Much of the following discussion presumes understanding the role of confirming

and disconfirming identity communication. Below I present the first vignette of this study, which discusses the impact of online interactions on statements of organizational identity. I note that under statements of organizational identity I understand statements made in conversation between organizational members and statements made on social media platforms. An important suggestion I make in the following section is that organizational conversations about and interpretations of social media interactions begin to constitute specific organizational identity practices.

Co-constructing Organizational Identity Statements

In this section of the chapter I introduce the vignette of Nature Sweet. Specifically, I cover a meeting between the company and the social media marketing agency hired to represent them online. In the meeting there are two representatives from Nature Sweet, both working in marketing, three representatives from the agency, and the researcher. Because I attended the meeting in person, and had attended all previous meetings over the phone, this gathering presented an opportunity to fully engage with my participants and ask questions. In this sense, this meeting was not like the ones I had attended over the phone where I did not partake in the conversations at all.

The present vignette is of note because the communicative co-construction of organizational identity is anchored in a meeting between two separate organizational entities tasked with representing one of the organizations on social media platforms. In order to illuminate how organizational identity statements are co-constructed by organizational members in response to online stakeholders, an emphasis is placed on participant reactions to various events taking place on Nature Sweet's social media platforms at the time. In the case presented here we witness an organization and the

marketing agency that does social media posting on their behalf go through what they themselves called, “deep dive into the brand.” Implied in the notion of a “deep dive” is a sense of intense meaning making, which I interpret as collective sensemaking of an organization’s identity from multiple perspectives (including the perspective of digital stakeholders).

A few concepts highlighted in the literature review are present in the Nature Sweet vignette. First, the role of the stakeholder in its multiplicity is exemplified here: there are three types of stakeholders in this meeting ranging from employees (internal), to vendors (internal/external), to fans and friends on social media (external). Additionally, of note is the concept of consubstantialization of organizational identification (Burke, 1969; Chaput et al., 2011), which I apply toward organizational identity instead, to showcase its ability to produce organizational “substance” in conversation. As a reminder, the term consubstantialization was coined from two other concepts: Burke’s concept of identification as “consubstantiality” and Cooren’s (2006) notion of “organizational presentification.” The Nature Sweet meeting is particularly informative when exemplifying the interpretation and co-construction of a common substance, in this case an organization’s identity in everyday interaction between organizational members, nonmember representatives, and social media stakeholders. *My argument here highlights identity negotiative moments stemming from online conversation that result in organizational statement of identity.*

“Deep Dive” Vignette

The meeting room at the WildRose Agency office was spacious, with a large table and tall chairs around which we all had gathered. I had just found out that this was Nature

Sweet's first visit to the agency's office. This in itself was important information, especially considering that WildRose's employees were in charge of representing Nature Sweet in daily social networking and conversation. Someone clarified that the team communicated over email and phone primarily and rarely met in person. As we sat down around the table, I took out a recorder, a small notepad, and set to begin. I wanted this to be a casual conversation, which I was prepared to start with some questions focusing on identity, if need be. However, the conversation immediately took an identity turn as seen in the exchange below, which comes after my first question about who Nature Sweet is to the group:

> Rachel (Nature Sweet): Do you guys want to take that? And I will follow up afterwards… Cause, I don't wanna… I don't wanna sway the room.
> Alice (WildRose): I don't know, Geraldine, do you want to take a stab? I am more than happy to…
> Geraldine (WildRose, on speakerphone): Ok cool, I am sorry; I can't see your faces so I don't know who is looking at whom.
> Rachel (Nature Sweet): And this is a no judgment zone!
> Sue (Nature Sweet): Rachel is grading you guys! We are driving back together so… give us something to talk about!
> Rachel (Nature Sweet): Like I said, I don't want you guys to feel nervous… because I am here, not at all.

In this quote, the negotiative nature of identity comes through quickly. First, there appears to be an expectation that Nature Sweet may not mean the same thing to the agency employees and the in-house employees. This initial negotiation over turns involves statements emphasizing hierarchical and legitimate relationships between speakers and organizations. Rachel, the marketing director at Nature Sweet, is quick to turn over her spot to the agency representatives, because it is apparent that the Nature Sweet employees think that it is in fact WildRose's job to know who Nature Sweet is, at least in terms of social media representation. At the same time, the discomfort in the

room was palpable, something that Rachel does not relieve with her comments, but rather seems to exacerbate. She is fully aware of her power as the client and marketing director, and thus clarifies right up front that she "doesn't want to sway the room" and also that she doesn't want to make the participants feel nervous. Sue calls out the elephant in the room—the client will likely judge the agency in their understanding of Nature Sweet's identity, even though the meeting is declared a "no judgment zone." Nature Sweet is in fact paying WildRose to represent *an interpretation* of the company's identity online.

This initial exchange sets the rules of the conversation: the entire meeting then followed the rule of agency representative speaking first, and client representatives speaking second, under the understanding that no judgments were going to be passed. The first identity statement about Nature Sweet comes from Geraldine, who is the social media strategist for the brand at the agency:

> I guess, Nature Sweet to me… and Alice can speak to this too. Um, you know, it is just a playful, authentic being, um, that, you know playful is the perfect word: playful, realistic, it is concerned with the causes that revolve around the processes of making; you know our products, the products that Nature Sweet produces. We really talk about the bees. We try to be a colorful brand, you know not only in our imagery, but also in our voice. Um, you know, and we have this one on one engagement online. I feel like we do a really good job at sounding authentic and actually caring behind the wheel and wanting to make sure that whoever is, whoever we are engaging with, has a positive experience with us and that we can build that relationship into a friendship, or, you know, just like this online friendship, I guess. Um, so that's kind of how I see it. I know that there are a lot of other words that we can use for it, but you know, I think authentic, playful, colorful, um, sincere, are all great words that I would use to describe the brand and then the voice of how we communicate online.

Although Geraldine volunteers to go first with her interpretation, she immediately calls to a colleague, Alice, who is a social media writer on behalf of Nature Sweet, to legitimize her own interpretation of identity and validate it through the use of the common "we." The common "we" plays a dual role here—there are two "we"-s in fact.

One “we” is that of WildRose, the agency, and another “we” is all encompassing and it includes Nature Sweet. In this sense, Geraldine, who is not a member of Nature Sweet becomes a part of it through her work as brand representative online. This is of note, because a few participants in this study spoke on behalf of organization they did not have a traditional membership with. The “we,” however, is a classic exhibit of claiming a common identity widely used in rhetoric and one of the criteria used by Cheney (1983) to make sense of how organizations foster identification among employees. In the present case, Geraldine’s use of “we” also indicates her sense of belonging to Nature Sweet even though she doesn’t “belong” in the traditional sense. Everyone in the meeting then takes on her identity statement for the rest of the conversations. Geraldine’s identity statement is entirely based on the online representation she provides for Nature Sweet.

Nature Sweet’s identity is stated as playful, colorful, authentic, friendly, caring, and sincere. As I sit in the meeting I am immediately struck by these human characteristics, and especially by Geraldine’s goal to build friendships with Nature Sweet’s digital stakeholders. Furthermore, the effect of the description above is indeed one of producing identity substance through the conversation. Rachel, Nature Sweet marketing director, jumps in, effectively co-constructing and consubstantializing the previous image through her own interpretation as a member who is fully authorized to speak on behalf of the organization. This is precisely the kind of exciting mix of consubstantialization and presentification that Chaput and colleagues (2011) discuss, yet in this case I apply the mix to organizational identity, a concept that lends itself better to the ideas of substance and presentification together. Here is Rachel’s consubstantialization:

> Yeah, and I would even take it a step outside of social media in a sense that you know, in all reality, we still are a brand that we are trying to find our way into this new world. You know, we very much started out as a side-of-the-road farm stand brand and how is Nature Sweet evolving from 1973 to 2015. And I think as a brand right now, and I think Geraldine, I mean you nailed it from a social media standpoint, but if you take it outside of social media, it is like, how, how do we build that brand equity and I see it as… we know, we have that heritage, we have the authenticity, but yet we are also a company that doesn't take itself too seriously. We stand for what we know, in a sense that it is all-natural sweeteners that would always be our stake in the sand… Our personality to Geraldine's point, it is fun, it is playful, it is someone who takes itself not too seriously, but at the same time you also don't want to take crappy cupcakes to your kid's birthday party.

A stand out element in this quote is the continuous reference to change. Conversations about social media presence frequently lead to conversations about organizational change in the meetings. This is important to note, because change is a suggestion of and opportunity for identity co-construction. In the quote above it is suggested that the very presence of Nature Sweet online is a cause for intra-organizational change. It is in the first sentence that the speaker notes: "we still are a brand that we are trying to find our way into this new world." The new world refers to the world of social media. Rachel's reference here expresses an internal tension that her company is experiencing due to the spotlight social media seems to bring on organizational image and representation.

Due largely to its decision to be active on social media platforms, Nature Sweet has had to endure an ongoing (external) image and (internal) organizational upheaval—from the logo change to warehouse modifications. In fact, the two Nature Sweet employees in this meeting used a Goffmanesque distinction between front stage and back stage to talk about what they called "front office" and "back office." *Social media, and the organization's official desire to be present in that space has led to what was*

described as a split inside the organization: "Our front office is so small and the rest is all production and they are just not, they are just not playing in the social space." So, while not related to specific comments on social media platforms, Nature Sweet's commitment to social media presence has indeed changed how the organization sees itself. Naturally, this process of change revolves around organizational identity and is not unproblematic, often leading to explicit forms of resistance. Much later in the conversation Rachel provides more details regarding organizational change, which are relevant in terms of the very conceptualization that organizational members form of who their company is (becoming):

> In full transparency, I mean, Nature Sweet as a company… we are going through a lot of changes! I mean, just in the 6 months that I have been there, I have seen 4 or 5 positions turn over and I think it's just kind of like we have talked…. We are very much kind of in that transition period of old school vs. new school in a sense that you know, there are people there that have been working there for like 20 years, 15 years, whatever it may be. And those people are very much in the mindset of, "No this is the way we do it, that's how we have always done it, we are not going to change, we don't want change, we are very averse to change." And then we kind of, have new school, you know, that we have all come in in the past year or two years. We are all trying to push the brand forward and really kind of build equity behind the brand and you know, turn it into the household name that it is. So, full transparency, I will be honest, there is, it's… I would not call it friction in the office; it's just, how do we get everyone on the same train moving forward?

Note here the speaker's repetition of the expression "full transparency." Her insistence that she is being transparent about the growing pains of her organization is in itself a sign of the new school world of transparent social media communication. Organizational transparency is a powerful mechanism for legitimization in a world of corporate social responsibility (Deetz, 2007) and according to public relations and reputation scholars (see Gilpin, 2010), an undeniable goal of organizational communication through social media. For most participants in this study, transparency

carries positive connotation and is frequently seen as a benefit of organizational social media use. This is very much related to Cheney and Christensen's (2001) observation that organizational presence on digital media has made the distinction between internal and external organizational communication obsolete. The notion of transparency is not without its problems, however, and it must be acknowledged, as one participant noted, that we must remain critical toward organizations claiming full transparency, "they've successfully sort of co-opted this language, now we are still being… like dupes, you know."

The new school vs. old school dichotomy statements Rachel makes throughout the quote is another way of addressing the "front and back office" situation that exists in Nature Sweet. In interviews the new vs. old school language was exclusively used to describe resistance practices when it came to organizational adoption of and participation in social media. In this quote we see the same interpretation, which also is used to describe the organization itself. The new school is the social one, the transparent, and open, playful, colorful organization that wants to build friendships with its stakeholders; the old school is the one made up of people that have "been working for like 20, 15 years" for the organization, possibly, have a different value system, and might be of another generation. Both schools make up who Nature Sweet is as an organization, but in the organization's decision to be present on social media, the old school identity is pro-actively minimized.

This proactive minimization of the old school identity becomes significantly more problematic as organizational practices seem to call forth issues of age inequality and digital literacy. This is well exhibited for Nature Sweet in the front and back office

distinction—the front office is where the text workers reside, the back office, the warehouse, is where the body workers are. It can be inferred from the quote that the division is largely due to attitudes toward changing technology and consequently, changing organizational identity.

In this line, Sue offers her co-constructive statement of organizational identity, which nods at the historical roots of the company and reminds us of the old school:

> I think that it was so long ago that it's not as associated, I mean, it was in the 70s… So, the history is that it really was just like a hippy commune and the story is that when the commune was breaking up one guy got the goat and one guy the honey business and that's how Nature Sweet started, in this hippy commune in [Colorado]. I just dig that story.

In this short quote, a new school employee embraces an old school identity. The quote provides us with an origins story of the organization that can be gleaned throughout the conversation—there is talk of a roadway farm stand, of a hippy owner, goats and bees, legendary honey, which "only people in their 70s like and ask for." And while the story of Nature Sweet's beginnings as a hippy commune is part of the playful, colorful, caring, personable organizational identity, that old time image is severely minimized online. The company is redesigning their website, logo, and colors (to become more colorful) in an effort to become a different organization. It can be gleaned from the quotes thus far that the desire to change who Nature Sweet is as an organization is very much driven by the social media context.

Below is a quote by Sue suggesting the role of the social media stakeholder in this identity co-construction:

> And I think, that has a lot to do with it too, because in a sense, from the social side, that's… it's the creating of this pretty picture, the creating that lifestyle for moms and families that says, "Hey, this brand has personality, this brand has design, this brand has style. And they are talking to me in the world I

am living in."

The emphasis on the audience, personality, and style in this quote is almost superficial when compared to the depth of the preceding identity conversation. The audience, the main target stakeholder as defined in the meeting, is female, mother, generally younger (the age issue explicit externally as well as internally in this case), health-, and quality-conscious. The posts by the organization match the social media identity statements already expressed—they are colorful, pretty, fun, skewing toward the family. *In this sense, a continuous focus on integrated communication can be recognized here: there is a recognizable push for the organizational identity to match the social media image.* As a result, Nature Sweet monitors organizational social media activity closely, and meets monthly to discuss ongoing practices and specific conversations online.

Unexpected Negative Comment

In this final section of the vignette, I move away from the in-person meeting and quote a section of a monthly social media marketing phone meeting. Given that Nature Sweet places big emphasis on being playful, positive, and friendly online, it is especially notable to experience the team's reaction to the only negative comment the company received while I was working with them. This occurred over Instagram, where the organization is active posting product information and sharing blogger recipes with followers. Geraldine, the social media strategist from the WildRose marketing agency, usually led these meetings and here she continues by giving a report on Instagram:

> Geraldine: Yeah… absolutely, ok good to hear. So, we will continue to follow the conversations that are happening on Instagram. A lot of people that are following Nature Sweet and talking about Nature Sweet, are tagging us so again,

> also searching though the hashtag #NatureSweet itself. Um, something that was interesting… and this happened today, so I guess it is not in August anymore… But yeah, we got our first negative comment on Instagram…
>
> Rachel (marketing director): Oh no, oh no…
>
> G: Yeah… so this was someone, a dieter, um, apparently she is going through a special diet and she just started it, but um, *she didn't tag us, she just used the hashtag, so it didn't go back to our account*, but… apparently she didn't like our blueberry syrup, so you know I said, well we can send you something and she hasn't responded back.
>
> R: So, she just said that she didn't like the taste of it?
>
> Sue (another Nature Sweet employee): Yeah, she said that it was worse than cough syrup…
>
> R: Oh, um, yeah… So, the blueberry definitely does have a different taste than the maple and the cinnamon…
>
> G: So I mean, we appreciate the customer input and we should encourage her to try the other varieties. I will let you know how that turns out.
>
> R: Cool.

In this example Geraldine is reporting on the organization's social media platform activities. At this point of the meeting she has gone through the monthly activity on Facebook, Twitter, and Pinterest and is moving on to Instagram. The surprise by the first negative comment on Instagram is evident early on in the quote, which is then taken by the marketing director who reacts with emphatic "oh no, oh no." Additionally, the negative comment stands out enough to be included in the monthly report early since the meeting was held in early September to cover past activity for August. Most intriguing however, is what comes next, Geraldine reports: "she didn't tag us, she just used the hashtag, so it didn't go back to our account." This is important because tagging an organization on Instagram means that everyone will see the comment on that organization's "wall" or "feed." When using the hashtag only, anyone who specifically searches for that hashtag may see the comment—a significantly less troubling scenario. A comment going directly to the organizational account is more threatening because it immediately becomes "attached" to the organizational image.

A surprise may be registered when Rachel, a Nature Sweet employee, asks: “So, she just said that she didn’t like the taste of it?” “it was worse than cough syrup,” another employee confirms. The meaning of these two sentences can only be fully appreciated when considering earlier descriptions of the Nature Sweet brand and identity. The company and its employees pride themselves on making the most delicious and healthy baking mixes, sweeteners, and sweet syrups. A public knock from a health enthusiast comes as a shock, which was palpable during the meeting, and a full-on panic is possibly only averted by the fact that the comment did not go directly to the organization’s Instagram account.

Following the cough syrup comparison, Rachel hedges a bit, admitting that the syrup does taste “different” from their other varieties by stating the obvious (blueberry doesn’t taste like maple or cinnamon) and drops the topic. Interestingly, it is in this unpleasant and what I interpreted to be a shocking moment of negative commentary by a fan, that Geraldine, who is not part of Nature Sweet, reverts to organizational text or classic “company talk.” This occurrence reminds us of sensemaking again and the frequent reliance on approved organizational texts and practices that members employ to deal with uncertainty.

Similarly to the reactions to confirming and disconfirming messages earlier, the instance of this negative comment is approached with positive, confirming feedback from the organization. But even more noteworthy, Nature Sweet, as represented by Geraldine, seeks to connect with this “negative” stakeholder, possibly in an attempt to change this person’s brand (and identity) perception at some point. This example of connecting and “following” leads me toward the next part of this chapter, which discusses control and

community. The practice of connecting with one's stakeholders suggests their importance. And while social media professionals generally do not admit that identities and brands are a matter of negotiation online, it is evident that much of this negotiation happens offline, within the private space of meeting rooms, telephones, and emails.

Thus, based on the presented evidence, I suggest that organizational identity co-construction, and in particular, organizational identity statements, are often created in private. As shown, this private identity discussion can be juxtaposed to the inherent publicity of the social media context. The fact that the negotiative character of organizational identity is not visible outright in the online conversation does not mean that this negotiation doesn't take place at all. *Organizations consider and re-consider identity statements and representation in the context of social media and those are always to some extent influenced by external stakeholders, usually in the privacy of a meeting room.* With this knowledge, it is enticing to understand how this organizational identity is communicatively controlled in the public domain of social media platforms.

Social Media Communities and Organizational Identity

Community creation is one of the biggest organizational goals in the context of social media. James, a social media strategist for a running company explains:

> That's what we are trying to create online. For the most part, all of our platforms are trying to create a community of people who are passionate and not just for our brand, but what our brand is supposed to mean.

In the interviews and meetings, the word "community" was mentioned 98 times, the word "fan" 128 times, the word "partner" was mentioned 31 times, the word "follower" 220 times, the words "friends" and "friendship" were mentioned 119 times, the word "advocate" 39 times, and the word "ambassador" was mentioned 12 times. In

other words, the participants in this study had a focus on community during conversation. Further, they clearly distinguished between types of community membership. I argue that understanding the virtual communities organizations seek to create and subsequently manage, aids in making sense of organizational identity and its co-construction in the context of social media. Additionally, understanding virtual organizational communities helps us to more specifically understand the role of the online stakeholder. First, I describe the make-up of social media communities as derived from the data. Second, I relate organizational interpretations for the role of community to notions of organizational membership and collective identity. And third, I briefly discuss the possibility that organizational communities on social media act as an identity controlling mechanism.

As described by the collective voice of the participants in this study, social media communities are made up of fans, followers, partners, friends, advocates, and ambassadors. Each of these groups has slightly different characteristics, although as a whole they are associated with the organization at least virtually (sometimes offline, too, as with business-to-business (B2B) partners and ambassadors) and in some ways interact with the organization on social media platforms. In this study, “fans” are generally perceived to be the lowest community denominator; they are everyone who “likes” an organization on Facebook or any other platform. “Followers” are not simply Twitter followers, but people who have expressed a bit more interest in the organization, perhaps liked a few posts, commented occasionally, maybe participated in a contest, but nevertheless, their association with the social media representation of any given organization is loose. Organizations usually refer to other business (such as vendors) as

"partners" and strive to connect with them on social media platforms in order to build mutually beneficial business relationships (i.e., if you mention and tag me in your posts, I will do the same for you, which creates a wider audience for each business). Interaction between organizations and partners is limited to mentions, tags, retweets, or praise.

"Friends" (different from Facebook's definition of friends) are the people who go beyond following: these are the people who regularly engage with the organization online in a positive manner. For example, Alice, a social media writer on behalf of Nature Sweet, talked fondly about women she would regularly interact with on Facebook or Twitter. She called these women friends of Nature Sweet, because they regularly appeared on the platforms contributing "likes," positive comments, and product reviews. "Advocates" are the people who openly stand up on behalf of the organization during a negative comment storm. Organizations frequently relied on advocates speaking up during high negative comment periods. Advocates are sometimes well known to the organization, other times they aren't, but their contribution to how an organization is perceived by others and by itself (through its employees who read advocate comments) is undeniable. Lastly, the "ambassadors" are community members who in some way work for the organization, yet they are not part of it, at least not in the traditional sense of membership. They are not in the employee directory, rarely if ever get paid with money, and usually haven't even met organizational representatives in person. These are individuals, however, who certainly work for the organizations. They may write content for social media purposes (i.e., Nature Sweet uses independent bloggers who provide recipes using Nature Sweet products), or use product in ways that are beneficial to the organizational image (i.e., Runner High uses beautiful pictures posted by runners on its

own platforms).

In Chapter 1 I mentioned some critical perspectives on the organizational use of user-generated content, and I acknowledge that the practices described above can stand criticism from this perspective. However, my point here is different. I would like to focus on how organizations think of their virtual community members. When I asked Nature Sweet and Runner High if they considered ambassadors members of the organization, I received an unequivocal "yes." These two organizations talked extensively about community engagement, which is why I use them as examples. Both organizations "paid" their ambassadors in free product and, for that, used ambassador-generated content to post and repost on the organizations' social media feeds. Additionally, the role of the ambassador and most other community members is to confirm the organization's identity online—a confirmation that reverberates inside and outside the organization. Ambassadors, through the conversations they engage in, and the texts they produce, give sense to an organization's identity, while also making sense of their own—becoming connected to an organization in an ambassador capacity contributes to their personal social media image.

There are two additional characteristics that I posit of the virtual communities in this dissertation: 1) they are flexible in terms of the levels described above and 2) they acknowledge organizational critics. First, the flexibility in levels is expressed well by the employees and representatives of Nature Sweet, who talked about one of their "super fans." Jenny Smith is a Nature Sweet super fan, as told by an organizational member—Jenny engaged in conversations with the company online regularly and always had something nice to say. Her efforts to communicate were so frequent that sometimes they

would go unnoticed by the organization, as expressed by Alice, a social media writer for Nature Sweet, who said: “She was having that conversation constantly with us, whether we know it or not.” In other words, Jenny would post on the organization’s Facebook and Twitter feeds without prompt and without expectation of a reward (i.e., free product, which Nature Sweet has never sent her). It is precisely because the organization has never reciprocated with free product that they do not consider Jenny an ambassador, but a super level of fan.

A few organizations in this study reported having super fans—people who engaged with them online continuously, usually without the expectation of a reward, something that tends to invite stakeholder interaction. Hence, I called Jenny Smith’s pattern of communication the “Jenny Smith effect.” The Jenny Smith effect generated this level of excitement among the Nature Sweet team:

> Rachel: Um, that you know, we all know who Jenny Smith is (chuckles)…
> Sue: Oh my gosh, yeah! We have got a super fan! A super fan! She likes every single thing that we have ever done, ever! And her name is Jenny Smith and we don't know her, no one knows her, but she… we don't know her!
> R: We have never paid her a cent, but I think she might have… Didn't she win the Eating in Color Contest?
> S: Yeah…
> R: One of the very first one that we did.
> Geraldine: Yeah, yep.
> Alice: A thankful winner.
> R: Something like that, and she is just…
> S: She loves us!
> R: She loves Nature Sweet! I mean, we will take it, we are not complaining.
> A: Yeah!

The excitement over Jenny Smith and her love for Nature Sweet is so palpable in the meeting room that eventually one of the employees admits: she has befriended Jenny on Facebook out of curiosity, but they never speak. This type of interpersonal

engagement with organizational community members was fairly common—most social media professionals knew and could name a few people from their organization's community who had left memorable impressions. At the end, what the Jenny Smith kind of community member suggests is that virtual communities are fluid and flexible in terms of membership levels (i.e., one can be a super fan, but not an ambassador). At the same time, the expressed care for community creation and growth also suggest that organizations take their virtual communities with the seriousness previously reserved for traditional organizational members only.

Thus, social networking platforms stand to create a sense of collective identity between organizations and their nonmembers. While collective identity has been thought of as a process that develops within the organization and it is expressed by organizational members, the way organizations are thinking of their virtual communities on social media might be changing this. Collective identity is defined as "a collective sense of itself—a communal property that cannot be reduced to any particular individual" (Koschman, 2012, p. 62). This is precisely what a community of "likes" and "favorites" reinforces for organizations and the social media professionals that represent them online. It is this sense of collective identity that appears to create and continually reinforce the passion and excitement expressed by the Nature Sweet team and the "Jenny Smith effect." It is this sense of collective identity that allows for an organization's identity to be co-constructed: by communicatively fostering, nurturing, and being accountable to communities of nonmembers online.

So far, I have addressed organizational virtual communities of largely positive nature. However, I would be remiss not to consider the communities of "haters" as one

participant called some of her most frequent interlocutors on Twitter. Organizations frequently have to deal with negative comments on social media platforms. While participants claimed that negativity was more prominent in some industries than others (i.e., a meat production company vs. a honey production company), negative feedback was considered part of the social media context. Previously, I showed how the presence of negative comments (and lack of comments altogether) could function as identity disconfirming messages, now I show that naysayers can have a community status of their own.

For example, Linda, a social media writer who spends most of her time on Twitter, knew her organization's "haters" by name. She could also readily describe what happens when she and the other social media writers on her team get into conversations with these people:

> They're really not the people who are twittering you because they want information or anything. They either really dislike you today anyway or we have some who—There's one guy who's in Boston! He has his own blog, and he just… doesn't hate us… but he will really stir the pot and put what I call those half-truths that just get the other people going. The difficult part with that is if you try to answer, we've done that in the past, then it just comes into this—And how do you do that on Twitter? It doesn't make sense. You're trying to be reasonable, but you have somebody else who's sort of going for the shock. So, you have those people, but they're not the most people. Most of your followers hardly ever even probably contact us, really. They just started following us to get the update and things. Then, you have the people who like to engage.

Usually, negative comments are made to generate shock value, she explains, and as a result, they don't indicate hate as much as they just want to "stir the pot." In this example, Linda even suggests that often it is not even worth it for her to try and reason with pot stirrers; instead, she either waits for the discussion to die down on its own while providing minimal well-measured feedback, or counts on advocates to jump in and close

the conversation. Linda does not address the standard feedback she has for naysayers in this quote, but provides examples throughout the interview, along with other participants. The general strategy is to counter negativity with politeness, “show that we are there to listen, whether it is positive or negative” as a colleague of Linda’s clarified, and demonstrate that useful feedback is valued. Most frequently, however, participants actively tried to turn negative feedback into positive through making sense of it in the context of what might be useful for the organization.

For example, one of Linda’s colleagues told me: “So it, it's not always a negative thing for us to have people be upset. We take that and then we can turn—we can turn it into a positive by saying, "Look, we listened. We understand you guys are frustrated and this is what we can do for you." The sentiment behind this brief quote was echoed throughout the interviews and meetings analyzed for this dissertation. The main thing to note here is the focus on listening and framing the act of listening as a positive, an indicator of receptiveness for stakeholder feedback on behalf of the organization. When asked if organizations took this feedback “in” for discussion and analysis, the answer usually was a qualified “yes,” social media professionals had the responsibility to bring up feedback if it had reached a sort of critical mass in addressing a specific issue. In the case of Linda’s company that issue was frequency of service; in the case of Runner’s High, a running shoe company, the issue was shoe design. A continuation of this strategy in turning the negative to positive was also what an agency social media strategist described as the “PR circle back to the source move,” where a complaint was taken on by the organization, often dealt with “offline” (i.e., in a phone call), and once resolved, a response was posted back under the original conversation to show that the organization

took responsibility and acted on negative comments.

Notable in terms of the community discussion is the explicit organizational attempt to turn negative communication into positive organizational communication through what can only be described as sensemaking. Most frequently, participants make sense of negative feedback online by thinking of it as an opportunity to show that as an organization they listen, care, and will act on "reasonable" requests. Consequently, most organizations admitted that they would consider negative comments as much as they would positive ones, thus legitimizing the status of naysayer communities as ones that impact the organization. Further, the fact that some organizations knew and acknowledged particular "haters," suggest that there might be levels to the naysayer community as well. With this said, the participants in this study did not provide enough information to construct a community description similar to the one revolving around positive commentary.

In the end, how do virtual communities impact organizational identity? Notably, by having organizations create social media positions in the first place, and specifically, create positions that some participants called "community managers." Indeed, some social media writers in this study carried the specific title "community manager" to refer to everything they did on the organization's social media platforms. The explicit focus on community when titling employees notwithstanding, social media communities were valued to some extent as revenue sources, but far more as sensegiving and sensebreaking, identity confirming and disconfirming mechanisms. Some, like James, a social media strategist, acknowledge that, "having a strong community creates advocates and those advocates create our job for us," and others, like Ally, a social media strategist and writer

for an educational institution, insist that a strong and vocal community influences her own organization "to get on board with the times" and accept social media as an organizational tool for interactive connection with stakeholders.

The role of community when it comes to organizational social media adoption can be interpreted as de facto organizational identity co-construction. A good example here is an incident suggestive of the ways social media characteristics (immediacy in particular), might change what organizations perceive as an acceptable feedback timeframe. In my interview with Ally, she told a story about her organization handling an "incident" that broke on Twitter just the day before our meeting. Through this story, highlighting the organization's discomfort in handling public social media conversations with stakeholders, she reveals much of her organization's changing identity.

> Ally: And so, just yesterday, we had an incident where someone talked about an incident that they had experienced on [our grounds].
>
> Interviewer: I saw it on Twitter.
>
> A: It's kind of an interesting little piece and probably an important part of case study of what I do here. She was groped, like you saw on Twitter, and she filed the report: she went through all the right avenues but then she started a public conversation about it. She did all the right things privately, not necessarily her obligation but it's, sort of, creates a conversation so that it can be resolved. And then she openly spoke about it and she tried to reach out to [our organization] and then also went to [another one] nearby, just to make sure that the story was heard. Timing-wise, it comes shortly on the heels of an article about sexual violence [around here where we] were called by name.
>
> I: Oh, interesting, okay.
>
> A: But the fact that she made it a public conversation! *The other [organization] immediately, like, within a minute after she posted her first tweet, got back to her. It took us three hours. And that is record time for a situation like this right now.*
>
> I: Yeah?
>
> A: *Just because the administration here was uncomfortable with it. So I didn't get to respond to it immediately, I was denied a response.*
>
> I: So you had crafted a response and needed permission to post it?
>
> A: Well, I crafted a response and said, "We need to respond to this." And several people throughout the [organization] said, "We need to respond to this," just in different parts of the organization. And so that went through my boss' boss

> and his boss to determine whether or not the responses were appropriate. And, I mean, word for word, they picked through them. So it sounded bureaucratic but we eventually got back to her.

The first thing that became obvious during my conversation with Ally was that she did not feel as if she was getting enough support from her organization. These feelings are evident throughout the story as well. A few of the social media professionals I talked to did not feel supported by their organizations, making this an important finding I cover in the last part of this chapter. In terms of community, this incident suggests that perhaps despite organizational perceptions, a social media community exists if the woman in this story felt comfortable sharing a private event in a "very, very public way" to make a difference. For reference, this organization's Twitter account at the time of the interview had 3,670 followers, and the Facebook account had 20,129 friends.

Many of these community members were not happy with the 3 hours of silence resulting from the organization's discomfort in communicating. Two of social media's characteristics as defined by Scott and Orlikowski (2012) come to the forefront in this story—social media is public and immediate, and organizations that want to exist in this context need to be aware of the affordances and constraints presented by these characteristics. Clearly, from this story, the fact that the social media writer is aware of these characteristics does not mean that the organization is aware or in fact able or willing to react in accordance to this awareness. The community's continued demand for an organizational stance in just three hours, and the "bureaucratic" response that came out at the end, provide an unprecedented glimpse of who this organization is—its values, vulnerabilities, fears, and discomfort in the face of identity disconfirming and threatening situations. It also suggests how even unacknowledged virtual communities might put

pressure on organizations to act. As 1 participant pointed out, “the conversation about you as an organization is already happening, so the question is, do you want to take part in it?”

Ally’s explanation later on that the “administration” of her organization doesn’t know how to reconcile the demands of their social media community with its own identity is enlightening in terms of the tensions presented by social media. Knowing the meaning and value of community feedback at the organizational level is a difficult task, which I discuss next. However, before moving on, I want to acknowledge what has been suggested by the results I present on the role of community. While much of the organization–community interaction is ultimately about identity, and the role of social media specific communities is to contribute in a unique way to the co-construction of organizational identity, this process does not come without tension. Derived from the very title of “community manager” is a suggestion that social media communities ought to be managed and, by extension, controlled. However, control is an elusive element in the social media context, one that organizations continuously try to achieve through knowing more about the impact of social media in general and stakeholders in particular.

Knowing and Organizational Identity Co-Construction

How an organization knows (its customers, its business, the market, etc.) and the process of knowing as a communicative, are subjects firmly rooted in sensemaking: in other words, the process is both reflexive and ongoing. Additionally, as Carlsen’s (2006) work on identity practice suggests, what makes the study of knowing important to identity is the fact that organizational practices are specific to the organization (often expressed as the eponymous, “This is how we do things around here!”). These practices

then help define the organization to its employees.

In the discussion below I use the term "knowing" similarly to Kuhn (2011), in order to emphasize that in communication (and in the present case of rapidly changing social media context, especially), *to know* is impossible. In this environment, the verb *knowing* captures the flexibility and temporality of the process with more success. I anchor the results pertinent to knowing social media and organizational identity in the Small Family Farm (SFF) vignette. The farm's story is one that involves a continuous, highly communicative process, and an organization that is invested in knowing what it means to be a small family farm on social media.

My understanding of knowing in this dissertation is firmly rooted in the theoretical perspectives of communication constitutive of organizing (CCO). Nevertheless, to better understand the vignette presented here, it is necessary to briefly explain my take on knowing within organizations. First, it is important to understand the difference between *knowing* and *knowledge*, especially in the incredibly fast-changing landscape and environment of social media. Knowing suggests action and an ongoing pursuit of accomplishment, as opposed to knowledge, which connotes stability and facts (Kuhn & Jackson, 2008). It is "knowing" that gets accomplished in the present case, in its most unfinished, ongoing, and continuously negotiated version. Knowing is rooted in community—including ones that involve online stakeholders. These networks help shape the interpretation of events, help define conception and competence, and allow organizations to determine what counts as appropriate action. Knowing then is deeply social, being regularly linked to various community practices that inform problem solving in all sorts of contexts, including the present one (Kuhn & Jackson, 2008).

In this study, my conceptualization of knowing is strongly influenced by my central take on interaction as an ongoing process of negotiation—and in the case of knowing, a constant possibility of reframing (Gumperz & Cook-Gumperz, 1982). The negotiative character of knowing makes it a process that is subject to reframing (based on a given context and event) within this context. These are essential assumptions that must be considered when moving through the story of the Small Family Farm. As I have shown already, interpreting and making sense of the social media context and the ongoing process of identity negotiation have proven challenging to organizations and the individuals working within them. In the case of SFF, I was able to observe an ongoing learning situation that continuously referenced an online environment. This situation allowed me to monitor online interactions between an organization and members of its community, and glean insight into the process of knowing one's organizational identity in a novel context.

The Small Family Farm can be found in the southwest part of the Salt Lake Valley. The farm, which grows mostly vegetables and fruits on its 70 acres, belongs to fifth-generation farmer Larry Small. As stated on the farm's website and during one of my interviews with Larry, the family's goal is to share the farm's harvest, "both literally and figuratively," while benefiting "body, spirit, and community." This goal originally incited Small (who is known to his community as "Farmer Larry") to set up a site for his business on social media and then develop his community online. In line with the community focus of the farm, its facilities include an attractive Farm Market, a big space for regularly-held canning workshops, another space for other public events (several are staged annually at the site), and even a preschool. Small is neither the only farmer

utilizing social media in the Salt Lake Valley, nor is he alone in this venture; a local marketing firm agreed under contract to help him and his associate, Tanya, learn the rules and practices of social media commerce and community engagement.

In terms of type of organization, in the context of this study, the SFF is unique in that it represents a business that is too small for separate social media roles (strategist, writer, etc., as seen in bigger businesses). In fact, this is typical for small businesses, where the role of public relations and marketing often falls to the owners or other employees whose responsibilities are diverse (Stokes, 2000). The agriculture industry defines a small farm as one that generates annual gross revenues of less than $250,000 (Hoppe, MacDonald, & Korb, 2010). This includes 91% of all U.S. farms. About 60% of these are considered “very small,” generating less than $10,000 annually; in these cases, nearly half of the operators must hold a job outside of farming in order to survive (Hoppe, MacDonald, & Korb, 2010). In Small’s case, although he used to hold a separate full-time job, he has since forfeited the position and committed himself to growing his farm as a full-time operator.

These small-sized farm operations often choose direct-to-consumer marketing to reach customers, bypassing the loss of revenue from indirect sales and allowing a higher level of control of production practices (Abrams & Sackmann, 2014). In this marketing model, the farms grow products as determined by a mix of their preferences and the market for those products and then find channels to sell directly to consumers through on-farm sales (including internet sales), roadside farm stands, and local farmers markets. For example, SFF has utilized their own farm stand, which recently became a full-fledged enclosed market in a bigger, renovated building on the farm’s property. However,

different from the typical small farming business, Larry Small does sell some of his produce (tomatoes and corn) to local grocery chains as well.

In lieu of more staff, more discretionary time, and/or more specialized training in marketing or public relations, small business owners and operators must manage social media for their own organizations. As such, the use of social media by these unique businesses often demonstrates their owners' personal styles, and this requires examination as a special case for this research. Special cases can be extremely useful in the study of under-theorized phenomena (Eisenhardt, 1989). It must be acknowledged also that social media marketing in the farming industry has been growing in recent years due to urban interest in farmers markets and the increasing numbers of farmers aged 18-35 (the primary user base of social networking platforms) who use social media personally and for business (Durban, 2011).

When applying these statistics to the Small Family Farm, it quickly becomes clear that the farm and its online efforts represent a prime example of today's family farming organization going social. Farmer Larry Small is in his early 30s, active in the local farming community, and an avid social media user. The Small Family Farm has the highest number of "Likes" on Facebook (3,770) of any other farm in the Valley. While there is a great deal that is interesting about the farm, what I chose to focus on here is Larry and Tanya's use of social media, and the way they've applied it as part of the process of knowing their business, marketplace, and community.

I had never previously engaged with a farm online, did not follow farms, and apart from the fact that my maternal grandmother had a small farm, strictly for family use, I knew nothing about farming. So, one of my first questions to Small was, "Why do

you use social media?" His response was so identity laden that I've included much of it here verbatim:

> I guess just because everybody does it, right? And people, I think people like to find out. I guess what we are trying to do is more than just…. Like our mission statement, you know, our farm is about, it is more than just trying to sell somebody fruits and vegetables, you know. We don't want to be Harmon's you know, Walmart, or…. We are not super focused on, you know merchandising as much, you know. We do it and we want to do it better, but I don't think anybody farms…. There are not many people who farm because they want, because they think there is money in it, right? (Laughs.)

The first thing to note in this exchange is that Small's answer is framed by questions. The initial one indicates a presumption that "everybody does it" and that this largely influences his farm's engagement on social media. The "right?" that follows this assumption was almost rhetorical, but not entirely: In my experience with the farm, it was my impression that many decisions about social media were made based on the influence of what others did, showcasing a strong sense of what I call *an industry pressure to participate*.

The second part of this exchange is even more identity defining, providing a glimpse as to how Small differentiates his farm (store) from others and why he chose to farm in the first place. He also offered a big insight into why he does what he does. A few concerns kept him up at night however, and one of them is an unresolved tension between growing a virtual community with the goals expressed earlier and making a profit from it. Below I focus on the way this tension is expressed in the context of social media, knowing, and the farm's identity.

Reports and Knowing

Meaning making and, by extension, knowing in the world of social media are just beginning to be problematized in the literature. For example, Langlois (2014) studies meaning making from the perspective of social media and provides a definition that is quite enlightening in the context of my work with the Small Family Farm. She understands meaning as a site of tension and transition between the effort to enclose the world in language (text) and the drive to unfold the world through language (conversation). In order to make sense of the SFF story, we ought to keep in mind that in the social media context, meaning has become a participatory (user-generated), technological (platform-based), and commercial (profit-oriented) enterprise (Langlois, 2014). The complexity of meaning making and knowing contained in this three-way split is well exemplified in this vignette, where I emphasize the participants' attempts to enclose the world in text and unfold that world through conversation, all the while trying to make sense of who they are in the process.

SFF Vignette

Upon entering the small, sparsely furnished office at the back of the Farm Store, I find Tanya despondent. It is less than 3 weeks from the farm's biggest event of the year, the annual Fall Festival, and Tanya has not been able to find any volunteers. I ask, "Have you tried social media, Facebook?" knowing that she has—I have seen the banner and daily announcement come through. She responds:

> When we did the volunteer call, um, I think I got one person from the social side the rest of it has been people calling in and wanting donations. So I let them know, if you want donations, then you will have to volunteer. So it is more of a trade than it is a donation. I've gotten 6 volunteers that way, which has been

> really good. And then I have probably about 6 people of my friends that are coming. Mary [an employee in the farm store] got a couple and Stephen got his girlfriend, so…. There is a few that way, but the social side did not hit the mark at all.

Tanya's complaint does not surprise me. Since I've been involved with the farm, to my dismay, I have seen them struggle to make sense of social media, its use, its benefit, and its profitability. Because Tanya is in charge of operations at the farm, she is responsible for anything from restocking the store, to organizing the preschool, overseeing the bale and tractor rides, and managing the canning workshops. She is also responsible for the farm's marketing, including social media. And while I've noticed that she has had fun maintaining the farm's Facebook page, I am also quick to note her frequent frustration and simultaneous reliance on the marketing firm that helps her. What strikes me most in her tone as she describes the volunteer situation above is her disappointment.

"This is so strange," I probe, "I mean, you guys have almost 4000 followers, you would think that would get you some volunteers!" Tanya continues,

> Well, and especially offering the free admission and, 'cuz we offered a free admission for their family to come in that day, and then we also offered them $15, well $5 for every hour that they volunteered so they can get, so that they can spend them in the market. That's one person, and that was it.

Given the activity on the farm's Facebook page, the disappointing social media volunteering effort is unexpected. The farm has clearly attempted to bolster their efforts to make it work, both virtually and analog, but they haven't yet succeeded in reaching the degree of engagement they want. This struggle is of note because it suggests something that social networking theorists (Gladwell, 2010; Morozov, 2012) have already offered: that perhaps social media communities are not able to engage, drawing conversation, but

no action when action is called for (usually referred to “slacktivism”). Alternatively, others (Shirky, 2008) have offered that social media offer (and deliver) unprecedented opportunity for self-organized collective action. This theorizing, along with Tanya’s complaint of an online community failing to deliver, amplify the difficulty of knowing social media, especially in respect to community. It also poses questions about the distinct types of communities that might be successful online and how to foster their growth. Tanya’s confusion leads me to a different question, which begins to reveal a special way in which knowing (including knowing about oneself as an organization) happens in the social media context.

> Interviewer: Why do you think social media didn't work [for your organization’s objectives]?
>
> Tanya: I don't know.
>
> I: Do you think that up until this point social has been doing what you guys were hoping it to do?
>
> T: *I don't know, because I haven’t seen the report*. So, I don't know how it’s changed since we started with [the marketing agency]. So I don't know where the… I’d like to see… Larry’s asked them and we want to see weekly reports, but then we haven’t seen anything from before they started coming out to the farm.

Tanya’s repeated use of the phrase “I don't know” and “I haven’t seen the report,” seems especially telling. *It is not that Tanya doesn’t know how to operate and navigate social media for the business—she is involved in daily interactions with multiple online stakeholders, she practically runs social media for the farm, and in fact, she knows how to run a basic Facebook activity report (I was there when she learned). What she doesn’t know is how her daily online activity (conversation) scales up the farm.* And this seems to remain unknowable until it is written: an official report, provided by the firm they have hired to run the reports, not the report that she can run on her own. *At the end, what this quote signifies is less about the problem of a nonresponding community (albeit that is a*

problem worth investigating elsewhere), and more about the power of authoritative texts and practices out of which the organization emerges.

My purpose here is not to make fine distinctions between types of knowledge, but recognizing basic organizational knowledge types provides me with an analytical advantage. The example above suggests that making sense of social media and its role in organizing is contingent on negotiating the tension between *tacit* and *explicit knowledge*. Broadly, tacit knowledge can be described as *knowing how* and explicit knowledge can be described as *knowing about* (Grant, 1996).

The critical distinction between the two lies in ease of transferability, or in what the Montreal School Approach calls ease of *translation.* This translation can occur across individuals, across space, across time, and ultimately, across organizational levels. In other words, as Tanya's situation demonstrates, tacitly knowing how to do social media, how to interact, engage, build relationships and communities, and how to apply this knowledge does not mean much without the easily communicated, textually explicit knowledge that a written report creates. Tacit and explicit ways of knowing make material difference in organizations, but in a somewhat roundabout way. While organizations usually highly value individuals who know how to do things, in the case of the organization knowing social media, the knowledge of the individual must be authored into organizational text before it becomes knowable. In other words, knowing about social media interactions is achieved through reports that are interpreted into enduring organizational practices.

In fact, I argue that this search for knowing about the outcome of social media interaction through written reports serves as intermediary of what eventually becomes

authoritative text (Kuhn, 2008), a key organizational practice for making sense of organizational identity and construed image (outsider perception). It is in this sense that local social media interactions constitute part of who the organization becomes. The reason for my claim resides in the fact that as described by Tanya and later Small himself, without a report, organizational meaning making is difficult for the organization. Until conversation becomes text that, quite literally, informs subsequent organizational practices, it is not part of the authored organization.

Clearly, there is a caveat here, because we know that informal, unwritten understandings, practices, and rules, do form all the time and hold enormous power in organizations. Yet, where large numbers of online interactions are concerned (as they are in many business social media sites), without an authoritative text to facilitate sensemaking, knowing at all levels is diminished. In this case then, an authoritative text could in fact be the *practice* of embracing big data and analytics to facilitate organizational knowing.

To clarify, I cite Tanya in a conversation with me during a meeting:

> Interviewer: I actually looked up other local farms and ranches on social and Small's is far, far beyond everyone else in terms of likes and conversations.
> Tanya: Yeah, I know that.
> I: No other farm around here is as popular on Facebook and Twitter as you are…
> T: No, you are right, we do stand out.

Our exchange sounds as if I am trying to convince Tanya that her employer is indeed the most popular local farm on social media, but it is clear that Tanya knows this from her own work online. In fact, Small also knows this, but as he unequivocally puts it in front of me later, "I want to know more." His insistence on analytic reports actually relates to the earlier tension between growing "soft" community goals online and seeking

proof of “hard” profit:

> I just want to be able to see like, if there is a way that you can track if those conversations are converting to sales… Um, and match that up with what we’ve got, you know. So, I can see that we are getting more…. From what you showed me, all that I can see from it is that we are getting more traffic on the site, on the Facebook page: more likes, more followers, more interaction. But I am still not sure if that is… what it’s doing.

Small’s comments demonstrate the difficulty in making sense of social media in relation to organizational goals, and clearly defining organizational goals in the context of online networking platforms. He states upfront that he would like to see interaction converted into sales, a statement that appears to conflict with his earlier statement about cultivating and growing a community. Those earlier stated goals included teaching the values of the farm, educating locals about the benefits of being outside, and guiding the public to grow their own food.

But Small’s comments also demonstrate that at the organizational level there is a struggle to make sense of changing boundaries, relationships, and profit definitions. *Knowing*, in that sense, is indeed an ongoing challenge and equivocal process, which appears to hold a few tensions in the context of social media. These tensions appear to exist in the heart of reimagining co-construction at the organizational level*, as this continuous struggle to know influences organizational practices, routines, and rules, which in turn impact the identity of the organization (Carlsen, 2006).* And while knowing at the organization level is achieved though authoritative texts (Kuhn, 2008), these authoritative texts could be written or practiced (Putnam, 2013) to effectively shape the organizational character, thus presenting a strong argument for co-constructed identity.

Identity Issues of Presentification, Identity Work, and Voice

Cooren (2006) wrote about "plenum of agencies," referring to the theoretical understanding that in any given situation, there are multiple actants that are not limited to being human. In this section, I introduce the concepts of *plenum of identities and identity hubs*. These introductions help me elaborate on the somewhat theoretically neglected process of organizational presentification in respect to social media platforms. In this final part of Chapter 4, I also explicate an identity twist, an interplay of organizational and individual identity that bears connection with the processes of identification, identity work, and voice, made unique by the context of social media. The section of this chapter answers part of my first research question, which asks if and how social media interactions with stakeholders might impact processes stemming from the communicative co-construction of organizational identity.

Plenum of Identities

In the context of this study, it is important to account for the fact that individuals represent organizations and their identities online. This representation is a contested and complicated process when it comes to social media, as exemplified by a participant comment discussing the fact that her organization has multiple social media accounts: "Where they [the accounts] really are official for a portion of the [organization], but they're not, sort of, authorized to speak for the [organization] as a whole." When Cooren (2006) and Taylor (2006) write of plenum of agencies and presentification, they both refer to situations where someone authorized speaks on behalf of someone or something else (usually the organization). This is one reason why a significant amount of data for this research comes from individuals who strategize and write on behalf of organizations

and through organizational social media accounts. These people, who may work for the organization they represent, or may be part of an agency that the organization has hired to do social media on their behalf, are in fact the voice of the organization online. They quite literally become the organization on social media platforms. It is this realization, which emerged during the data collection process, that made the matter of agency relevant in some respects.

The Montreal School Approach has a highly communicative conceptualization of agency, which I utilize in my understanding of how individual and organizational agencies interact in the context of social media. Montreal scholars in general articulate agency as the ability to make a difference (or have an impact) in and through conversation. In this study, I conceptualize the types of interactions taking place on social media platforms as conversations, so the above definition of agency suggests that in this study impact is achieved in and through organizational representative—digital stakeholder conversations. While helpful in fleshing out who is doing what in the social media space, The Montreal School Approach theorizing comes short in explaining some of the identity processes going on in the present context and expressed by the participants in this story.

So, I develop this theorizing further. To begin, I understand agency very much as I understand identity, as a fundamentally communicative action and ongoing process. For Latour (1987, 1993, 1994) as cited by Taylor (2006), any human action reflects the mobilization and organization of agents; these agents may not be human—an instance seen in the present study when discussing the role and implicit power of social media platforms' design and algorithms. When discussing agency within the MSA framework

and this study, it is important to distinguish between actants and actors. My specific interest in the role of social media professionals as organizational representatives on social media platforms necessitates this initial explanation. The MSA approach extends Graimas' earlier definition of actants and actors, by positing that actants "are abstract potentials," "pitched at a high level of generality," while actors, unlike actants, are tied to circumstances particular to a context of "habitual interaction" (Taylor & Cooren, 2006).

In this study this is a helpful distinction when it comes to understanding the social media professionals as agents of organizational identity presentification. Social media professionals are actants in the sense that they fall in a specific job category, a role that incorporates assumptions about how these organizational representatives act. They would reveal "an ideology that is characteristic of the society in which they exist" (Taylor & Cooren, 2006, p. 137), for example, that social media professionals take on specific marketing and public relations related actions that are part of their job. Social media professionals are also (and simultaneously) actors in that they engage in situated, contextualized conversations on behalf of their organizations. What becomes rather interesting here, however, is that in the social media context, while there is a presumption that someone, an individual, is speaking on behalf of the organization, it is in fact the organization that is represented online. For example, when Alice writes social media content on behalf of Nature Sweet, it is Nature Sweet that is in fact posting this content on social media platforms, not Alice. *No one, from the interacting social media stakeholders, knows of Alice or can identify an Alice behind the name and communication from Nature Sweet. So, in terms of agency, actant, and actor, Alice's position is a precarious one, which I call a plenum of identities.*

Further, this peculiar role of the social media professional necessitates a "twist" in how we understand the agency these individuals perform online. While they are in charge of the ongoing conversations on behalf of the organization, this conversation is regulated and constrained by organizational discourse (ranging from "common sense" to policy as articulated by participants and addressed by me shortly). The agency—constraint dialectic is well exemplified in my conceptualization of the "plenum of identities."

When I write of plenum of identities, I am inspired by the Montreal School Approach use of the concept of plenum of agencies (Cooren, 2006; Robichaud, 2006). The plenum of agencies as a concept refers to the notion "that the world as we know it is filled with agencies" (Cooren, 2006, p. 84). When theorizing the plenum of agencies, Cooren focuses on the interaction and interdependence of human and nonhuman agencies (i.e., the PDA reminded you of an upcoming appointment, the subway map indicated how to get to your appointment, the list of building tenants informed you of which floor to go) to suggest that although human agencies are not something to completely pass over, it is something that gets "help" from nonhuman contributions. The plenum of agencies is a concept closely related to a main theoretical construct within the Montreal School Approach, presentification, which is exceptionally helpful in this study. The plenum of agencies and presentification together make it possible for an organization, a collective communicative entity, to exist in interaction.

From an actant perspective, it is the job of the social media professional to make an organization present online. How they make this organization present is through specific content they write and post sometimes multiple times a day on various social media platforms. This content defined by the organization, although for some participants

the organizational discourse behind this content was so well ingrained, they referred to it as using “common sense” when posting. Social media professionals act on behalf of the organization continuously by engaging with various stakeholders online. These specific contextualized actions make social media professionals also actors. Yet, these interactions are both the responsibility of the organization and the individual making it “present” as we have already seen in the very opening of this dissertation and the data presented so far. The proposed plenum of identities accounts for this exciting mix of organizational and individual identity, which happens in the social media context. Because the focus on this final part is on organizational identity processes, it is useful to think of this peculiar twist of identities as an overarching theme.

One way to begin addressing the complexity of agency and identity in this study is to start by answering the question: What do social media professionals do? The job description borrows ideas from fields such as marketing, public relations, and programming, but when we move beyond this, the quote from Dan, a social media strategist, provides for a more poignant description: “We just have to identify what the brand is, who that brand is, and who they are trying to reach, and then just be the you that is going to talk to those people.” It can be inferred from these words that social media professionals, be they strategists or writers, be they agency or in-house organizational employees, are identity workers who take on the organizational voice. Once on the job, their first task is to create an organizational identity to “presentify” online, identify an audience, and finally, become the “you” that is the organizational voice for that identity. This quote is an excellent introduction to the agentic struggle represented in the notion of plenum of identities, which I exemplify further when discussing the identity-laden

process of taking on the organizational voice.

Taking on the Organizational Voice

The concept of taking on an organizational voice has to do with three separate but intertwined concepts: agency, identity work, and presentification. In their intertwined form, these concepts make up the plenum of identities as I see it. Both agency and presentification are terms elaborated and framed by the Montreal School Approach; I add the concept of identity work, which comes from the organizational identity literature. The plenum of identities as seen in the interaction of these three concepts is best represented in the idea of taking on the organizational voice. "Taking on the organizational voice" emerged as a code that was subsequently related to categories of organizational identity, representation/presentification, and identity work.

Taking on an organizational voice is not an unproblematic process because it entails a peculiar interplay between individual and organizational identity. Identity work helps explain the process of how people tasked with representing an organization's identity online take on and express this identity. As it has been shown in the identification literature, this process of taking on an organization's identity is usually realized through a series of ongoing transformations taken on by the individual understood as basically motivated by an innate desire to belong. *The concept of identity work aids in understanding how individuals actually work through this ongoing process of identification and organizational presentification online.*

Alvesson (1994) introduced the concept of identity work when he explored how advertisers talk about themselves, their work, and their clients. Alvesson argues that the way advertisers talk about themselves, their work, and their clients is a form of identity

work that is of service to the organization (their own and that of their client). Identity work is generally defined as "the ongoing mental activity that an individual undertakes in the constructing and understanding of self that is coherent, distinct, and positively valued" (Alvesson, Ashcraft, & Thomas, 2008, p. 15). This definition of identity work leans toward internal psychological processes that interest me little in the context of this study as I am focused on how this identity work is communicatively performed in the context of social media platforms. In this sense, while acknowledging the above, I understand identity work in line with its definition within institutional theory as the process of constructing and performing particular identities that affect organizations and institutions (Creed, DeJordy, & Lok, 2010; Creed, Scully, & Austin, 2002). Further, my understanding is informed by this study, which suggests that identity work might be qualitatively different for social media professionals. As I show, becoming the voice of the organization in the public, ongoing social media conversation carries certain permanence and is characterized by no plausible deniability.

Social media professionals in this study, regardless of their organizational affiliation, perform identity work through the process of taking on the voice of the organization. What I mean by taking on the organizational voice is the sentiment expressed by participants that they literally have to become the organization online, and in the process their own identities become less relevant. While close to role-taking, when social media professionals take on the organizational voice they lose their own. In other words, when a social media writer writes on behalf of the organization, there is no identifier telling other social platform interlocutors that an individual is writing. There is a socially constructed assumption, of course, that there is an agent speaking on behalf of

the organization, but s/he is entirely hidden behind the organization's identity. Below, Peggy, a social media writer for a home protection services company, explains the daily identity conundrum that she enters in order to do her job:

> So for example, the typical person who would purchase home security, typical consumer is probably like they are at least fortyish, they own a home, they have a family. I am 23. I don't have a family. I don't own a home. So it does take a little bit of a different mindset to sit down and think, "Okay, who is my audience, what are they looking for?" And really think about it every day because it's not something that I actively seek out or relate to in my personal life.

While social media professionals understand that this identity requirement is part of their job as writers or even strategists, few, if any, have been trained to perform this kind of identity work. Unlike Alvesson's case of advertisers performing identity work, the organizations in this study ranged widely in their level of support for social media efforts. The company that Peggy works for is actually one of the organizations that provide a variety of assistance to their social media professionals, usually in the form of preapproved content to post. Still, little to no training was ever provided by Peggy's company, and many of the organizations in this study, to facilitate the identity work performed by employees writing for social media. The fact is that identity work was not recognized by organizations as such: most participants in this study were young, new at their jobs, and with little knowledge of the company they worked for and had to "become" online. So the process of taking on the organizational voice and performing a demanding form of identity work, made more complex by a largely public context, was largely left to the management of employees with short organizational history.

When it came to becoming the organization through identity work, most participants were concerned with audience foremost. The audience on social media platforms presents quite a different conceptualization from the audience in any other

situation, because social media professionals representing the organization have to appeal to everyone and no one. The reason for this conundrum hides in the elements characterizing social media—its immediacy, editability, persistency, and public nature which, if not properly understood by organizational employees, can reflect poorly on organizational identity representation (Scott & Orlikowski, 2012). It is the public and immediate nature of the context that complicates voice adoption and subsequent audience management specifically. As Dan, a social media strategist, puts it: "You have your audience that you can regularly affect and then you have the whole world that can always see you." In other words, as hard as organizations and their marketing departments attempt to zero down on a specific audience, the social media audience in particular is always a moving target. With that, so is the organizational identity a writer is trying to portray.

At the end, the performance of identity and organizational identity representation by social media professionals enlightens (perhaps by further complicating) theorizing about agency. While for the Montreal School agency is found in the ability to make a difference, an impact, in conversation, in this study the agency of individuals to do so is constrained by the authoritative power of the organization in that it provides the rules of interaction. Participants frequently describe the performance of organizational identity online as a practice of "common sense," yet this common sense is defined in organizational terms often exemplified online as specific company talk. For a process that is also rarely explicitly managed by the organization, the steps and practices of taking on an organization's identity were also fairly well defined among the participants. Madeline, a social media writer, describes how this process went for her. The example is a bit long,

but very useful in illuminating the intricacies of taking on the organizational voice on social media, the identity work performed by social media professionals in order to do so, and the eventual "textualizing" of the entire process by making it an authoritative practice (i.e., this is how we do things now):

> So that was, that was a challenge for me, um—for example, so we have Lets Get Married wedding stationery, they were one of our big clients. And FlyFishing, a local fly-fishing shop, they were another one of our clients. And so it's like you go from talking to brides to a bunch of camping, hippy, happy dudes that just want to go cast flies on the river. So, I'm a—I'm getting married in September so the, the bride thing was actually extremely easy for me. I was able to sort of go through and engage with people because that's the situation that I was in. I was, I was a bride and I was able to post—because, you know, what do I want to see as a bride? What do I want to engage with? What do I want to learn? Um, but then you'd get over to the fishing—and we started our fishing client a couple months after we started our wedding client. And so I think the first post I did was—I had just found some picture of a guy casting and was like, "Let's go fishing today," a bunch of exclamation points—and I can't remember, one I did was extremely embarrassing. But so it, it took me a while to learn and what I ended up doing was I, I created sort of a brand manual. I sat down with, um, Tom and Bill, sort of the heads and shop owners of FlyFisher, and I, I just basically, I basically asked them questions and said, you know, what, what is your brand? What is your mission? What is your vision? What—where are you headed in, in the next five years? What do you want people to see or think about when, when they are talking about your company? What, what do you want? And so it was sitting down with them and going over and making up a brand manual and a content hub, and then every time I had questions—and, and it, it's everything from the voice to—like I said, the vision and the mission statement and so we, we developed like a quick paragraph on the voice. What, what is the voice? It's fairly monotonous, it's, um, very technical, there's a lot of, you know, The Sage Fly Rod radiant six, like this crazy, just detailed stuff. So we went in and, and we just created—it was like a 35 page manual. And then whenever I was unsure of how to speak or what to post I would be able to go in there and see how they talk about this particular product. So that's kind of how—and then from there we took it—so whenever we'd get a new client it would be the same thing: let's, let's develop this together because Client A—owner of Client A, knows the voice better than anyone else, so let's sit down together and let's talk about how you want to portray yourself as a brand. Um, because we're posting and we're talking to people every day and the voice needs to be consistent. And that's why job transition is, is hard because it's like I've been, I've been the voice of these eight clients forever and I've been following the person who took my position and it's just like you can, you can absolutely tell that there was this 180 degree flip.

Madeline's story has an all-encompassing explanatory quality—it covers a few of the points already made and presents a few more to cover. In describing and understanding the voice take-on/identity take-on process as noted here, it is useful to know that Madeline was retrospectively making sense of her experiences, she had already left the marketing agency where all this happened as she alludes toward the end, and was now in the process of taking on similar steps with her current, in-house organization. Similar to other participants, Madeline started at her marketing job fresh out of college and received no training on how to be a social media writer. She had to take on eight different client identities, but the two that stand out in her mind are likely the most disparate and consequently most challenging to reconcile in terms of voice. By her own admission, Madeline identified with the stationery company she represented, because she was a bride herself at the time. The sufficient identification that already exists caused the speaker to not go into details about the wedding stationery and her work for them. What stands out is the identity work she had to do for the fly-fishing business, because she did not identify with it, knew very little about it, and possibly cared even less for the sport.

Taking on the organizational voice is a complex, challenging endeavor that has to be repeated, as noted by Madeline, over time, every day, with consistency for one's job. For this purpose, an authoritative text is created, a 35-page manual for one organization alone that quite literally *becomes* the organization for the social media writer. The brand manual or "content hub" she creates with the owners of the shop becomes the document that in theory allows for anyone to take on the organizational voice of the fly fishing shop and *be* the organization on Facebook. It should be noted that in the example of this organizational text we also witness a new practice being adopted by the individual and by

the organization, which changed how the individual does her job and the how the organization represents itself online.

While identity work is a continuous "struggle," the process itself does become a habit, the habit of being another, and a nonhuman other at that, in a virtual context. A participant expressed the difficulty of identity work found in its continuity, which does not seem to get resolved by the fact that she doesn't think about it as much anymore: "But yeah, it is—it is a struggle. I don't think about it, um, too often as I—I—I don't think about it as much as I used to because I think it's more, uh, now it's more habitual." *In the context of this work, the habit is unique in its permanence and lack of plausible deniability, enforced by the publicity of social media platforms.*

There is more, however, that is found in the daily identity work performed by social media professionals. As Creed and colleagues (2010) suggest, individuals can use their identity work for the creation, maintenance, and disruption of institutions. In the present case, identity work can authorize organizations, where authorize means communicatively re-create the organization via organizational identity texts (such as brand manuals). These texts then, which are based on identity work in the first place, perpetuate both the identity work, in the form of habit, and the organization, in the form of continuity surpassing individual agents.

Presentification

A culmination of this discussion on identity, agency, and the taking-on of organizational voices through identity work is found in an extension of the concept of presentification—the closest idea to organizational image, equally bound and liberated by the acting agencies of who/what is speaking on behalf what/who, that the Montreal

School Approach theorizes about. I see presentification as an informative connection between organizational voice, identity work, and the plenum of agencies (and identities) involved in the processes of identity construction and representation in the social media context. Presentification is defined as "the acts of making present something or someone" (Cooren, 2006, p. 83). Following this, acting in the name of others, according to Cooren, then amounts to making these others present, a sort of "presentification." This in itself is also an act of agency on behalf of the professionals. The brief example below takes us off in the right direction:

> Yeah, because you're… you might just be one person or, or even an outside agency, but you still are being, you are acting as the voice of the company. – Jim, social media entrepreneur

Jim's quote provides for an easy insight into the connection between voice and presentification. In the context of this work, and the examples above, taking on the voice of an organization is an instance of presentification. What makes this connection more complex is the interplay of identities between individuals and organizations, not as much the interplay of agencies, which presentification makes conceptually relatively easy to grasp. If the organization is this enormous (monstrous, Cooren calls it) being, then in the social media context, its mode of being is extended to whomever that "one person, or even an outside agency" might be, as long as this last entity is authorized to speak on behalf of the organization.

Presentification is the only concept within CCO that accounts for organizational image, or identity for that matter, and in this respect it is quite insufficient. It is evident that the very act of making an organization present on the personable platforms for social networking is not a process to be taken lightly. It is a process that has very much to do

with who the organization is, who is doing the presentification, and ultimately, how does this process unfold through organizational identity texts. According to my interpretation of the participants in this study, *presentification is a process of identity appropriation (i.e. taking on the organizational voice)*. Cooren (2006) writes of appropriation as the dynamic condition that makes presentification possible, relating it to agency (acting and making a difference). The identity appropriation that I discuss below makes organizational identity representation on social media possible.

In many interviews and throughout meetings the purposes of social media as far as organizations are concerned has been described as affording the ability for organizations to "put on a human face." While the organizational representatives that I talked to seemed to understand this organizational–human face as fairly metaphorical, from agency perspective the organization is indeed *putting on a human face*, the face of the social media writer appropriating the organizational voice. At the same time, to any external stakeholder who does not know who writes for an organization's social media account, this face and voice are always only organizational indeed. This flip-flop resonates with Taylor's (1993) worldview or the understanding that ascribing agency is always a matter of perspective. For example, Ally describes the discomfort expressed by her organization when it came to putting one person in charge of the organization's social media accounts:

> It's just really odd, and that's one of the curious things for the administration here: what one person or small group of people, do we put to be the face of the organization, the face that we actually put forward to have this very personal conversation, on behalf of the organization.

Note the use of key expressions such as "one person or small group of people," "face of the organization," and "very personal conversation on behalf of the

organization." Behind this quote is a high level of anxiety expressed by multiple organizations and representatives throughout the study. This anxiety of representation has to do with who is doing the speaking, on whose behalf, and how can an organization ultimately control this process in the social media context. As I insist here, this process is identity bound, because social media is used by organizations largely for branding purposes. So, as I show below, it is an organizational goal to foster identification in its social media strategists, managers, and writers in order to facilitate what Taylor and the Montreal School Approach call coorientation.

Coorientation is an act of organizing, which revolves around the linguistic ways people, groups, and entire organizations establish compatible beliefs and coordinate responses to events as they occur (Taylor, 2006). Simply put, coorientation is then about someone talking, someone (or several others) listening and responding, and an object (something to talk about). Organization is created in the process of communication between cooriented entities and in this sense, it can be argued that coorientation is not limited to organizational members, as the Montreal School Approach tends to suggest. Given the encompassing simplicity of the concept as described by Taylor himself, it can indeed be applied to any two or more individuals, talking about the same thing (i.e., the same organization), as we see often happening on social media platforms. Additionally, a relationship of coorientation presupposes a take-on of an identity (Taylor, 2006) which can be organizational (as is the case with social media writers representing their organization), or individual (as is the case with many stakeholders on social media platforms). From the perspective of the organizational members, which is what interests me throughout this study, a relationship of coorientation in the social media context is

then inextricably linked to an externally-focused presentification of an organization and its values and beliefs, and an underlying individual sense of identification with these values and beliefs. In other words, while coorientation is suggested to be how people organize, in the social media context (or really, any context that requires *re*-presentation of the organization), organizational identity and organizational identification are both fostered and, ideally, present.

Thus, presentification, although happening multiple times a day, is not at all unproblematic, largely due to its inextricable relationship to a plenum of identities. This flip-flopping of identities (individual and organizational) presents a potential problem not only for the organization, but also for the stakeholder interacting on social media. Stakeholders on social media must continuously reconcile what 1 participant called "the dichotomy between talking to a brand but knowing whom the person behind it might be," or that there is a person behind it altogether. The identities and agencies partaking in this process of presentification can indeed be (co-) constructive, whether this process is invited or not by the organization. The example below suggests that organizational presentification on social media, an externally-focused making present of someone or something, forces internal structural reconsiderations that sometimes can have vast organizational identity consequences. This is an instance where the act of making an organization present online reverberates internally throughout the organization and calls forth issues within the organization:

> People don't recognize *the* organization. They don't recognize our logos. They don't recognize us as a brand. They don't know our mascot. They don't participate in our sporting events, or our arts performances, or any of that because we are so disjointed, we are just a mess. – Ally, social media manager

Here the speaker alludes to something happening that is in the heart of both

research questions driving this study—*the very act of organizational presentification in a social media context appears to showcase and have an effect nearly simultaneously on internal organizational processes.* Not surprisingly, the concern above is identity-focused (the organization, its logos, its brand, its mascot), because it is identity indeed (the brand) that writers "presentify" on social media. Because organizations are in fact *made present*, even materialized, by elements such as logos (Cooren, 2006), not having one's logo recognized is identity threatening. Indeed, social media professionals talked about a variety of processes being affected by both types of events—the ones happening online, and the ones that can potentially happen online.

In other words, the very thought of social media representation encouraged forms of consideration that affect the organization through and through on a variety of levels. This is evident in Ally's extended Twitter example where her organization finally realizes that they have to change their social media post approval process in order to respond in a new timely fashion. It is also evident in James' description of a Runner High vs. PETA debacle over a national TV ad produced by his organization, which involved the popular Running of the Bulls event in Pamplona, Spain:

> And I got to tell you, if we were to face that decision again, we would probably think about it a lot differently. Which is another reason social media is valuable. We would have never thought in a million years that someone would be frustrated with us doing that, now we realize that maybe we should have been a little more careful, maybe we should have thought things through.

While I address decision-making practices influenced by social media interaction extensively in the following chapter, this quote suggests that often organizations (and the people working for them) cannot know the impact of any given action, "which is another reason social media is valuable!" As a few interviewees pointed out, including James

above, the value of social media is in the relatively unadulterated, unscripted stakeholder responses. “We would normally pay money for feedback like this, but now, now we don't have to,” says Jeremy, an opinion shared by many a marketer interviewed for this study. With this said, there is tension regarding this feedback that stems from two places: the first is an economic and a critical one and it consists in acknowledging the problematic of having to pay people a fair price for their time and opinion, and not doing so in the context of user-generated content (Langlois, 2014 argues that this is one of the primary ways to make sense of the existence of social media to begin with); the second is that this sensegiving activity from stakeholders with various stances toward the organization holds a lot of “dangers”: “Um, but there are a lot of dangers in participating in that, in that edginess and that disruptiveness, because… there’s always going to be people who don't like it or disagree with it, you can never fully embody what all of your fans think you are.”

In keeping with the general theme of this section, below I address the agency of social media professionals when identity re-presentation is concerned, both individual and organizational, and the processes of identification related to taking on the role of someone who presentifies an organization in an immediate, interactive, negotiative, and public environment.

Identity Hubs and Identification Tensions

In this final part of Chapter 4, I bring up significant identity issues that emerged in conversations with social media professionals. The identity issues described herein relate to the complex interplay of individual and organizational identity that occurs in social media contexts, previously discussed as plenum of identities in presentification. Here I

focus on the individuals who presentify the organization while answering part of research question one, which asks about the impact of social media on member identification. In order to do this, first I look at how social media professionals talked about their own identity playing out in their daily work. I discuss the notion of "identity hubs," suggesting that the people in charge of organizational identity presentification must perform a role that requires elaborate negotiation of activities online and throughout the organization. Much of this negotiation relates to identity: their own, that of their organizations, and that of their stakeholders.

Second, I explore the complexity of the identification concept as a process related to identity, both individual and organizational, and as such problematized in the organizational-social media contexts. Specifically, I look at identification from two angles that are unique to the social media context and the employees who are tasked with working on social media platforms. In one way, having to identify with the organization (regardless if one is in-house or in an agency) is seen as a *job requirement*, which appears to diminish employee agency over the process of identification. In another, subtle way, *employees claim agency over the processes by identifying with the profession instead of the organization*, thus allowing themselves the flexibility to switch between organizations, agencies, and clients. These tenuous forms of identification are united by the concept of *emotional labor* (Hochschield, 1983), which is most frequently experienced by service workers who have to perform certain emotions as a job requirement.

Social Media Professionals as Identity Hubs

> So I'm trying to create sort of a balance between creating comfort for the administration and using social media the way it's supposed to be used in a conversational real-time way. – Ally, social media manager

Ally's quote is a good example of what I heard from many social media managers. Because social media interaction on behalf of organizations often revolves around identity and identity negotiation, I propose that we think of social media professionals in charge of this process on behalf of the organization as powerful "identity hubs." Below I show why and how this is justified.

Social media representatives have an intermediary role in systems terms and in terms of the organization–environment relationship. This role involves a variety of practices. Being in this role is also a particularly powerful organizational position. As the speaker notes above, much of what she does is to create "comfort" for her administrators by posting only administration approved content on the organization's social media platforms. Yet, at least close to "real-time" conversation is the essence of social media platforms and social networking online. So, as a social media professional, Ally is in the role of a negotiator—maintaining a level of comfort for the organization, while also using social media "the way it's supposed to be used," for public, real-time conversation with various stakeholders. Because organizational presentification is very much identity bound, a social media professional speaking on behalf of the organization is in effect managing identity representations both internally and externally, becoming an identity hub.

Geraldine, a social media manager who works for an agency representing multiple organizations, recollects a similar identity hub experience:

> I personally care that somebody gets their attention and gets their problem fixed, but I also have to remember and keep in mind that I am representing the brand I have to feed that back. I change my wording a little bit to fit the brand, but it has the passion behind, which makes sure that this consumer's point is addressed.

This quote further illuminates the social media professional as an "identity hub" in a continuous process of identity negotiation. It also sets up the stage for discussion on organizational identification. Social media professionals are digital organizational boundary spanners, whose job is no different from what Bartel (2001) defines as boundary spanning work: "to link and coordinate an organization with key constituents in external environment" (p. 380). As boundary spanners, people who work in social media contexts must determine the social identity that best fits the context of their interactions, which in the case of professionals doing social networking on behalf of organizations, would be their identity as organizational representatives. In this sense, as suggested by the basic premises of social identity theory and boundary spanning work, organizational representatives who do boundary-spanning work will experience magnified identification with the organization they represent.

As boundary spanners, social media professionals like Geraldine are in a communicatively intense and powerful position of being the translators of a brand as organizational representation online and organizational identity offline. For example, she says: "but I have to remember and keep in mind that *I am representing* the brand and *have to feed that back*." From this we can glean most clearly the hub's directional split—an identity hub is a junction for the plenum of identities, suggesting that *one way organizational identity co-construction occurs in the social media context is through the negotiative acts of the social media professional.*

Individual identity plays a significant role when making sense of one's position as a boundary spanner and identity hub. In fact, participants frequently referred to their own identities and personal preferences when communicating online and extrapolated those to the organizational work they were tasked to do. This is evident in my codes for "identity of the marketer," "individual-organizational identity disconnect," and "identity of the farmer"—all emphasizing participant concern with personal identity integrity (or not) when communicating on behalf of their organizations. Further, it is necessary that we understand how social media professionals navigate this identity labyrinth because of their role as identity hubs. In fact, it is that very role that positions social media professionals as interpreters, translating various interactions to the organizational level. As I explain further in Chapter 5, the act of translation is of theoretical and practical importance to the communicatively constituted organization. If we don't understand how these people belong and ultimately identify with organization or work, we will be at a disadvantage in understanding their organizational power in continuously translating and facilitating co-construction.

The individual identity of social media professionals in the workplace social media context was expressed by participants in two ways: in one way, they fully embraced the social media life and became part of it, by being active online themselves, following organizations and engaging with them themselves—actions that provided valuable opportunity for learning and reflexivity. In a second way, social media professionals removed themselves from the social media life they did for work, did not participate personally, and rarely if ever engaged with other organizations online; some even closed their own social media accounts in an effort to remain neutral in some ways.

These different inclinations are evident in two separate quotes below:

> So, I think that you should have a little bit of your personality involved in the social media that you're doing. The way that I like to think of it is you know, if you go to a party, then you're going to have multiple you's. You're going to tailor your conversation, how you speak, what words you use, to the people that you're talking to and what you're talking about…. Um, you know, personally I get much more excitable and you know, really into the conversation and you know, stuff when we're talking about fashion and food, you know, but if we're talking about business then you know, I just try and sound interested and follow along and make sure that I'm intelligent and stuff. – Dan, social media strategist

> So, it is almost like, for me I am very much a viewer, not a "participator" personally when it comes to social media, you know. That's probably not good considering that I should practice what I preach, but um, that's just who I am personally. So, that's why it is, from a brand perspective, it is you know, I understand that that's kind of a Catch 22 in a sense that I am asking all of our fans to engage and get into the conversation and yet, I don't do it myself from a personal perspective. And I think about this all the time, what would actually encourage me to join a conversation with a brand that I follow? – Rachel, marketing director and social media strategist

The quotes above are provided by two different individuals, from different organizations (and states), in different settings (interview and meeting) and represent the feelings of most interviewees in one way or the other. Negotiating individual and organizational identity on social media is a tenuous subject. From the quotes above, it is clear that individual identities and organizational roles sometimes do not match (which is not unusual in itself and has been covered in the organizational literature) and this can be problematic in the role of a social media professional. For example, Dan passionately explains what he personally likes about social media. He is active online, follows and engages with his favorite brands, and gets excited about fashion and food. When it comes to business (including the business of social media in which he participates as a strategist), he just tries to "follow along and make sure that I am intelligent and stuff." This identity conundrum necessitates the activation of "multiple you's," as Dan states and

it is only through embracing this multiplicity that he is able to do his job successfully.

But this identity multiplicity is described as awkward by the individual, even like cheating as described by Rachel, who confesses that she doesn't like to engage with brands online, even though it is her job to prompt stakeholders to engage with her organization. Every single person in that meeting echoed this sentiment and all of them worked in social media. Eventually Rachel reasons that perhaps her disinclination to participate in conversations online makes her more critical toward her organization's way of encouraging stakeholders to get in the conversations. She finishes up by saying that in fact, she thinks about this a lot and that it is a "Catch 22," referring to an unresolvable dilemma between what she does personally on social networks and what she has to do as an organizational representative. The multiplicity experienced by individuals must be continuously reconciled during organizational presentification online. Additionally, it frequently has to be reconciled when representing social media intra-organizationally. As James, a social media strategist, notes, "In fact, I think one of my biggest responsibilities and that of my community managers [other social media professionals working for him], is to advocate internally for social media."

In the midst of this identity multiplicity, which includes tension between the "I" of the individual and the "we" of the organization in the context of being public and conversational, the one thing that was deemed absolutely necessary by participants was identification – either organizational or professional. Identification facilitates the ways social media professionals negotiate their own identities in the context of the organization's identity and the task to represent this identity in a fast-paced, challenging context. The identity hub concept in particular is especially useful in enlightening the

idea of complex identity “distribution” in social media and organizational contexts (externally and internally, and many times in both directions).

Organizational Identification

As suggested earlier, social media professionals are expected to identify with the organizations they represent. This expectation is unwritten and primarily set by the professionals themselves, not the organization (yet, as previously discussed “common sense” among social media professionals is implicitly defined by organization and profession). Because the act of organizational presentification in the CCO sense, becoming and continuously making present the organization online, is so intensive in the social media context, in interviewing one gets the sense that people consider presentification to require identification. This was made evident by the codes for “organizational identification,” “identity of the marketer,” “disidentification,” “faking identification,” and lastly, “passion & emotion.”

Additionally, because identification is seen as something one has to experience in order to perform well, individual agency becomes problematized, suggesting that people must identify to do their jobs. It is in this tension between feeling a sense of belongingness in which the marketing goals of the organization come to match that of the employee (identification), and the perception that identification is a job requirement, an implicit organizational rule one has to follow in order to perform what is asked, where people demonstrated the most confusion. For example, many times I heard what turned out to be a telltale sign of emotional labor: that being professional in social media entails retaining the ability to remain positive in one’s communication with stakeholders at all costs.

To begin, I first refer to the quote below, which emphasizes the prerequisites for becoming a social media professional—passion, speaking on behalf of the organization, and caring about the organization. These prerequisites set up the tone of the emerging sense that the emotionality involved in building stakeholder relationships through social media is in fact emotional labor.

> You know, if you… I feel like a lot of people who go into um, social media or communication—or you know, marketing, are usually pretty, they're pretty passionate about where they work because you have to be! They, they speak on behalf of the organization and you know, you should at least care a little bit about it if you're gonna be in that position. – Jane, social media manager

Here the speaker refers to her own feelings and perhaps experiences, suggesting that many people who work in social media for an organization generally feel strong for the brand, they likely already identify with it; they belong, they have passion, and they care. Sense of belonging has been recognized as the biggest prerequisite for organizational identification since Kauffman (1960) and has been confirmed in studies ever since. But how does one in the position of a social media writer achieve this sense sometimes even before they have been hired? The quote below illuminates this a bit:

> I mean say for instance, like a really abstract scenario. Say for instance, you hired me to do SEO for a company. I'm gonna see your social media. Like I'm gonna look at it! And I might work harder for somebody that does lots of charity work. I might work harder for somebody that looks like a company that I would care about, you know, like people have affinity for brands. People care about brands and companies. And if you can do, you know, things to say that online, via social media, then it will have a ripple effect, like yes, it will directly affect your employees, yes, it will directly affect your customers. – Tim, social media writer

What is happening in this conversation is hypothetical, but it informs the question above. As suggested by branding and marketing scholars (Ahearne, Bhattacharya, & Gruen, 2005; Bhattacharya & Sen, 2003), customer–company identification is a measurable phenomenon that many experience in their relationships with organizations

and their brands. It is a form of customer–company identification indeed that makes us prefer a certain brand to another, which is what the speaker above explains in terms of potential employers. To contextualize this, the organization he does social media for uses various platforms for mostly internal employee communication with one caveat: the social media strategy actually dictates that all "internal" posts should be made with "external" stakeholders, and especially potential employees, in mind. Tim is in charge of creating these messages, which are influenced by the actions of his employer, especially in terms of shared values ("charity," "care"), which in turn lead to identification processes and commitment ("I might work harder").

Additionally, the sense we get from the quotes above is that this form of early identification is almost a requirement. This should not be surprising. Identification is after all a form of organizational control (Barker, 1994; Tompkins & Cheney, 1985) and a form of control appropriate for use on the very representatives who are going to *be* the organization in a novel and unfamiliar context. Many participants expressed that they consider their organizations vulnerable in social media contexts where the very things that are useful from an audience feedback perspective—the unpredictability, honesty, and efficiency—are also the most dangerous. *Similarly to Tim's quote above, many agreed that stakeholder interaction impacts how an employee feels about the organization they work for, which could then create conditions for loss of organizational control through identification or at least problematize the identification process.*

It is also worth reminding that social media representatives have to respond to stakeholder messages that vary greatly in positivity and negativity. While no organization in this study had had as enlightening and frightening an experience as JP Morgan Chase

in the beginning of this dissertation, a few had experience with negativity spreading through social media platforms. It is in the organization's interest that the person in charge of responding to these messages cares, has passion for the brand, and wants to see it succeed in order to successfully respond to negative messaging. This logic is supported by Elsbach and Kramer's (1996) well-known study on organizational identity threats, which posits that identifying organizational members maintain and affirm organizational identities in the face of external threats. However, we also know that identification is not static and a given, but a process that ebbs and flows (DiSanza & Bullis, 1999), sometimes resulting in an identity struggle well exemplified by the following quote:

> Yes. Yes and no. Um, and I, and I, I'll tell you why because there are things that I disagree with that my, that the management does. But my job is not, is, is to still—I still see my job which is to make sure that we're positive with the public and that I don't put my opinion in—get my opinion in the way. Um, there are definitely things that I disagree with management and sometimes it's more difficult than others to, to swallow that, so to speak, and to move forward and, and to, and to, um, be that positive person to the public. But, when it comes down to it is, um, I do know that they do have the best interest, uh, for the, for the majority of the time. Um, even if I disagree with one of those, one of the things that they're doing or, or a couple of things they're doing. So yeah, it does affect me, so I, um, you just have to—you just have to look at the bigger picture. And I know that you're probably aware of it, I mean the, the bonuses that we, that the executives get, you know, for, for me, for me, that's something that I, I struggle with. So yeah, there's been, there's, things that I struggle with, but at the end of the day I'm going to support my management. – Aaron, social media writer

The very first words of this speaker radiate tension, which stems from a mismatch between fluctuating organizational identification and the pressure to be always positive and supporting in online organizational representation. This quote presents an insight into what is easily a daily struggle in employee identification and organizational identity presentification in the social media context. Aaron's words also illuminate the emotional labor frequently necessitated by organizational presence on social media platforms, the

success of which appears to depend on responsiveness and positivity of interaction. Studies on emotional labor (Hochschield, 1983; Rafaeli, 1989; Rafaeli & Sutton, 1990; Van Maanen, 1991, 2008) where employees are paid to put on a happy face, suggest that in managing emotion, employees contribute to its creation. We can see this in the case of social media professionals and the active negotiation and management of not simply how they feel about their organizations, but also how they communicate this (positivity) to stakeholders over social media. Similarly, we can also see from the comments so far that what has become a social media related practice of being that "positive person to the public" feeds back to what social media professionals feel.

Further, as posited by Tracy (2000), emotional labor is not something that only the organizations (and supervisors) manage for their employees. In fact, individuals play a tremendous role in controlling themselves, a suggestion already gleaned from the organizational identification literature and the concept of concertive control. The emotional labor suggested in this study is certainly linked to the expectations for organizational identification, which was assumed by most participants. Having to identify, faking it when you don't (alternatively, doubting that to fake it is at all possible), and remaining positive in front of the stakeholder at all cost, reveal an aspect of social media work that has not been considered previously. Given the identity creation and negotiation role these individuals find themselves in, considering identification and emotional labor in the context of organizational identity representation and co-construction is necessary and enlightening. The fact that individuals saw maintaining positivity in online communication as the rule of organizational presentification on social media suggests that emotional labor becomes a unwritten organizational practice

expected for good job performance.

An example of the practical closeness of emotional labor and identification as expressed by social media workers is observed in the last part of Aaron's quote. One of the reasons why employee identification is so valuable to organizations resides in the theoretical assumption posited as early as March and Simon's (1958) work on decision making and later confirmed many times over: an employee who identifies with his organization will make appropriate decisions on its behalf without overt organizational control. In other words, if an employee likes his place of employment, he will want to act in the benefit of the organization. I was reminded of this when reading Aaron's quote, and in fact, when talking about identification with other participants. In the quote above, it is clear how hard Aaron tries to justify his actions and particularly in having to stay positive with the public (emotional labor as a job expectation). Later in our conversation Aaron shares that he has strong personal feelings about the large bonuses his executives receive. He minimizes these feelings by claiming that "you just have to look at the bigger picture," which is that "majority of the time, they do have the best interest" of the public.

A continuation of Aaron's process as a social media representative, presentifying his organization online, became even more explicit when, a few weeks after we had first spoken, he and his team were expecting a social media storm as a result of a big report on his organization published by the local paper. The agency's PR team had found out the content of the newspaper story before it was published and trained externally facing departments to handle the public backlash. Over the phone Aaron told me that the story was about the large bonuses his organization gives out to managers, something that he had personal feelings about. So, I asked him how he planned to handle this should it

come up on social media given his own feelings on the matter. He told me that he couldn't and wouldn't get his own opinion in the matter, that he would just try to emphasize the positive things his organization does for the community in a message he had already crafted, and then move on. The goals of organizational identification are met in this situation where Aaron rationalizes organizational actions and his own place in them through the benefit for his employer.

In answering the question of if and how conversations with stakeholders on social media affect organizational identity, I suggest that employee identification processes are one way. As suggested by previous work on the role of organizational image and identity in employee identification processes (Dutton & Dukerich, 1994; Schultz, Hatch, & Larson, 2000), the opinions of and communication from external stakeholders have an effect on identification through what is known as construed organizational image, or the way employees think outsiders perceive their organization. This perception is readily available on social media platforms today and has an impact on how the participants in this study perceived the work they did and the organizations they did it for. However, the impact of stakeholder comments appears to also be dependent on the tenure of employment. I provide a comparison below. Madeline, a social media manager, explains what effect stakeholder comments have on her:

> And I think when—one of the reasons, and correct me if I'm wrong, one of the reasons I was hired is because I have been around [this place].[7] I, I've lived here, grown up here, and I [am] from the here, I started at this [organization], I worshiped it as a little kid, and I'm all about athletics and all about sports. So, I care more about what my colleagues and my—the people that I work with, I care a lot more about what they think than I do—what they—their opinions and thoughts of me make—have a, a more direct effect on my emotions than what

[7] Locations and organizational names have been altered to retain anonymity.

some super fan says about the graphic that I made earlier that day.

In this quote it is obvious that the speaker does two things—she emphasizes that identification was indeed a prerequisite for hiring her for the position she currently holds, confirming the idea that social media professionals have the impetus to identify early; and also that stakeholder messages do not affect how she feels about her job or her skills. Instead, Madeline cares about what her co-workers think of her. This statement can be interpreted on its own as signifying characteristics of the identification process for Madeline's organization in particular. However, I think that this quote is more interesting in comparison with the following response from Brent, Madeline's boss:

> Because I've worked here for a long time… I first started working here in 2001 as a student, like, um, a long time ago. And so I take a—and it's difficult for me to separate it and say, you know what? They're just people that want to get—they just want to stir the pot, they want to get their own likes, they want to get their own follows, they want, um, you know, they want all their—all—it's all for their own credit and so they are just throwing stuff out there and just let it go and move on.

It is important to contextualize this quote by explaining that Brent and Madeline work for the same organization and for the same department. They perform very similar daily tasks with the difference that Brent is in a hierarchically higher position and just hired Madeline to help with things that he was falling behind on (specifically, actual social media posts and relationships with other employees). Additionally, as evident from the quotes, Brent has a longer organizational tenure than Madeline and uses this history to justify his reaction to negative stakeholder comments. Brent's stance is key when considering how identification and identity may be affected by stakeholder comments because it exemplifies that both tenure and organizational history influence how stakeholder communication is perceived. Early studies on organizational identification have confirmed that the processes is not affected by hierarchical position or tenure (Hall,

Schneider, & Nygren, 1970) and here we realize that similarly, hierarchy and tenure do not seem to affect if Brent and Madeline feel any different for their organization. However, tenure seems to relate strongly to how one interprets stakeholder comments that come through social media (especially negative ones).

For Brent, it is his long-standing relationship with the organization that makes him react strongly to negative comments. To contrast construal of outsider perceptions, Brent thinks that stakeholders who "stir the pot" do so for their own benefit, making out their intentions to be a lot more personal and hurtful to the organization. Madeline's interpretation, on the other hand, waves off the possibility and aftermath that a "super fan" may comment on "a graphic I made earlier today." She discounts both the super fan (which we know now is important to organizations) and her own work in the eyes of the super fan—the opinions of her new co-workers are the only things that matter as she is trying to establish herself. For her boss, who has established himself with colleagues, it comes to higher order values—the organization and its image as seen by the outsider. At the end, Brent's reaction suggests identification processes similar to what Dutton and colleagues (1991; 1994) described among employees of the New York Port Authority, a process clearly linking identification and construed organizational image and thus showing that similar co-constructive conditions exist.

Professional Identification

None of the quotes above belongs to a participant who worked for an agency providing social media services to client organizations. As it can be expected, agency workers did not identify with the client organizations they served per se, although as discussed earlier they have to take particular steps to learn about an organization's

identity and *become* the organization's voice. Still, as one agency employee admits, "ideally, you would want somebody internal to do your social media," but sometimes, usually due to constraints such as organizational resistance to social media adoption, this doesn't work. So, what did agency employees identify with? Usually, with the profession itself and the expertise this professional belonging allowed them to claim, for what is known as professional identification.

Professional identification signifies a process of identification with a group of people who belong to the same profession as opposed to a particular organization (the members of the Professional Social Media Club would be an example of people united by the strength of their professional identifications and not necessarily by their belonging to the club or any particular organization). Identification often tends to be stronger with smaller entities such as workgroups and departments (Barker & Tompkins, 1994; Bartel et al., 2006), so it is not at all unusual to see agency social media professionals, whose job is to represent even more distal targets than their own organization, identify more strongly with what they do than with the organization they do it for. However, the relationship between organizational and professional identification is somewhat contested. Initially, it was believed that the two are in conflict (Gouldner, 1957, 1958), then there were claims that the two do not necessarily compete (Russo, 1998; Wallace, 1993), and there are more recent suggestions that higher levels of one or the other lead to differences in employee work performance (Hekman, Bigley, Steensma, & Hereford, 2009; Hekman, Steensma, Bigley, & Hereford, 2009). *It is safe to say that in the context of this study, social media professionals who do social media work in-house and identify with their organizations vs. agency employees who tend to identify with the profession*

make sense of identification and organizational identity differently. Specifically, in-house social media workers call forth their identification through emotions toward the organization; agency workers on the other hand, call forth their identification through expertise in the professional field.

Agency social media professionals do not experience the sense of belonging and sometimes intense emotion that in-house employees described earlier when reading and responding to online comments. Tim, a social media strategist for an agency admits: “But we don’t want to be them [the client organization], we are not them, we sound like them, but we are not.” In this sense, various stakeholder comments are perceived in a significantly more professional way, often shrouded in “expert opinion” language as described by Dan below:

> [Negative comments are] Definitely, helpful. I think that if you don't listen to them, you're doing yourself a huge disservice. Um, if you have people that are willing to engage with you, whether it's positive or negative, like listen to their feedback because it takes a certain threshold of emotion to engage with a brand on social. And so it means that they're passionate, it means that they're invested, it means that they are really trying to get a point across and you should listen to them. And they, you know, obviously, maybe you don't change your entire product line based off of one Tweet, but listen for that feedback and if it's a reoccurring theme maybe like you look at making some tweaks to your actual product, like if that's what people want.

Here Dan explains the ways he sees negative comments as helpful with the rationality of a professional. In the entire conversation I had with him, he never expressed anything but cool command of the subject where an outburst of passionate expletives would have been impossible (recall farmer Larry Small’s outburst over the only two likes he received on a praised Facebook photo). At the same time, similar passion, but for his work and expertise, are clear in this quote. The participant knows the process, he cares for it, and he can coolly implement it. One of the big signs of professional identification

here is the language used, in addition to the expert knowledge that agency employees exhibited. Below, we see Dan take another stab at the effect of negative comments, with this one being directed toward anonymous companies:

> Um, I think that one of the things that social media people as well as executives really need to understand is that knee jerk reactions are super unhelpful. Overreacting to anything is super unhelpful. Social media is fast-paced and people will forget about it in a couple of days. So move on. Don't swing the other direction. Don't kill your social media strategy or make your whole like audience suffer because of one negative reaction or one post that got a lot of negative reaction. Um, just learn from that and improve.

The expertise in this quote is evident in the first sentence, suggesting that "social media people and executives" alike do not understand social media. But agency social media professionals do, because they can expertly envision and explain how negative comments should be construed and reacted to as seen in the above. I am careful here because I don't want to suggest that in-house social media professionals don't know what they are doing—*knowing* is not in question here, it is the language of knowing that is different, defined by the expert detachment exhibited by agency employees. Contrast, for example, Dan's comments above, which albeit strategic and signifying expert level knowledge were somewhat casual, with Tim's highly expert language, what I called "expert talk," while he explains to me the different goals of his own agency organization and the goals of the clients he works for:

> Our goals are different. At the tactical level our goals become very different because we want recognition, authority, subject matter expertise, that kind of stuff—tied into our brand. What most of our clients want is, especially if they've hired us for SEO, PPC, and they've added web, or, uh, social, they usually want something more measurable than something as vague as branding. So we want to be able to report growth on, of essential media numbers, growth in social media followers. But more specifically we want to see conversion or traffic from social media sources to their web page. And so if that's what they've hired us to do, even though we know best practices in social media, say don't post too heavy-handedly about a product sale or filling out a form, we'll, we'll respond to

> the, you know, the needs of that client and give them a ratio, 1 in 5, 1 in 7 posts will say something pretty overtly "salesy" with the hopes that it doesn't alienate (laughs) the audience and break the strategy.

This quote starts with a statement of difference that Tim emphasizes throughout the abstract. He is discussing difference in organizational goals between his agency and the client organizations they serve. In the second sentence he explains what his agency wants to be known for: recognition, authority, subject matter expertise. This statement is followed by a second differentiation statement: Clients do not care about things "as vague as branding" (something that the agency cares for), "they usually want something more measurable." Specifically, for the agency's clients, it comes to return on investment, a prevalent, yet conflicting, notion in the world of organizations and social media that will be discussed shortly in Chapter 5. So, clients are different, because they want different things from what an agency employee knows is best practice. The last sentence of the quote illuminates the tension that exists between any agency–client relationships in this study.

Ultimately, in conversation with social media professionals who worked for agencies, a certain superiority in terms of expertise becomes evident quickly. It is this expertise that speaks into the professional identification concept. Professional identification is in a way a subtler concept than organizational identification, as the sense of belonging to a professional community can be expressed in a variety of ways. In the case of social media agency employees, professional identification is marked by expertise, specifically, the expressed feeling of belonging to an expert field of professionals. While expertise in itself is evident in quotes and conversations with participants, by far the clearest example of professional identification comes from

observing the practices of the Professional Social Media Club.

Even though professions transcend any one organization and in terms of identification are better couched in the individual than the organization (because they deal in roles and occupations) (Ashforth et al., 2008), the power of professional identification is arguably best exemplified by professional member organizations. In this sense the PSMC provides a great example, because it is in fact a rather open organization, albeit with very clear markings of expertise once inside. For example, during this study the executive committee consisted of mostly agency social media professionals. This local chapter was in fact started by one of the well-known social media marketing agencies in the city, with the expressed goal to share expert knowledge. So while anyone could be a member, throughout the meetings and especially presentation, the experts were marked by their belonging to the executive committee, or in the act of presenters *socially sharing* expert knowledge.

The "expert talk" of the agency professional extended to organizational identity as well, often seen as critical of what client organizations knew and represented about their own identity. The following quote comes from an agency professional that describes how he learns about a client organization he is about to presentify online:

> We have a process now that I've refined from doing this dozens of times. And it's a, it's a reworking, a, a, a piece I've seen before, but I call it "statement of brand purpose." And you create a statement of brand purpose where we ask those questions: Who do you serve? So who is your target audience? What do you do? So what is your USP, what do you do that makes you different, you know? And then why do you do it? Your motivation! I always say, what gets you out of bed in the morning? What keeps you up late at night? You know, what's your passion for it? And when we put those three things together, I'll create a statement of brand purpose. It usually sounds like: Our organization represents the premier provider of X to this type of client. I want a very narrowly defined client. And the funny thing is, like, you'll get this—I tell this to people, um, as soon as I ask those questions, it's amazing to me like I would say 70% (laughs) of the people I talk to

> don't know the answers to those questions. And these are big, profitable companies! – Tim, social media strategist

There a few things of note in the statement above, which responded to a question about the ways an agency learns of a client identity. First, the speaker refers to a document—a "statement of brand purpose," which he compiles through interviews with client executives. Interestingly, the statement of brand purpose becomes the client organization for the agency employee; this is what Tim will later use to adopt the organization's voice. The statement of brand purpose also suggests expertise; although passion is evoked in the quote, what is sought is the passion of the client, not the agency. Second, this quote summarized an expert-led identity interview. In fact, the meetings that were held in order to create a statement of brand purpose would have been very similar to the gatherings Chaput and colleagues (2011) attended to find out about identification and consubstantialization—member meetings that communicatively created and re-created an organization's identity. Finally, I would like to direct our attention to the last two sentences of the quote:

> And the funny thing is,… I tell this to people, as soon as I ask those questions [about organizational identity], it's amazing to me, like 70% [laughs] of the people I talk to, don't know the answers to those questions. And these are big, profitable companies!

The quote in its entirety, but especially the last part, is indicative of the expertise claimed by agency professionals when it comes even to client organizational identity. The speaker's suggestion above has to do with the perception that he knows better, that he has done this before, and that his belongingness to a different group, of agency professionals, is what gives him the knowledge to textually create and re-create an organization's identity and then represent it online. This expert knowledge of social media best practices and even organizational identities was seen as belonging to the

individual or group of professional individuals, not any one organization, which again suggests professional identification. This form of identification allowed social media experts to feel relatively free from organizational bounds, switch jobs often, and regularly consult on the side. In fact, the PSMC current president is a former agency employee who quit two jobs in the last year, and now runs his own expertise-driven business that advises companies on social media strategy. When we discussed his expertise in an interview, he said, “I put everything through the mom test. Would my mom like and understand what I am posting? And then I run it through the “me” test. Would I like to engage with what I am posting? Hasn’t led me wrong yet.” Expertise is humanized, brought down to easy terms in these words, yet what is important here is that the expertise signifies professional knowledge and it is this that social media agency employees identify with, not any one organization in particular.

To summarize, social media professionals use two different forms of identification—one with a focus on emotion, and another with a focus on expertise. Since social media professionals are at the forefront of organizational identity creation, representation, and negotiation in the social media contexts, it is necessary that we understand how they identify with their organizations or professions. Because identification has been linked to organizational decision-making and commitment, the process further illuminates the organizational position of the social media strategist and writer as an identity worker. Additionally, studying the identification processes of these individuals is the best possible way to begin gleaning into if and how social media impacts organizations. As I spend significant time demonstrating in the next chapter, the social media professionals have the rarely-recognized role of interpreters to the process of

translation, which is the basis of the communicative constitution of organizations. What and how they interpret from the social media landscape to the organizational level is dependent on if and how they identify with the organizations they serve.

Summary

In this chapter I provided evidence and made arguments toward answering the first research question of this study, which asked if and how organizational identity co-construction takes place in social media interactions between organizations and their stakeholders. This larger question had two subquestions asking more specifically if first, social media conversations affect statements of organizational identity and second, if these conversations affect organizational identification processes.

I attended to these interests by relying on data acquired from participant interviews, meetings, and supporting documentation. The data revealed that organizational identity co-construction processes might be best understood through the sensemaking strategies of the social media professionals tasked with organizational identity creation and representation in social media contexts. Specifically, in this chapter we learned that in their interaction with organizations on social media platforms, stakeholders provide the organizations the positive and negative, confirming and disconfirming identity messages, which function as sensegiving and sensebreaking devices for social media workers. In other words, stakeholder perceptions of organizational identity communicated through social media aid in the continuous process of making sense of one's organization's identity and thus continuously constructing and reconstructing this identity in future online and offline conversation.

From there, I showed that these sensemaking strategies affect statements of

organizational identity as discussed between social media professionals in organizational settings (meetings). Particularly, people engaged with organizational representation online begin to think of their organizations in certain ways that are specific to that representation. These ways of communicating and envisioning the organization sometimes clash with the identity interpretations of employees not engaged in social media work. Additionally, we learned that these meetings also served to facilitate a complex process of learning and knowing about social media processes that in turn defined new organizational concerns and practices. These novel practices related to organizational representation online have begun to change how organizations interpret the meaning and role of community and even profit.

Lastly, I examined how processes of identification were impacted by the social media context. These were best gleaned from the only organizational members today that have authorized access to social media, the people I broadly call social media professionals. From these results we learned about the intricacies of identity work performed by social media professionals in their role of creating and representing organizational identities online. The data on emergent concepts of organizational voice and presentification became especially explanatory, driving a discussion of agency in organizational identity construction and representation. I presented two concepts derived from these results and existing literature: the plenum of identities and the identity hub. The two concepts inform us of the complexity of organizational representation on social media, and the role of the social media professional as an identity translational "hub" between online stakeholders and organizations. At the end, I discussed the specific forms of identification for social media professionals, which I found to depend on their

organizational membership (in-house or agency) and thus the type of social media organizational representation they were engaged in.

In Chapter 5, I answer my second research question and discuss results aimed at the understanding and explanation of the ways social media interactions impact the communicative constitution of the organization.

CHAPTER 5

ROLE OF CONVERSATION AND TEXT IN THE COMMUNICATIVE CO-CONSTRUCTION OF ORGANIZATIONS

In this dissertation, social media events play a constitutive organizational role through the relationship between conversation and text. The conversations organizational representatives have with various stakeholders on social media platforms influence organizational processes such as decision making, strategy routines and practices, and perhaps most importantly, how organizations think of themselves in terms of these processes in the context of social media. I used the subquestions below to enrich the detail of my response and the clarity, although the data for the three subquestions are intertwined and presented throughout this chapter. In this chapter, I answer the following question.

Research Question 2: How if at all, do every day interaction/conversations, taking place on social networking platforms, become laminated and imbricated into the organization?

- Does online interaction/conversation affect organizational decision-making?
- Does online interaction/conversation affect organizational social media strategy?
- Does online interaction/conversation affect organizational routines and practices?

As with my answer to research question one, the data used in answering research question two came from all available sources: interviews, meetings, observations, and organizational documents such as reports of social media activity, guidelines, and

policies. The results and analysis for this chapter were derived from the following codes: “MAKING DECISIONS,” “CONVERSATION” (“FEEDBACK,” “NEGOTIATION”), “LAYERING CONVERSATIONS” (“MEASURING SM,” “MEETING RE: SM”), “LAMINATING PRACTICES,” “INSTITUTIONAL PRESSURES,” “ORGANIZATIONAL CONTROL,” “VULNERABILITY,” “UNCERTAINTY,” “DEPARTMENTS AND SM,” “STRATEGY.” Additionally, I use the presented sub-questions to guide my data analysis and organize the structure of the results presented below.

Lamination, Imbrication, and Decision Making

The relative novelty of social media use by organizations has led to repeated questions in the popular business media on whether organizations should consider social media and its platforms as useful and influential in terms of business decisions and profitability. Indicative of this questioning are the multitude of popular articles targeted at organizational executives that aim to explain and, in a discursive way, organize social media for organizational consumption. For example, the Professional Social Media Club (PSMC) provides many such articles to readers through its own social media platforms, while a variety of online blogging publications (i.e., Social Media Today) review the pros and cons of general social media use by organizations, and specific platform use for numerous goals. Clearly, the organizations participating in this study have all adopted social media to some level, one organization even called itself “social,” crediting sophisticated and fully integrated social media use as the reason for this self-definition.

This is not to say that many organizations, including most of the ones participating here, do not face various levels of resistance against social media adoption,

integration, or even study. For example, negotiations for a big organizational case study analysis that were to be included in this dissertation fell through precisely because organizational leadership felt that my research might expose inadequacies not only in the use of social media but, perhaps more importantly, inadequacies found in the decision making, strategy, and overall impact of stakeholder interaction on the organization itself. In short, my research inquiries were turned down after an extended proposal period because organizational leadership was afraid that asking questions about the role of social media in organizational identity processes, including the ones above, might uncover significant organizational problems or otherwise cast the organization in a negative light.

As a result, in this section I explain the ways social media influences organizational decision making, including associated resistance to social media adoption and management of vulnerability in social media conversations. This suggests that even in organizations that have adopted social media (either because of strong organizational belief that they should or due to strong institutional pressure), resistance to social media integration might be found due to perceptions of continuous organizational vulnerability. To clarify, by social media integration I specifically mean the integration of social media events into the processes of decision making or: do social media interactions affect the organizational decision-making as in the structure of customer feedback, meetings about this feedback, and ensuing changes based on this feedback? To clarify further, this entire question and chapter are not interested per se in the details of the decision making process (or strategy or policy), but view these as explications of the communicative construction of the organization and in particular its co-construction through stakeholder activity on social media.

The straightforward answer to the question, does online interaction affect decision-making in the participating organizations, is yes. How this happens is what I focus on next. A great assistance in answering this process question is the theoretical framework for this study, communicative constitution of organization (CCO), the Montreal School Approach (MSA), and specifically one of its main dialectics: conversation–text, and the coorientation pattern revealed in lamination and imbrication, the processes that facilitate the emergence of text out of conversation (McPhee & Iverson, 2013).

The conversation–text dialectic is the most familiar, widely-used pair of oppositional tensions within the MSA and has come to symbolize the recursive interplay between organizing as conversation and organization as text (Putnam, 2013). The tension expressed in this dialectic resides in conversation as the action and text as the more static (but not unchangeable) result. Being dialectic, however, the relationship between conversation and text is circular, meaning that conversations produce texts and texts mediate conversations. For example, social media conversations about local services provided by a participating organization inform the decisions made for future service. In this case, a public services organization has been getting a lot of negative feedback about holiday service hours on their social media platforms. Negative comments are first addressed by the organizational representative online in a fairly standardized manner ("Our current [situation][8] cannot justify the allocation of resources for holiday service. We apologize for the inconvenience."). Often some back and forth between the organizational representative and stakeholders ensues where terms of service are

[8] Quote content has been altered to maintain anonymity.

discussed. The process then moves up the ladder.

The organizational representative participating in this study takes the summary of collective opinion expressed on social media and presents it to his or her co-workers. In the case of the organization I worked with, the employees working on social media discussed holiday service interruptions frequently, because this was one the most controversial topics of online conversation. During the period of my interviewing there were two major interruptions of service, the reaction to which I observed online and addressed in interviews. When I first started interviewing, the first interruption had just passed and we discussed the ramifications visible on the agency's Twitter and Facebook feeds (lots of negative comments). Towards the end of my interviewing, another holiday was approaching and with it, planned service interruption. As a result, in interviews I repeatedly heard participants talk about the online discussion they anticipated, "…you know, because we are not gonna run service […] again, and surely people will be upset. But I still have to make the announcement, I just can't wait," explained one participant. His comment indicates both the regularity with which interruptions and negative comments, respectively, happened and the emotional strain that this seemed to build.

So, holiday service interruptions were a popular, albeit not a favorite, conversation topic for the social media writers. The fact that all three cited this as one of the more annoying recurring events on social media and all three agreed on a common way of dealing with it (providing a standard response to all complaints) is an example of lamination. *Lamination is the process in which day-to-day regularly occurring conversation becomes the usual professional or company discourse to refer to when the same circumstances arise*. Fairhurst and Putnam (2004) borrow Boden's (1994)

definition of the process when organizational members draw on past circumstances, overarching organizational rules, and structures to select what is relevant to use in locally occurring events. The agreement over a standardized response in this case is one such lamination. So is the very knowing that the lack of service on specific dates (local event) would cause a storm of negative comments and members ought to have a plan of action to handle this every time it happens. For theoretical purposes, it is important to understand that lamination, as well as imbrication, have much to do with another driving concept for the MSA— coorientation. Coorientation is seen in the laminated action of agreeing upon and knowing the standard response for "lack of service on holidays" stakeholder comments on social media platforms.

The process described above does not end at the laminated response actions however. In fact, stakeholder feedback goes up to the organization's management regularly. All three social media writers attend various meetings where their input, and the input of stakeholders, whom social media writers *represent* within the organization, is taken into consideration. For example, Aaron, one of the writers, explained that he attends service planning meetings and marketing meetings. He describes his input in the following way:

> I mean, I am in constant meetings where we do planning for big events, um, and they want the [details about service provided] and my input is always, I bring the customer input, because I am the one who gets the information, so when I am at that meeting I say, this is what the customers are saying, this is how many, this is what they want.

As a social media writer, Aaron sees himself as in charge of bringing the customer input to management, and later explains that his management expects the same from him. He is "the one who gets the information," thus he knows best what is needed

based on Twitter and Facebook conversations. As noted in Chapter 4, social media professionals have a mediating role between social media audiences and the organization, while also *being* the organization online. This dual organizational role played by social media writers facilitates what the MSA theorists call "imbrication."

Lamination and imbrication are closely related aspects of communicatively enacting and "scaling up the organization" within the conversation–text dialectic. Both lamination and imbrication are connected to the very important coorientation concept as stated earlier, their relationship characterized by degree. If lamination, as described above, is the standard way of calling something up from memory or doing something that may refer to an event that is long past to apply to a current situation, imbrication is the larger process of translating (Taylor, Groleau, Heaton, & Van Every, 2001) what is learned from such localized events into organizational infrastructure in order to be able to come up with a localized response when needed. *In Aaron's example above, imbrication would be the "scaled up" version of temporary service changes for big events—constituting the practice of listening to such stakeholder suggestions and acting upon them through established organizational text or practice (i.e. for all events we will provide specific event services).*

For the purposes of this dissertation, I theorize the relationship between lamination and imbrication as follows: I see lamination as the more localized coorientation process (the one where actants engage in dynamic interactions to get something done by referring to past experience for guidance (Putnam, 2013)); and imbrication as the larger-scale pattern where already laminated practices become more permanent, institutionalized organizational texts (such as social media guidelines) able to

guide future action. So, the definition of imbrication to be used here is derived from Putnam (2013) and it explains the concept as one that refers to “the emerging structures and routines that surface from the ways that conversation and text interface. It occurs when order emerges from traces of past conversations that change or reproduce them” (p. 29). Further, I recognize that within these definitions, and in the very process of coorientation in fact, there is a certain tension between change (conversation) and stability (text), which plays out in patterns of communication as we see in the following sections. *In the context of this study, there is a very obvious tenuous relationship between change and stability suggested by the perceived role of social media within and around the organization.*

Decisions to Adopt or Resist Social Media

When considering how the organization’s adoption of a social media mindset affects various organizational decisions, we must take into account the simple fact that since organizations are on social media platforms, they will have meetings and events around social media. As the participant above attests, organizations want to hear from their social media representatives. Most often this is achieved in meetings, which sometimes are specifically focused on social media, but more often are generally focused on marketing. Social media funding comes out of the marketing budget for every organization that participated in this study, so the fact that organizations meet to talk about social media is not in itself that interesting, as it is likely expected. What is more interesting and what I would like to discuss here is the very palpable tension between change and stability, which seems to be frequently created by an organization’s presence on social media platforms. Although this dissertation is not about the organizational

resistance to social media adoption, when it comes to how organizations make decisions about their practices based on stakeholder communication on social media platforms, the question quickly becomes about how much conversation there is (change) and how much reliance on text there is (stability).

For example, note the contrast in the two quotes below, one from an organization that has embraced social media, and another from an organization that does social media due to what I call institutional pressure (because everyone else is):

> But I think that the customers were using it [social media] already. So, um, I think it was a smart decision by our managers to say, "They're already using this, why don't we take a look and see what we—our, how we can use it to help them and help us." – Aaron, social media writer

In this quote, the speaker channels the reasons that guide at least a significant part of the rationalization behind organizational use of social media platforms. Among social media professionals there is a rather clear recognition that a conversation about one's organization or brand is already happening on social media platforms such as blogs, Yelp, review boards, even Twitter, regardless of whether there is an official, authorized organizational presence on social media or not. So, as another social media strategist put it, "It is about whether you want to join the conversation or not as an organization, 'cause whether you want it or not, people are talking about you, it is already happening." The participant above, who strongly identifies with this organization and has fully embraced his role as one of the organization's voices online, points out that his management made the "smart decision" to not only announce a social media presence, but in fact fully embrace it for strategic organizational reasons. His mangers recognized that there is a learning opportunity within the stakeholders' collective voice and despite the fact that this particular organization is frequently subject to negative comments and identity

disconfirming messages, social media has become a source of information that aids decision about service changes, hours of operation, and even employee retention.

There was more than one organization in this study that found social media beneficial to decision making. The participating organizations universally looked toward social media when they wanted to "listen," with most of the differences between organizations consisting in what then happened to the heard information. The example below showcases a different organizational case:

> Ally: So a lot of people really don't feel comfortable, and they just see the bad. The other thing that I've been surprised how much my opinion has changed is that there are decisions made, pretty well constantly, by people who are higher up and have authority but don't necessarily have an understanding about the decision that they're making.
>
> Interviewer: As far as the Internet, as far as social media go?
>
> A: As far as the web and social media, absolutely. One instance is several years before I came here, there was a blog attached to our sites, a platform called WordPress, you're probably familiar with it. It's one of the bigger ones and in my opinion that's probably one of the best ones for us to use. At the time, the security setting weren't set up right. And so it made our site vulnerable. At that point, that's the only information that our administration had and the decision was made that there could be no more blogs on our site. Well, in terms of internet marketing that's a terrible decision! A blog is a fantastic way to get consistent content about your brand online on your site without having to restructure or create newer portions of your site all the time.
>
> I: OK.
>
> A: And so, I came in here, and said, "Well, let's get a blog on our site." And there was severe push back, and people who said, "Well, I was in a prior position but this is what was made, this was the decision that was made so this is how it is and we can't change that." Well anybody in the [organization's] community that knows enough about the web can tell you, "When you think about those platforms, they can set up securely, they won't be a security threat to your site, there isn't an issue, we can absolutely do that." But the Administration says, "Well, eight years ago, I said, 'no', because this is, this is, this is, the reality." Well, eight years ago, I mean, people were still using old technology that you don't really hear about today. I mean, browsers and internet or internet providers, and e-mail providers and social media right now, the face of the internet is just totally different. – Ally, social media manager

This quote points toward a few important elements related to social media use by

organizations and the decisions that this use may spur. This story is clearly not about an organization that has embraced social media yet; it is about an organization that is using social media despite itself. As already mentioned, an organization like the above, and many others, uses social media because everyone else in their competitive circle uses social media. *Indeed, industry pressure is often the impetus for trying out a social presence—this was the case for organizations that were rather successful in their efforts, and organizations that did not do as well.* However, in the extended quote above, the tone of resistance is dominant.

Due to various factors, most frequently having to do with age and tenure of the employees, participants reported a perceptible discomfort with organizational social media use among their colleagues. This discomfort often caused difficulties for the social media professionals tasked with representing the organization online because it emphasized an existing tension between the organizational image they were representing, and what was happening internally throughout the organization in terms of decisions and support for the social media endeavor. This particular tension is strongly related to organizational identity. *It is of note that organizational image here is externally oriented, and organizational identity is internally focused. In this sense, how much social media influenced an organization depended on whether there was an existing organizational text, a practice, in support of matching identity with image.* The process is of course recursive, the persistence of ongoing conversation (remember, the social media conversation is always already ongoing) demands lamination and imbrication to a pattern of communication that then facilitates the interaction process.

Some of the details of this very process are seen in the quote above: a discourse of

discomfort based on past experience with a failed blogging attempt was laminated throughout the organization's administration. Although this experience was some years ago, most of the administration personnel, as described by Ally, had been working at the organization for 10 years and more, having the necessary tenure to set up a particular mindset against social media. Further, a harder to deal with discourse of vulnerability emerges that is also based on this past, now laminated, experience. The employees, who sometimes might be in charge of the social media effort, see "only the bad," because they remember a time when the organization was in a vulnerable position caused by its social media presence. Much of the organizational presence on social media then is about managing perceptions of communicative vulnerability, which frequently reverberate throughout the organization a lot stronger than throughout the individuals working with social media.

Some of the participants in this study saw themselves as "advocates" of social media and stakeholder feedback within the organization and as a result pushed against administrative or managerial resistance. As already demonstrated, social media interactions do influence organizational identity and associated processes, but when identity is concerned, organizational transformations are difficult (Nag, Corley, & Gioia, 2007). So, a few of the organizations in this study struggled to secure buy-in from upper management, despite the fact that these organizations already participated in the social media conversation. Some participants reported that buy-in wasn't much of a problem, but acknowledged that they are lucky to have organizational support. For example, Dan, a social media strategist, reported: "My company does not have that struggle. Um, we have very smart, uh, very modern, executive team and directors that, that understand the value

of social media, understand the value of almost everything that we do. I'm, I'm so lucky!"

Others would describe their advocacy for social media as having to convince and educate management about the benefits of organizational social media use. For example, James, a manager whose company already had a strong presence online, reminisced about a current VP who "kind of approached social media as a joke." Because James reported to that person directly, he saw his attitude as an even more serious problem. So, he invited his manager to a social media camp for the brand's ambassadors where they talked about the benefits, dangers, and best practices of social media. James reported that the manager came out of this experience with a changed mind and since then social media has the full support of his organization (as far as he was concerned).

One thing that greatly facilitated social media buy-in for the "less digitally inclined" organizations, as one participant called them, was decision making based on sophisticated social media data. Every organization in this study emphasized the importance of metrics when it came to decision making, which is not unusual. Metrics are a form of intermediary organizational text; they provide information about the surrounding environment, facilitate the monitory of this environment, and legitimize organizational actions. When it comes to the lamination and imbrication of ongoing social media conversations, "running constant reports" and "speaking data" became the accepted communicative patterns that could imbricate stakeholder messages up to the organizational level.

This data driven approach to making decisions based on social media interactions is not without tension itself. One tension emerging from the interviews has to do with

how the purpose of using social media is conceptualized by participants. Nearly everyone agreed that the goal of organizational participation on social networking platforms was to "become more human" and to "put on a human face." Being more human in turn evokes notions that I have already discussed, such as community, friendship, and care. These are difficult to reconcile with the data-driven organization, hungry for enumerating community, friendship, and care. As one participant explained, "So, my boss, he is SEO.[9] He recently became the team manager for my brand and ever since everything revolves around numbers. And it is hard to kind of, say, hey, don't forget that it's not all about numbers sometimes." As reported by participants, this unresolved tension frequently causes difficulties in decision making when it comes to social media strategy. Despite this, it is a tension that perhaps will never be resolved as it encapsulates an ongoing organizational discourse of managing vulnerability in the social media space. Implied in the word "managing" is the realization that being vulnerable to stakeholder negative, identity-threatening commentary on social media is always going to be an issue.

In fact, the vulnerability discourse is one that has been laminated throughout the participants in this study, the interviews and meetings presented here, and even throughout the literature on organizations and social media. This discourse mandates that vulnerability should be managed through careful decisions which sometimes, as seen earlier, may even mandate the closing of all social media accounts—effectively exiting the ongoing conversation and ceding organizational identity to stakeholders. Besides exiting networking platforms altogether, this study revealed another way of managing

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[9] SEO (Search Engine Optimization) is a particularly data-driven form of digital marketing.

stakeholder input, guiding decision making and managing the pervasive organizational concern with the "social media blunder."

One way organizations manage the all-encompassing sense of uncertainty and even vulnerability online is through the creation of social media guidelines. Like the participants in this study, I use "social media guidelines" somewhat loosely to denote sets of guiding practices or documents, including a revolving document participants called a "content calendar." These guidelines could take the form of common sense practices (unwritten), policy (written, what not to do), practice guidelines (written, what to do, how to do it), and a monthly content calendar (written, a flexible blueprint of future messages to be posted on social platforms). A number of participants discussed the rules of social media as matters of "common sense," a set of unwritten practices, which constituted the mode of discursive organizational "being" online.

The common sense practices discussed by participants resemble the social media affordances discussed by Treem and Leonardi (2012) in that being able to call on common sense when representing the organization is afforded to individuals by the social platforms they use to communicate their organization into existence. When participants called on common sense practices, it was clear that this common sense was in fact organizationally defined at least to some extent, as well as platform defined. So, ultimately, "common sense" practices, seemingly brushed off by participants, became most interesting in the context of this work, because they represent moments of coorientation toward a common organizational goal.

While social media policies seem to be popular discussion topics in nonacademic literature and a few participants mentioned the more general idea of "social media

governance," very few actually admitted to having a social media policy and nobody was able to produce a copy. This does not mean, however, that those organizations did not follow a *policy process* to make sure that "everything is squared away." The term preferred, however, was "guidelines." Additionally, participants frequently emphasized the temporality of these documents, their changeability and flexibility that depended on close monitoring of stakeholder feedback. I was able to acquire two separate guideline documents from the two organizations that provided me with more extensive access in this dissertation, Small Family Farm and Nature Sweet. Content calendars were frequently discussed in meetings, but were only ever described to me, without a physical document. To illustrate the textual role of content calendars, I present example quotes that address this part of the planning conversations. Below, I go over the modes of managing organizational uncertainty and vulnerability on social media.

Managing Vulnerability in Conversation Through Text

It is important to note that when practices of doing social media were discussed, organizational members and people acting on behalf of the organization online used unwritten common sense practices and written guidelines simultaneously. While different forms of organizational text (one unwritten, the other written), people used practices and guidelines as uncertainty management resources throughout their daily work. Often participants in this study, both in interviews and meetings, characterized the social media work process (posting, responding) as one defined by common sense and guidelines as seen by the quotes below.

> Um, we do have a legal team and so depending on what we're doing we do, you know, discuss things with them and make sure that it's okay. Um, so for instance, if we're doing a contest or a giveaway, we make sure to run that through

> compliance, make sure that we're using the correct terminology, that we have the correct like terms and conditions. You know, everything is squared away. Um, but for the most part I think it's, it's common sense and it's just being human. I think that if you... interact with humans as humans—they're less likely to be offended or upset because they understand that you're a human. If you come across solely as a brand, as a robot, as a corporation, then it's much easier for them to attack you or to have negative feedback. *But no, so no, no like long list of guidelines. I think that it's mostly just, just common sense*. – Dan, social media strategist
>
> *There is a lot of common sense involved but there are some guidelines that we have set up. Um, but it, it is a new, uh, a newer thing*. I mean it's only been in the last three years so we are, uh, *making some policy as we go as well*. Um, you know, and like I said, there are, there are certain things that are common sense that you know, that we try to—we don't want to engage in any open arguments. We don't want to, you know, uh, be any—we don't want to be negative. Um, we do try to be as polite as possible. If it's our fault, like something is our fault, we will apologize. Um, but if it's not us, if it's not our fault we want to let them know, like you know, we're sorry that you have that problem, but it really isn't our fault, this is the policy and this is what, you know, this is your mistake. So we try to educate as much as possible as well. – Aaron, social media writer
>
> Currently *we do not have guidelines, no policy either, it is just--it is mostly common sense*. – James, social media strategist

The quotes above provide rich insight: explicating the same issues of imbricated practice. It becomes immediately clear from all three quotes that common sense, policy, and guidelines are thought of together. Interestingly, the three quotes indicate very different processes associated with doing social media. For example, at Dan's organization, various departments are involved in the social media process. The mentioning of Legal and Compliance suggests that more than one department in this organization partakes in the doing of social media. This is also surprising, because Dan explained earlier that his team does not get much oversight by management when it comes to their work on social media. A few participants explained that the Legal department's involvement was a condition for the organization becoming active on social media. Others vehemently opposed approval of posts by anyone other than marketing,

leading to bitter jokes, further illuminating how complex and even contested social media representation can become. Nature Sweet was one of the companies that prided itself on being small enough and not having to go through what participants called “the 400-hour Tweet” process. This quote refers to an article a Nature Sweet employee cited in a meeting, which depicts the process of approving a tweet (140 characters) for a big bank, which reportedly took 400 work hours to accomplish.

Organizations that had the freedom of no official approval process relished this fact and considered themselves more advanced in the social media practice. Dan, who mentions the involvement of legal in this instance, quickly points out that at the end it comes to “common sense” and “being human.” In general, when describing the social media process as being about common sense, participants also called forth the humanity of their organizations and of themselves. “Interact with humans as humans… and they will understand” is Dan’s suggestion and a mantra he repeated throughout the two interviews I conducted with him. For Aaron’s organization, the common sense approach clearly comes with an asterisk, too. While he doesn’t go through legal approval, his organization and team do have guidelines already set up. The guidelines quoted are fairly standard and appear to be generally followed by everyone interviewed for this study. In fact, many times the “common sense” people referred to was with similar organizational and professional guidelines in mind. This is what James, in the last quote, refers to in his brief explanation as well.

While the processes of using “common sense,” “making policy as we go,” and “some guidelines” seems casual, it only indicates how well laminated and imbricated the practices have already become. It has been only a few years since organizations have

been engaging on social media, and the rules under which social media professionals operate are rarely even realized. So much so that in my conversation with one participant we discussed both the lack of guidelines or policy, and the fact that his team holds yearly social media trainings for employees and community ambassadors, where the team explains social media best practices among which is, "to never take a picture of your shoes and post it." As suggested by policy communication studies (Canary, 2010; Canary & McPhee, 2009), *policies are discursively constructed and enacted, which often means that when organizational members enact a policy, they are not aware of it. This was evident in my conversation about common sense and guidelines.* The lack of awareness in decision making and policy enactment reminds us of what Simon (1976) and later Tompkins and Cheney (1985) discuss as organizationally inculcated decisional premises, the strength of which is in their unobtrusiveness.

The other version of guidelines observed was a written one, which when presented to me was given under the warnings, "that all of this is a work in progress" and that "this is old, maybe more than a year, and it needs to be revised." From this I understood that even written documents are not permanent in the social media context, characterized by rapid change and continuous demand for flexibility. This realization is particularly relevant in the context of the conversation–text dialectic, were text is theorized as at least semipermanent. Social media guidelines are a definition of temporary permanence. But, despite the relative temporality of these guidelines, the effort to write down specific practices for *being* on social media, and *doing* social media emphasizes the importance of laminating and imbricating past experience in organizing. The emphasis on *practice* is another aspect of interest here. This is so especially because

social media practice has an aura of "common sense" indeed, reportedly requiring simply being "human" or the appropriate organizational self. So, it is important to remember that the approach to practicing social media as illustrated here is a continuum from "common sense" to guidelines and best practices.

The two documents I go over here are similar and different in a few respects that are informative for this argument. For example, the Small Family Farm employees were presented with a best practices document by the marketing agency they had hired to help and educate them about social media work (see Appendix B). The document itself did not appear to be written specifically for the organization, at least not in a sense that it identified the client by name anywhere. However, the document also had an educational tone, explaining for example what it means to function as an organization in "the relationship era." Then, best practices for working with Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Pinterest, and Google+ were outlined. Best practices in this case covered forms of posts (i.e., always post a photo and a link, shorten the link), forms of responses (i.e., make sure to always post content that naturally creates conversation; never ignore or delete negative comments), and general rules of engagement (i.e., never be the one ending a conversation on Twitter, unless the conversation has run its course completely). Each section was followed by helpful links to additional information on the topic.

The document[10] that guided Nature Sweet's interactions on social media was also created by a marketing agency the company had hired to help with social media. Since

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[10] Just as the name Nature Sweet is an alias to protect the organization's identity, the entire document in question is not presented here as it contains identifying information that would break my agreement with the organization to keep their name anonymous. However, I have made available the table of contents and the company's most general, anonymized approach to social media in Appendix B.

marketing agency employees exclusively executed posts, the guidelines functioned as an explicit commitment to Nature Sweet of what content was to be posted. This commitment included extensive planning meetings following the guidelines and a content calendar—a written document that looked like a printed monthly calendar, with notes on what is to be posted. While I did not see a copy of the content calendar, following is a quote, which explains how this document functions for social media planning. In the guideline document, both logos of the marketing agency and Nature Sweet were present, suggesting that the guidelines were specifically created for the organization. Nature Sweet's guidelines were a lot more detailed compared to the Small Family Farm, covering information on approach, audience, tone and voice, roles and responsibilities, topics, frequency of posting, rules of engagement, monitoring, strategy, *and a list of pre-approved responses*. The content calendar, also a list of preapproved messages, with certain flexibility, was in addition to these guidelines and addressed monthly and daily content to be posted. These documents, as they are specific to Nature Sweet, are remarkable in a sense that 1) they remind us again of Simon's decisional premises and preformed decisions, here designed to achieve consistency between organizational identity and image, and decrease uncertainty and 2) they effectively communicatively constitute a social organization as a written text of guidelines and daily practices.

It is important to understand here that the guidelines discussed resulted from initial organizational experience on social media platforms. While parts of these guidelines have already been institutionalized and become regular practice across a number of organizations, the fact that much of this is highly flexible and changeable cannot be overstated. The continuum from established practice and planning of social

media content to remaining open and flexible to change it all in a minute's notice is well exemplified in this quote from a meeting with Nature Sweet's marketing team:

> We usually start, um, a minimum of a month in advance, the process… We haven't even started November content yet, because we are still in the process of approving it all. But we usually start with, we usually brainstorm on both sides [marketing agency and client organizations] and then we bring ideas to the table and have a discussion about what campaigns do we want to run, what's going on, what do we need to promote. And then… after all of that has been said and done, and we've gone through a multiple stages of that, usually the final PDF presentation (and I would go through that), and that's two weeks in advance, and I would write every single post for the following month in, it's called a content calendar. So, we would have the whole calendar laid out with all the posts and custom images we need to make, that would all be done and just be ready to go. And then my boss would go through it and make edits and approvals. And, it is flexible, if there are things to be added, promotions, or sales, we would add things like that. Um, and then it goes to the marketing director at Nature Sweet, and she looks through it, and we would go back and forth a few times, makes changes that we need. And then, after all that is said and done, we'll schedule it out for the month. And then again, if things change, or we decide that we don't want to post, it's super easy to edit, Facebook makes it really easy to plug it all in and just preschedule everything. A lot of it we base on, because they are, um either moms or a lot of our audience has jobs, posting before work and after work we know is effective, so just kind of knowing the nuances of that.

This quote, by Alice, a social media writer on behalf of Nature Sweet, illustrates the detailed planning process of social media activity. Note that the content calendar does not address or direct specific conversations or try to explicitly manage interaction. The conversations and engagement with stakeholders was covered by the general guidelines, and in general strokes, leaving room for personalizing and experimenting with conversations. Notably, Nature Sweet readily described most of what they do online as an "experiment," the uncertainty stemming from which was managed through, as we see above, numerous discussions and meetings. In these meetings specific ongoing interactions were referenced and addressed. These interactions between stakeholder and organization were then used to make next month's calendar or on more rare occasions,

redo portions of the guidelines.

Further, the quote above brings up a number of intermediary texts, designed to facilitate and regulate practice. If we go back to the introductory example for this dissertation, it is similar texts and practices that the “back to the drawing board” comment refers to. It is important to realize that the rich practices described by Alice are something that organizations internally negotiate and renegotiate multiple times (this is denoted by “brainstorming” and “we would go back and forth a few times”), in itself a communicative process of creating the organization online. In this respect, the process of a content calendar creation, in its written and unwritten aspects, is the communicative constitution of organizational representation online. These are indeed the texts of who and what Nature Sweet is on social media platforms. And lastly, while these texts are flexible (“it’s super easy to edit”), especially in respect to any ongoing interactions with stakeholders (acknowledged as “moms” and “audience with jobs”), they only are to this conversational extent. The practice of having and relying on these texts is, as we see, quite firmly established organizationally.

Finally, the guidelines and best practices presented are examples of organizational attempts to direct and control employee decision making about social media representation. Needless to say, participants viewed the documents as helpful, with both organizations requesting these documents to be produced for them. As noted earlier, employees did not refer to the texts frequently, but they knew that they were there, should they need to refer to them. This attitude is best exemplified in Aaron’s earlier quote where he puts common sense, guidelines, and policies under the same umbrella while describing the “text” guiding his interactions on social media. As communication-based

work on policy has shown, employees find the existence of policies, even if they are not often referred to, helpful in directing interaction and action (Canary, 2010). In a fast paced context such as social media, where relational issues between organizations and their stakeholders often exist (i.e., customer service complaints), having an official organizational text supporting specific interactions and actions and thus minimizing individual decision making and responsibility was interpreted by participants as a positive. It is the knowing of this "policy of consistency" (Carlsen, 2006), which includes various authored and authorized organizational practices, that influences the organization's identity and this identity's representation in the social media context.

Along with the role of these documents in directing action and reducing decision-making responsibility for whoever is tasked with presentifying the organization on any given day, participants perceived the function of the texts as one that legitimized their work and the role of social media organizationally. As already demonstrated, organizational presence in social media contexts is often a contested area for the organizations of this study. There is resistance to the practice itself and in some respect even to the people performing the work. In this sense, it is not surprising that participants noted their reliance on "governance" to demonstrate to colleagues that they have their own authoritative text. At the same time, however, I acknowledge that although the authoring of (written or unwritten) organizational texts might provide a sense of legitimacy for social media work among the people who do it, it is also evident from the continual resistance that these texts alone do not fully legitimize social media throughout the organization.

As authoritative texts (Carlsen, 2006; Kuhn, 2008), practice guidelines emerge

from laminated past experience in interacting with stakeholders and simultaneously aim at guiding the future experience of interacting with stakeholders, showcasing the recursive relationship between conversation and text within the organization–social media contextual relationship. Because these authoritative texts are created in direct response to past experience, which has not had time to permeate the organizational discourse yet, I argue that the emerging best practices associated with social media work are an example of imbrication, of communicatively co-constructing the organization from laminated past experience. As it stands for many study participants, having a dedicated practice, a set of rules, especially if they are "common sense," redefines what their organization has become through the imbrication of these to create a communicative substance some readily called social.

Communicative Constitution of Social Media Strategy

In the previous section I suggested that the organizational role of the stakeholder is realized in the ongoing social media conversations that scale up the organization's textual level through the discursive process of decision-making. In the continuing discussion I reiterate the lamination and imbrication processes in respect to specific social media practices and texts that revolve around strategy. The sections below continue to answer the overarching research question 2 and thus continue to focus on the communicative constitution of organizations in social media conversation and text. Next I discuss how organizations organize in light of the affordances and complications provided by the social media context, and the interacting digital stakeholder.

Organization–Stakeholder Interactions in the "Relationship Era"

Social media best practices usually mention a transition toward the "relationship era," when discussing organizational strategy in a digital and relational context. This is how one organization's best practices document defined this mysterious organizational moment: "We've entered the "Relationship Era," where the only path for businesses seeking long-term success is to create authentic customer relationships." The text continues by explaining that to the chagrin of some executives, the "relationship era" requires a new organizational focus on honesty, transparency, shared values, and purpose beyond profit. The challenges of the "relationship era" are demonstrated by a recent example of Unilever's Dove Twitter campaign called #SpeakBeautiful. I use this example to showcase the social context, which many organizations are a part of when doing social media today. Then, I proceed to specific examples informing the role of the stakeholder in organizational strategy derived from this study.

On February 24–25, 2015 the cosmetics brand Dove, owned by the conglomerate Unilever, partnered with Twitter for a new promotional campaign, which targeted cyber-bullying and, specifically, negative tweets targeted at women's bodies. Through the partnership with Twitter, which has struggled to curb "trolling" (unsolicited negative comments) on the site, Dove's social media experts targeted, found, and responded to women's negative body posts with Dove-branded encouraging messages. This campaign comes on the heels of other Dove efforts in recent years where the brand has been known to stand for "real beauty" and partner with various organizations to promote self-esteem in women of all ages. The #SpeakBeautiful social media campaign appeared to go with similar efforts. As an example of relationship marketing, the campaign was exemplary

and was lauded in popular media. It also appeared to garner a lot of positive tweets in response, including endorsement by well-known social media scholar danah boyd. However, Dove also garnered much negative press, especially from analysts critical of the “relationship era” marketing, who called the #SpeakBeautiful effort “terrifying” by expressing concern with the anthropomorphization and humanization of the for-profit company (see Dewey, 2015).

The Dove campaign and the following reactions toward the “relationship era” defined by organizations that “befriend” stakeholders on social media platforms raised questions about the humanization of the corporation throughout popular media. As someone who writes about organizational identity, I must acknowledge that corporations have been legally defined as human since the 1700s, a story well illustrated by Bakan (2004). In fact, in order to be able to conceptualize organizations as having identity, we ought to personify them, which identity scholars have done for years. In other words, the anthropomorphization of organizations is not a concept that came into existence with social networking platforms and social media, but one that has existed and has been discussed for centuries. With this said, the organizations in this study reported an exceeding focus on the “relationship era” along with its attributes of honesty, transparency, shared values, and purpose beyond profit, and explained that their organizations wanted to appear “human” in social media conversations.

As I have already suggested and explain further below, the characteristic for the social media organizational goal to “appear” human raises issues of agency and identity: Indeed, while the organization is represented online as an image, it is in fact a human who is presentifying it. But these issues are not irreconcilable; in this study interested in

identity they are fascinating. As pointed out, the study of organizational identity and identification suggests the personification of organizations (Cheney, 1983) and even what Czarniawska-Joerges (1994) called a superperson, an institutionalized entity capable of having an impact on the world. Yet, these concepts are generally familiar to the people who study them and are usually too abstract for a general audience. With the advent of the "relationship era" on social media, however, organizations acting as humans and through humans to form what I earlier called a plenum of identities are beginning to gain the attention of nonscholars because of their complex and not unproblematic representation online. *Becoming human* for all intents and purposes on social media platforms can be summarized as a main organizational strategy of the "relationship era" bound organizations in this study. I discuss the details of this claim below.

Being Human as Strategy

Ascribing personality traits to organizations is a dangerous business, yet, in organizational studies (communication and otherwise), we have been doing so for years. Organizations are made and enacted by people until eventually they acquire a personality of their own—a mix of culture, identity, brand, and image that is difficult to parse out (Alvesson, 2013; Cheney, et al., 2004; Hatch, Schultz, & Larson, 2000). And while organizations admittedly have an acquired personality of their own, this personality is still enacted by individuals on a daily basis and in a variety of contexts.

One such context is social media. Because social media platforms began as tools to facilitate the social networking of individuals, when organizations first appeared on platforms such as Facebook, they were required by the design of the platform itself to act like the individual members of these networks and their platforms. Hence, organizations

acquired “friends,” engaged in “chats,” posted content that explicitly differed from advertising, and actively responded to comments made on their walls, streams, newsfeeds, and pages. All of this human-like behavior was initially driven by the structural design of social media platforms. In other words, if Dove (Unilever) from the above example, or any of the organizations represented in this study, wanted to be on Facebook in 2007, they had to think and act like a human in order to fulfill the structural requirements of certain platforms.

While social media platforms have advanced their design and settings to accommodate organizations today, the interpersonal feel of social networking platforms remains. In fact, the relational aspect is now a big part of the organizational social media practice and discourse, leading to expressions such as the “relationship era,” which define an entire approach to marketing. Study participant examples of strategy practices pointing to the development of human-like relationships online abound. Robert, a social media strategist, provides insight into his organization’s relational practice:

> So typically a lot of people are searching for natural ways to live their lives. You have dairy-free and gluten-free lifestyles, things like that. Those are very popular subjects and so we actually talk a lot about those kinds of lifestyles and recipes and things that will improve your lifestyle if you were living in that way. *So we can build our relationship in that way. And then we can talk about those things freely, because we don't have any products in any of those spaces. And then from that point forward because we have the relationships built, individuals typically will go through and look at our website and find out what information we have [about our own products], they are intrigued enough to possibly ask someone else what we do.*

This quote illustrates one of the key points made in the best practices document presented earlier: avoiding a direct sales push for a “purpose beyond profit” approach. The relational aspect of social media is emphasized greatly here, but not without the mention of product. Providing useful information around one’s product line has become

the way organizations talk about themselves online. This participant is not alone in his desire to discuss lifestyle, educate, and be useful—this is the approach a few organizations took across social media platforms, including the farm and the natural sweets company I worked with more extensively. For example, the farm often posted local community information, recipes, and fun facts about farming, vendor information, and products in stock at the farm store. Similarly, Nature Sweet emphasized healthy recipes featuring their products. The strategy of shrouding product information in useful, educational, lifestyle-focused discourse is a way in which social media stakeholders and interactions have influenced organizations today.

Beyond this, the building of (digital) relationships as organizational strategy is entirely discursive in nature, enriching the argument that organizations are communicatively constituted in and through online conversations. As noted by most participants, emphasized throughout meetings, and written in various practice guidelines, having a conversation with one's stakeholders is an organizational goal in the social media context. *Being human* throughout these conversations is the overarching goal. Converting this "humanity" into organizational text through reports and advanced analysis presents a *translational* challenge in a theoretical sense, having more to do with people's attitude to one another and the norms of communication than with the object itself (McPhee & Iverson, 2013; Taylor, 2006). Adopting relationship building and being human as part of organizational strategy requires more than just a single individual who presentifies the organization in social media (although it starts there), it demands organization-wide coorientation that would translate the experience into laminated practice exemplified in statements similar to "this is how we do things."

This doesn't mean that all practices mentioned by this study's participants are always legitimized by the organization—there are details of doing social media that remain the communicative property of the few who do it, but, when strategy is concerned, the coorientation must be at the organization level to be successful. As a result, it was precisely in these interconnected processes of coorientation and translation where many participants saw the biggest challenge of their jobs as the identity hubs—talking the human side of an organization's identity into existence as a strategy both externally (in the digital space) and internally (in the organizational space).

The participants in this study described what I call the "challenge of translation" as attempts, usually led by them or marketing in general, to "shift" the organizational discourse to "being more human." Social media professionals talked extensively about being human online and presented this as a viable organizational strategy of getting their stakeholders to engage in conversations and perhaps other more profitable actions. This is how Chris, a social media strategist for an advertising agency, described the "shift" he routinely asked his clients to consider:

> When you move to social, you want brands to be human. So it's not as if they're being fake before, but it's *to try to get them to shift to be more human, to let your guard down a little bit.* And so we'll go in and explain to them and we'll usually say, "Well, this is what other brands are doing, so either you'll be standing over here, or you could be more human with other people."

Clearly, the quote speaks from the perspective of an agency social media professional and refers to a common situation when an agency is tasked with introducing social media to a client and leading them through, as already noted, a conceptual and discursive "shift to be more human." Becoming more human is associated with the organization's identity and brand in the juxtaposition between "being fake before" and

being human now. Of course, a process of changing practices is implied throughout the quote. The perceived necessity to let one's guard down comes in direct opposition to the intense feelings of vulnerability that organizations experience in the social media context. As a result, the shift is indeed one that requires what has been shown in this study to be the strongest pressure of all, the institutional. In effect, the shift to being more human is a shift in how one's organization is perceived externally and internally, because social media "is a real life test room" for organizations, explains Chris. "These are real people looking at content," he continues, providing immediate feedback, whose impact resonates with organizations, because they spend a lot of time and resources to understand it.

Role of the Stakeholder in the Communicative Constitution of the Organization

This subsection addresses an overarching concern of this dissertation and research question 2. It is presented here because it builds on the two subsections before, which addressed decision-making and strategy as per the research question. As already noted, data in support of the last subquestion on organizational practices are incorporated throughout this dissertation.

While social media professionals claimed to never enter in direct and public negotiations with stakeholders, their own answers suggest otherwise. Based on participant responses, negotiation appeared to be understood as bargaining, which of course is not how this dissertation conceptualizes negotiation. Similarly to Deetz (2001), I see communication in general as negotiative, which led me to interpret participant answers in a particular way. For example, to my question on if and how social media stakeholders might negotiate organizational identity online Dan, a social media strategist,

responded: “I don't know if I would consider it a negotiation, I would consider it a *conversation*.” Given my theoretical framework and epistemology as a communication scholar, I interpret the mentioned conversation as negotiative in the sense that it is communicative.

Admittedly, I never saw “bargaining” negotiations during my observations of my participants’ social media accounts, but I did witness that when a problematic situation emerged, the organizational representative would take the conversation offline as per guidelines. With this said, perceptions of the role and power of stakeholder participation on social media contributes greatly to how employees see the organizations they work for, with many acknowledging that “they [the stakeholders] have just as much as say as anybody else.” We already know that organizational outsiders affect the construed organizational image, or how organizational members perceive the organization they work for (Dutton & Dukerich, 1991; Dutton, Dukerich, & Harquail, 1994). As a result of this study, we now know that the social media context extends and complicates this effect. In terms of communication, we also know now that what stakeholders *say* impacts what and how the organization *does*. Ahead, I provide more specific evidence to this claim.

As already illustrated, the relationship era affects organizational decision making and strategy, which means that by extension, the people that organizations build relationships with also have influence on decisions and strategy. We have seen that the relational aspect of social media forces a reconceptualization of community and the role of certain members within this community when it comes to meeting organizational goals. More subtly, we have also seen that the proliferation of social media platforms and

the ensuing focus on relational discourse has led some of the participant organizations in this study to reconceptualize the traditional organizational member. This reconceptualization has a clear relevance to the role of the stakeholder in the communicative constitution of the organization. The following quote begins to put the role of the stakeholder in an intriguing light: “In years past I would say that they didn't have as much, um, input or say. But I would say within the past two to three years, that culture has changed and yes, they have—they're very important to us and they have just as much say as anybody else.”

In this quote, a social media writer explains that the changing role of the stakeholder is also changing the culture of the organization. The speaker’s interpretation that stakeholders on social media have as much say as anyone else in the organization and beyond, but that was not the case before, speaks to that cultural shift. In the following quote, Aaron, a social media writer, explains that his online interactions impact the organization mostly through him as an organizational member:

> I mean um, I know that the controllers and, which are the people that, uh, that [manage the equipment], that do the alignment, they are asking us questions like, "What do you guys think about this plan for when we do construction?" So they're, they're conscious that you know, uh, of, of what social media is saying, what our customers are saying.

Indeed, this quote represents a *translation* of social media conversation into organizational conversation and indicates employee coorientation when it comes to interpreting “what our customers are saying.” From earlier quotes presented in this dissertation, and throughout my conversations with Aaron, it becomes clear that he often meets with organizational leaders to share insight from social media interactions. *His take on his role in bringing in customer input to the organization reminds us of the theorized*

identity hubs that social media professionals are when it comes to presentifying the organization for the stakeholder and the stakeholder for the organizations. Here this role is further illuminated, suggesting that it is not only organizational and individual identity that social media writers negotiate, but "identity hubs" also translate stakeholder conversation into organizational language. Similar interpretation of one's organizational role is seen throughout the interviews with organizational employees who expressed that they often assume the responsibility of representing the interests of digital stakeholders to the organization. For example, Geraldine, a social media strategist, evoked this responsibility multiple times in our conversation when explaining that if it weren't for her, the voices of customers would not be heard by the organization. Aaron above, in a separate quote, explained that his job was to report what customers thought of his organization's service in meetings. Having just come out of a meeting about service hours right before our interview, he said: "I would almost be a 100% certain that next year we run holiday service."

Another example of the ongoing, often difficult to monitor, conversation between stakeholders and organizations presents itself during one of my conversations with Linda, a social media writer. During our interview a social media colleague of hers knocks on her door and peeks in with a reminder that Linda is due in a meeting about "the Tribune article coming out tomorrow." Linda responds, "10 minutes," and I use the opportunity to investigate more.

Her organization is the subject of an investigative journalism piece that was expected to discuss the organization's money handling practices especially when it came to executive pay. The social media team was about to have a meeting with the public

relations team to figure out an integrated response for the entire organization. In Linda's words, many of the organization's online stakeholders cared deeply about the business and their own stake in it, so they would often engage on Twitter or Facebook regarding the company's state of affairs. In fact, Linda reports that some stakeholders communicate acute sensitivity about the matters of her organization over social media. This realization makes her exclaim, "I work here and I don't even care that much!" This exclamation and my entire interview with Linda and her colleagues are suggestive of the profound change that social networking platforms bring in terms of organization–stakeholder communication. I am not implying that organizations never interacted with stakeholders before, nor that this interaction was never as heated. What I am suggesting however is that through the highly interactive platforms of social media, stakeholders and their organizations today vie for a novel classification, perhaps one of nontraditional membership facilitated by ongoing identity conversations and community.

Further, the watchful or concerned stakeholder reminds us of the theoretical stakeholder in Cheney and McMillan's (1990) theorizing on organizational rhetoric, the one who talks back at the organization. My argument is not in introducing or even re-introducing the act of talking back, but in suggesting that through social media, talking back is more impactful due to the specific characteristics of social media discussed throughout this dissertation, but mainly, publicity. I have shown that public scrutiny is on the forefront of organizational thought as a major vulnerability when it comes to social media representation. Tom, a social media strategist, illuminates this claim by telling a cautionary story of a car dealership driven out of business based on a social media user "campaign" against the company. The following story also brings up a point about the

role of narrative in the communicative constitution and co-construction of organizations. It is a useful quote because it provides an opportunity to witness not only how a well-framed stakeholder-authored story on social media can impact an organization, but also it demonstrates how narrative can later be appropriated for a different function.

> Tom: Well, you make your business more easily accessible! And no matter what, the easier it is to get to you, the more risks you face. That's the whole thing with online reviews. You hear about businesses not wanting to set up review sites because they are afraid, but a customer can just go and set up your review site. It might not be an officially claimed and verified site, but customers can go and do that. So you are out there no matter what… That, that's kind of the thing… I've had, I've seen businesses go under because of social media. I knew a car dealership, they sold a used car to a girl. 8 days after she bought it, it completely broke down. She brings it back to the dealership and is like, I want my money back, but with used cars, all deals are final. So, it was partially her fault for not doing the full on research and partially for the dealer for being a jerk, because that's what he did. He said no, screw you. And I see the point, what's to say that you can't return a car then in 7 days or 9 days, I understand that. But she got pissed and went after him on Facebook. She created a page and made a big stink and it got to the point where the local press picked it up. And then, 3 months after the whole ordeal, he had to sell the dealership, change the name, the whole ordeal and rebrand.
>
> Interviewer: And people joined her social media attack then?
>
> T: Yeah, and here is the thing, it was about how she framed it: it wasn't how this dealership screwed me over, she just so happened to be a member of the military reserves and framed that as, this dealership hates the military. And so, it blew up! It just spread like wildfire. It wasn't about them versus her, but them versus the military. She was a smart girl! But at the same time, it ruined his business, because he thought that it would just go away because it was on social media. Eh, he thought, that stuff doesn't matter.

The importance of this story in terms of understanding the perceived role of the stakeholder cannot be overstated. According to Tom, social media gives power to organizational stakeholders. The expressed sentiment reminds of Cheney and McMillan's (1990) "talking back," a proposition we know well in theory. However, fewer examples of stakeholders talking back and having impact as in the one above are ever discussed. In this study, my explicit interest has been in uncovering these stories of stakeholders

"talking back" and thus claiming power over an organization as suggested by the authors all this time ago.

While the example above is one of destruction rather than co-construction, the narrative itself has a co-constructive and prescriptive role in terms of the social media space, the organizational stakeholders within it, and how organizations engage with both. From the position of a strategist, Tom presents an argument for the power of the stakeholder that translates to more than any one individual organization—it speaks to the entire realm of what it means to be a *social* organization or even an organization in the social space. Admittedly, this is a cautionary tale, which is not in this section by mistake. Tom's story describes a vulnerability, but more importantly it is delineating the place of the stakeholder and the power of the conversation when it comes to co-constructing a space of practice, such as an organizational use of social media platforms and networking.

The example of the stakeholder bringing down an organization through Facebook makes yet another case for stakeholder impact on organizational processes. But what is more important here is the role of narrative. In the quote, Tom explains that the stakeholder "framed" the story right—she brought up part of her own social identity as a military member that could be significant in the context of what had happened. Then she built a conversation (story) where she was a representative member speaking on behalf of the military, which effectively positioned the conversation as one between two organizations, not an individual and an organization, to assume more power. It is interesting to look at the two narratives we have above (that of Tom and that of the stakeholder) in order to better understand the meaning and importance of this quote.

Narrative plays a special role in the Montreal School Approach, especially when it comes to connecting actions and making sense of communicative acts (McPhee & Iverson, 2013). Especially useful here is Cooren and Fairhurst's (2002) theorizing of narrative as a four-phased process consisting of manipulation, competence, performance, and sanction. Because I am using this structure to discuss two semiseparate narratives presented in one quote, my use of this explanatory process is less detailed than it would be in a more focused analysis of one organizational narrative. Manipulation, according to the authors, involves the creation of tension between subject and object. Here I am assuming that the subject is the stakeholder in Tom's story and the object is the car dealership. This tension is articulated by Taylor and Van Every (2000) as they suggest the need for action (i.e., the dealership did not uphold its obligation to be fair). The competence phase sets up the subject (stakeholder) with allies or helpers. We see this in the quote above expressed as the stakeholder's smartness in framing the narrative as between the dealer and the military (helper). Additionally, there is the invisible role of the other stakeholders in the narrative—the Facebook users who participated in the outcry against the dealer. We see a play in agency here again, the same that we continue to see throughout this dissertation—on social media who does what, under who's "face" and "voice," is always somewhat problematic.

The third phase is that of performance, or the main, decisive action performed by the subject on her quest (Cooren & Fairhurst, 2002). As told by Tom, we can assume that there were multiple actions throughout the campaign, but all with one target and focus—to seek fairness and justice through Facebook conversations, posts, and comments. The final phase involves the sanction or the fulfillment of the quest where we see the

dealership going out of business first and then having to rebrand (re-create an identity) in order to continue to function differently and under a different identity. Tom tells the story to explain to me how he (and according to him, all of his colleagues) makes sense of the role of the stakeholder when it comes to organizations and social media. Not surprisingly, I've just appropriated Tom's story to build my own, in trying to illuminate better the impact of stakeholders on organizations today.

Creating stories that stakeholders can associate with online is not a novel approach to branding or most types of organizational communication. It becomes more novel when seen from the perspective of the stakeholder, whose stories we rarely hear, and the impact of stakeholder narrative when "applied" to organizations, without authorization, and in public. To take things further, such cautionary stories are then taken up by professionals in the social media field and mythologized in an effort to make sense of a new and difficult to understand space. As a result, social media narratives affect singular organizations as much as they affect the larger field of organizational presentification on social media.

Impact of Social Media on the Organization

This chapter has focused on answering the general question about how social media and the organizational stakeholders found on its platforms impact the organization from different perspectives. This section discusses how organizations are dealing with the impact by organizing internal resources (most often interdepartmental collaboration) to meet the challenge of being social. A few organizations in this study alluded to being *social*, associating social media as the force behind cultural and even structural changes that allowed them to incorporate stakeholder feedback more efficiently and effectively.

Only one organizational representative called his organization “social.” Indeed, when Bradley and McDonald (2011) discussed the social organization in terms of social networking platform proliferation, they suggested that what determines whether an organization is social is not its representation online. It is the level of integration of socially sourced “knowledge” within the organization.

The participant who called his organization “social” explained: “Because we, we are here for the public's benefit and we try to create an urban center that is for culture, commerce and entertainment, all those things are based around social right?” It was his organization’s appreciation that it is people who create “the connective fabric of a city” that made it social—not necessarily the organization’s participation on social media platforms. While this may be interpreted as a contradiction to my emphasis on social media, it is not. This organizational focus was then translated to extensive use of social media to reach out to the city of people and start a conversation. This, the participant explained, has been embraced by every department of his organization. Although not every organization in this study reported itself as social, participants did talk about the novel relationships between departments that organizational social media presence has necessitated. Most often one such integration was seen between social media and customer service.

It is important to note that I view social media as a semistandalone department to avoid any confusion, but in reality, social media is most frequently situated within marketing and draws on the digital marketing budget of organizations. In this study most participants explained that social media was usually associated with customer service, “because people know that if they complain on Facebook, because it is public, someone

will get back to them right away," explained one participant. Although logical, this connection with customer service has put a lot of strain on how social media's organizational role is perceived throughout the organization and what social media professionals see the growing potential of social media to be. For one, despite its acquired customer service focus, customer service representatives are not authorized social media users. Marketing or public relations representatives manage social media interactions. Thus, open channels for communication between social media and customer service ought to be maintained, which presents issues of coordinating activity frequently.

Usually, social media representatives have a point of contact in the departments with which they coordinate, emphasizing once again the identity hub aspect of the social media representative. Because customer service departments are usually made up by vastly more employees compared to the few or sometimes even one employee working on social media, many customer requests are taken offline and given to the customer service department to handle. Although not offered as an explicit explanation of why complaints are frequently taken offline, this might be a structural reason for doing so. After customer service is finished with the request, someone circles back to the social media representative so that this individual can follow up on behalf of the organization with that customer on the platform on which the request originated. The public character of social media platforms, and the scrutiny this often entails, necessitates this last step.

While doing customer service through social media platforms has become regular organizational practice, the description of this practice in interviews and meetings was usually prefaced with the word, "unfortunately." In interviews, social media professionals tended to idealize and perhaps conflate the organizational goals of doing social media

(engagement and community building, both goals difficult to quantify and measure), and hence seemed to dislike its connection to customer service and its goals (measurable outcomes of customer satisfaction and purchase history). Having to navigate multiple points of connection throughout the organization once more highlighted my interpretation of the social media professional's role as an identity hub, managing online conversations and their organizational translation. Although interpreted in this study as central due to the power implied in translation, the role of social media professionals as "interpreters" for the organization is frequently not realized by organizations that have problems with buy-in.

Others described integration of social media with departments beyond customer service, which were an unusual instance. When collaboration between departments was achieved successfully, it was described similar to this:

> Once being close to Operations and once we kind of got integrated, it was a little hard kind of pushing into their space, of the controllers I mean at first... But now somebody will say on Twitter, "Oh, somebody spilled coke or something on the floor" and all I'll have to say, "Gee, tell me what car you're on and I'll report it." And then I'll turn and say, "Somebody just reported that there's coffee or something spilled in car 49," and they'll instantly get people either to clean it or remove that car. – Linda, social media writer

In this final quote, the speaker is describing how her social media team was moved around quite a bit until finding its space within the organization's operations unit. Earlier in the interview, Linda, a social media writer, had told me that social media used to be a part of marketing, public relations, then customer service ("because we are very, very customer oriented"), but eventually was transferred to operations. The social media team shares physical space with the unit. When I note that having the social media team next to the people who operate the organization's vehicles, Linda notes that the decision

was made after someone noticed that Twitter has become a “hub” for operational news and updates. Now, Linda and her colleagues share not just space with operations but also practice. The proximity has also facilitated communication and afforded the organization swiftness in decisions and response to online stakeholders.

The level of integration and embrace of communicating with stakeholders through social channels varies greatly between organizations, yet one thing is clear, social media has become a big enough organizational phenomenon that it necessitates full consideration to function properly. Once a participant in the social media world, organizations must adapt and restructure in ways that allow for even more flexibility in terms of structures, practices, regulations, and identities, because the conversation about all of these things is not only ongoing, but it is frequently difficult to control. Through my discussion of the impact of social media conversations through practices of decision making, strategy, and the overall role of the stakeholder in organizations, I have demonstrated throughout this chapter that the organizational processes associated with social media are deeply communicative and organizational—both externally and internally to the organizations of this study. Additionally, I have demonstrated that the conversation–text dialectic from the Montreal School Approach to CCO along with related concepts of lamination, imbrication, coorientation and translation, provide useful explanatory mechanism of how social media interactions constitute organizational processes.

Summary

In this chapter I provided evidence and arguments in answering research question two, which asked about the role of the stakeholder in the communicative constitution of

organizations. I paid attention to specific communicative “areas” of the organization, such as practices, decision-making, and strategy, all under the overarching theme of the main research question.

According to this research, stakeholders on social media play a role in the communicative constitution of the organization and this role is best understood through the conversation–text dialectic of the Montreal School Approach. Further, the processes of lamination and imbrication of conversation to text explain the exact way in which stakeholder feedback is incorporated throughout the organization. In this chapter I demonstrated that ongoing social media interactions are communicatively incorporated throughout the organization in organizational employees’ conversations, scheduled social media meetings, decisions about products and services, strategic planning and initiatives, and even cross-departmental collaboration.

This study also demonstrated how interactions are incorporated throughout the organization and suggested that this is accomplished in ongoing practices and text. In other words, organization–stakeholder interactions on social media led to the development of specific practices designed to address challenges of the context. One such challenge I discussed was the perception of vulnerability and uncertainty organizations reported when engaging online. The reported feelings of vulnerability based on multifaceted, largely uncontrollable conversations were managed through somewhat flexible practices and changeable texts, such as common sense, policy, guidelines, and content planning calendars.

The context of social media had an explicit impact on organizational strategy, where we see organizations turning to goals of relationship building and humanization.

Beyond this, however, institutional pressures largely drive the very presence of organization on social media platforms. While neither of these goals is unique to the social media context, they certainly are reinforced and even complicated by it. Throughout these strategic goals, the role of the social media professional is undeniable, these people being the organizational presentifiers in the context and the stakeholder advocates in the organization. The notion of identity hub returned here to facilitate explanation of the translational role of the social media professional. These are in fact boundary spanning individuals who create an interpretive bridge between fast-paced, always changing social media conversations and a more stable organizational reality such as reports and analyses, stemming from practices, rules, and guidelines. And lastly, we learned that in the "social" organization, social media has changed the communication and practices of and between various departments.

In the following discussion and conclusions chapter I revisit the questions that prompted this study, review the theoretical lenses that framed this research, and discuss my methodological approach. I synthesize my findings and offer theoretical and practical implications. Finally, I conclude with possible research extensions and new opportunities.

CHAPTER 6

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this chapter is to accentuate important findings of this study and enter into productive speculation about them by engaging with the literature and questions that prompted the work initially. In general, I set out to find if and how interactions between organizations and their social media stakeholders impact an organization's identity. Additionally, I wanted to know if and what role these stakeholders have in the communicative constitution of the organization.

Theoretically, stakeholders have always had some impact on organizational processes, but this impact has rarely been studied from a communicative perspective. The heavily interactive, fast-paced, and still relatively novel context of social media platforms has created an opportunity to study how online conversations between organizations and their stakeholders, in particular, might influence organizational processes. These conversations were examined especially in terms of their ability to shape identity-defining practices, routines, rules, and regulations. I framed my research broadly with organizational identity theory, including the concepts of organizational image and identification. I have also relied on the theory of communication constitutive of organizing (CCO) and specifically, the Montreal School Approach (MSA) to this theory.

These choices of theoretical frameworks are justified equally by their contributions to this study and the intellectual gaps that they leave for this study to fill. In

terms of organizational identity, we know very little about the impact of stakeholder input and conversation. What we do know is that organizational member perceptions of how "outsiders" view their organization impacts the member identification processes (Dutton & Dukerich, 1991; Dutton, Dukerich, & Harquail, 1994). We also know that organizational identity is authored in member practices (Carlsen, 2006; Hatch & Schultz, 2002; Nag, Corley, Gioia, 2007) and that members consubstantialize identity and identification communicatively (Chaput et al., 2011). Additionally, the most recent attempts in the communication field to theorize stakeholder involvement in the communicative constitution of the organization come from the CCO and MSA side (Ashcraft, Kuhn, & Cooren, 2009; Kuhn, 2008; Kuhn & Ashcraft, 2003; Piette, 2013). However, empirical research on the ways stakeholder communication may impact and shape organizations and their identity is severely lacking. This study sought to contribute to filling this gap, which is extensively articulated in Chapter 2, the literature review.

A key contribution driven by the findings of this study indicates that organizational interactions on social media do impact the organization in terms of its identity and practices. This impact is indirect and happens through the translations and interpretations of the people who oversee social media on behalf of these organizations, and who act as what I call "identity hubs." This process is complex, emphasizing practices of sensemaking and presentification, and culminating in a peculiar interplay of organizational and individual identity, which I call "plenum of identities" (borrowing from Cooren's (2006) plenum of agencies). In terms of constituting practices and routines, the impact of social media interactions and conversations is best described and understood through the conversation–text dialectic, the most familiar and frequently used

explanatory tension within the Montreal School Approach to CCO. Paraphrasing Putnam (2013), the conversation–text dialectic is embraced by communication and management scholars alike, because it has come to successfully symbolize another interplay between the organization as a dynamic conversation, and the organization as a relatively static text. In this study, the interplay between dynamic and static is equally descriptive and explanatory—social media conversations are seen as ongoing, fluid, rapidly changing, and difficult to control by any organization or individual. Nevertheless, their impact on the organization is "tamed" by intermediary texts (regular meetings and various reports), which become part of everyday organizational practice and even structure.

Although I separate the two research questions in two chapters for convenience, and follow the same discussion structure below, I recognize and embrace the connections that emerge between the two inquiries. One such connection that I emphasize is the link between organizational practices and identity. Similar to Carlsen (2006), and in line with the philosophy of the CCO intellectual tradition, *I see organizational identity as authored in the daily practices of organizational members, including their communicative practices with various online stakeholders. Moreover, the routines ensuing from these communicative practices help constitute an organization structured to act with and within a context of social media presence.*

Next, I engage in a more detailed discussion of the main findings of this study. I use existing literature to point out the similarities and departures in my findings from what has been theorized thus far. A point I made during the literature review for this dissertation, which bears repeating here, is that there has been little research on the subject of this dissertation. Thus, my reliance on existing literature is in terms of its

theoretical implication, rather than for a historical comparison or commentary on the existing work.

Role of the Identity Hub: Identity Work, Identification, Presentification, and the Plenum of Identities

In this section I discuss the theoretical implications of the findings pertaining to the first research question of this dissertation, concerning organizational identity co-construction in and through the social media. I am compelled to point out right away that the role of sensemaking—of context, the self, and the organization's identity—was central to the findings of this study. As noted earlier, the sensemaking theme flows throughout this entire study, but is especially prominent in parts concerning the first research question. As a result, sensemaking is addressed in a few occasions throughout this discussion, both as a finding and a helpful exploratory mechanism.

Initially, I expected to rely more heavily on an analysis of the conversations that took place on various organizational social media platforms included in the research. This expectation, however, was eventually dismissed as a result of the data coming out of other sources. Most importantly, the feedback received from social media professionals, whose role was to interact with stakeholders on social media platforms, was invaluable to this research. The role of these individuals in performing the work, making sense of ongoing conversations, representing the organization (I call this "presentifying" in line with the MSA vocabulary), and becoming an important actant within a peculiar plenum of identities, helped reveal meaning and was a major theoretical contribution to the study.

Of course, this does not mean that social media conversations were not strongly considered, too. In fact, they played an important role in understanding the context, the

organizations, and the opinions of the people who worked for these organizations. However, engaging in a conversation analysis study was ultimately deemed unnecessary to accomplish the task of answering my research questions. Instead, my research champions the organizational role of identity hubs, the people who actively translated social media conversations to organizational text.

Identity Work and Organizational Identification

The notion of the *identity hub* was derived from discussions with participants concerning their roles in the organization and the practices associated with these roles. The identity hub concept can be linked to two other identity-related concepts: identity work and organizational identification. Both Alvesson's (1994) concept of "identity work" and the process of identification are key to understanding what social media professionals, in their complex roles of organizational gatekeepers,[11] do every day. According to Alvesson, (whose study involved advertising managers, a group very similar to the participants in this study), identity work is the process of talking about oneself, work, and clients, in terms of (and in service to) the organization. As a concept, identity work is close to identification in that it "calls our attention to how individuals navigate objects and processes of identity within organizational parameters and frames" (Hedges, 2008, p. 79). Organizational identification is a process where members, and

[11] The terms gatekeepers and gatekeeping refer to the media theory process of culling and crafting countless bits of information into a limited number of messages that reach people every day (Shoemaker & Vos, 2009). I use gatekeeping here to allude to the role identity hubs play in translating large amounts of information into limited bits of data that reach organizational members such as colleagues, managers, and executives. However, I argue that the role of the identity hub revolves around managing various identities and in this sense is often even more complex.

sometimes even customers, take on aspects or attributes of the organization as their own. Through identification, individuals bond with a particular value-based identity, and subsequently make sense of the world through that discursive formula (Larson & Pepper, 2003).

The relationship between identity work, identification, and organizational identity is a dynamic one, and its articulation here may help in understanding organizational identity co-construction. It may also help establish a number of significant identity defining issues. Cheney (1991) suggested that identity is a composite of multiple identifications, and thus is itself multiple. If identity is commonly used to represent a group or an individual, then identification is the process by which this identity is appropriated. In the present study, both identity work and identification can be seen at work in presentification, or the process of making present an organization's identity online.

As identity hubs, the participants in this study embraced their organization's brand, frequently relying on this brand in difficult conversational situations. However, even more important to this study is the communicative multidirectionality of this identity work, not usually emphasized in this type of research. While identity work is often conceived of as a way for the organization to regulate employee self-identity (Alvesson & Wilmott, 2002), in the case of social media bound identity work, this process of regulation is much less pronounced. Instead, the identity work performed by the participants is seen as one of translating environment conditions technically outside the organizational physical boundaries to facilitate interpretation within the organization. In this sense, I see the identity work performed by social media professionals as one of

interpretation and them as interpreters.

I must specify here that I do not believe the identity hub is all there is to processing identity interpretations back and up to organizational "authoritative texts" (Kuhn, 2008). Rather, I view it as an important part of a chain of processes, including additional sensemaking activities, such as meetings, report generation and interpretation, guidelines, content planning, and authored practice. Indeed all of these "practices" are constitutive of organizational identity (identity practices), because they become what organizational members "know" and continuously learn of their organizations (Nag, Corley, & Gioia, 2007). Additionally, for an act of identity construction to attain a symbolic meaning outside its specific temporal and situational occurrence (the social media context, platform, wall, feed), it must become a "text" (Carlsen, 2006).

Organizational texts can be written or unwritten, as defined by their relative permanence rather than form. In terms of identity practices, Carlsen suggests that "the authoring of identities in organizations amounts to the selective appropriation of experiences… for the sake of synthesizing "me"-s or "we"-s" (p. 133) into a collectively achieved authoring. In Carlsen's theorizing the "me" refers to individual organizational members, and the "we" refers to the members' unified perception as part of an organization. In this study, the "me"-s of social media professionals and "we"-s of organizations may be regarded as contingent on the ever-shifting authored texts that are multiple in the ways they are expressed and interpreted. *Hence, the act of the interpreter (identity hub) is one of utmost importance to the co-construction of organizational identity, as it is in this act of translating daily social media experiences (interactions, such as "likes," and conversations, such as posts and comments) into authored texts*

(written or unwritten) that an organization's identity communicatively "becomes." In this sense, it is important to realize the power imbued in the role of the social media professional and the continued effort of the organization to manage this power through authoritative texts.

The concept of translation is central to the Montreal School Approach of CCO, and defines the communicative becoming of the organization. Seeing translation as the main practice of the identity hubs helps explain how conversations on social media platforms become part of the organization. This translational process is evident when participants employ interactional data (from the organization's social media platforms) in conversations with colleagues, in meetings, and discussions with other departments. By doing this, identity hubs effectively change the form of social media conversation and interaction from online banter into usable information. These translations can then serve as the basis of new organizational guidelines, decisions, and strategy.

Translation, according to Brummans and colleagues (2013), involves more than a change from one position or another, or one attitude to another; it implies transformation, both in medium and form. In an organizational sense, a focus on translation foregrounds an "inductive stitching together of a multiverse of communicative practices that scale up to compose an organization" (Brummans et al., 2013, p. 177), which adds new meaning to a given situation and its favored ways of making sense. Social media professionals are the actants behind this type of translation process that blurs the line between what is inside and out for the organization.

As identity hubs, social media professionals are in charge of the inductive stitching together of multiple communicative practices (e.g., conversations on social

platforms, conversations with colleagues, and meetings about social media). Some of these practices take place within the physical organization, others within its digital representation: identity hubs connect the two spheres through textual renditions of communicative events. To be in charge of these processes, and manage the organization's online presence, however, requires individuals to identify with the organization. Participants in this study construed their own identification processes, organizational and professional, as a job requirement, which is a unique finding.

The identification process in this dissertation was punctuated by intriguing, and historically conflicting, organizational and professional peculiarities: social media professionals who worked on social media in-house tended to identify with the organization, professionals who worked for marketing agencies tended to identify with the profession. While the different identification targets never seemed to present a problem in performing the identity hub role, or even noticeably affected organizational presentification on social platforms, the difference did cause individuals to talk differently about the identity work they performed.

The language that participants used when discussing identification best exemplified these differences. In-house workers talked extensively about the emotion and passion associated with representing their organization online. The agency workers, on the other hand, relayed heavily on "expert talk," highlighting professional expertise as what distinguished them from those who worked in-house. Even further, agency professionals employed "expert talk" to critique the organizational practices of their clients, which usually related to identity.

Sensemaking and the "Policy of Consistency"

Identification significantly facilitated the continuous yet always-retrospective process of sensemaking for identity hubs: The ultimate purpose of this process includes coorientation and coordination with organizational members and online stakeholders. As theorized by Karl Weick, identity is part of the theoretical essence of sensemaking as discussed in Chapter 4. However, the extent of the connection between organizational identity co-construction and sensemaking is better illustrated through the concepts of coorientation, narrative, and a coordinating "policy of consistency" (Cooren & Fairhurst, 2002; McPhee & Iverson, 2013; Taylor & Van Every, 2000). In the context of this work, coorientation is the ground level of communicative processes involved in everyday actions (content creation and conversation); this includes the social media context as it involves both social media professionals and online stakeholders. These communicative processes are in fact *cooriented* toward the object of the organization, or brand, as some participants referred to the online rendition of their organization's identity. The ongoing communicative processes referring to organizational social media representation (whether these processes are happening online or in a meeting about online activity is irrelevant) constitute a meaning making narrative that in turn constitutes the organization.

This constitution was demonstrated during the Nature Sweet meeting, which developed organizational statements based on online representation. In fact, these statements represented a communicatively constituted organizational entity that did not quite exist in the reality of the Nature Sweet offices. The members of the meeting took online organizational representations and conversations that occurred continually and then "textualized" these interactions into the colorful, playful, caring social media

organizational representation *they* worked for. These social media inspired identity statements were continuously negotiated, both in the meeting and in the office afterwards. It is this process of identity co-creation through an ongoing, continuously negotiated narrative that allows for sensemaking of any given event (Taylor & Cooren, 2006).

Knowing what a social media interaction (such as a "like" or comment) means for one's social media inspired organizational identity statements is a vital part of this process and contributes to sensemaking, coorientation, and coordination (a step up from coorientation) (McPhee & Iverson, 2013). Acquiring, negotiating, and managing new knowledge were key ongoing processes for the organizations in this study. But knowing what a given communicative event means requires a combination of explicit and tacit knowledge about social media platform operations, and the identity and goals of the organization. The need for a coordinating "policy of consistency" is indeed well exemplified in knowledge intensive situations such as moments of repeated "don't knows" in the face of new communicative events.

As suggested in the earlier "hub" metaphor, co-constructed identities are fluid and continuous, becoming textualized through interactions managed by "identity hub" professionals in both internal and external directions.[12] However, the fluidity of organizational identity is conceptualized with care as the notion of a brand came through in the results as one that is fairly static in terms of how it is conceptualized and represented by participants.

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[12] I use internal and external here to provide a sense of direction in respect to the organization: as I have pointed out earlier in this dissertation, based on Cheney and Christensen (2001), internal and external organizational communication is at best a tenuous relationship, and at worst, doesn't exist.

Many participants in identity hub positions explained that practicing social media conversations requires one to *know* the brand and stay within certain identity confines. I call these confines a "policy of consistency," borrowing the notion from McPhee and Iverson's (2013) work on activity coordination and the Montreal School. In my use of the expression, I merely mean to suggest that identity hub actants often employ a self-determined set of guidelines and boundaries to shape their online conversations with stakeholders. These guidelines are typically consistent with the actant's understanding of the organization and its identity, and may help explain the often-contested relationship between the process of communicatively co-constructing who an organization is (its identity, along with all of its practices, rules, and regulations) and its brand representation on social media platforms.

Sensemaking throughout the organization is accomplished through narratives which provide structure for meaning (Taylor & Cooren, 2006). The role of these narratives (including identity and brand stories) is to create a consistent basis for coorientation and coordination. It is then proposed that sensemaking, coorientation, and coordination all aid in the development of an organizational "policy of consistency," which participants in this study implicitly kept referring to when making organizational identity statements. In earlier writing on branding (Olins, 1978), a brand was "concocted" to be entirely customer-facing, while corporate or organizational identity was "aimed" at various stakeholders, including organizational employees. However, today organizational employees more easily blend into various external stakeholder groups, and many outside groups (including customers) develop and share internal insight into organizations, necessitating an unprecedented consistency between organizational identity and its brand

representation (Olins, 2000; Schultz et al., 2000). This is a notion that participants in this study called “being authentic.”

Being an authentic organization on social media, as described in this study, requires a policy of consistency that necessitates the coordination of sensemaking throughout the organization. This coordination is achieved initially through the identity hubs who create, maintain, and manage the flow of (occasionally conflicting) information between organizational identity and brand representation, in the context of an organization’s social media communicative activities. However, as this dissertation has shown, organizational representation online requires coorientation and coordination throughout the organization, between individuals, departments, texts, and even non-human actants, such as the social media platform design. This means that these processes (i.e., coorientation and coordination) must move significantly beyond any one individual. The theorizing of this requires a discussion on organizational presentification and the plenum of identities found in the results chapters.

Presentification

Organizational representation on social media platforms happens in an identity twist best explained through the MSA approach to CCO, specifically in the concepts of agency and presentification. Presentification is conceptually close to representation but it suggests a peculiar interplay of agencies, which MSA scholars borrow from Latour’s actor network theory. The concept of presentification suggests the making present of an agency that previously did not exist. Using the concept, scholars attempt to better explain how collectives become organizations, or what Nicotera (2013) refers to the process of transforming from “we to it.” Montreal scholars define presentification (Cooren,

Brummans, & Charrietas, 2008; Brummans, Cooren, & Chaput, 2009; Nicotera, 2013) as a process that occurs when individuals or collectives continually act on an organization's behalf and "in the name of" it, thus making the organization "present." Brummans and colleagues (2008) even use the term *incarnation* to signify the organization's independent existence and ability to "act" from individuals or collectives.

Organizational representation on social media is an excellent and enlightening example of presentification. An organizational page (Facebook wall, Twitter feed, Pinterest board, etc.) typically is used to allow the organization (or more precisely, members acting as the organization) to post and respond to stakeholder comments made on the platform; in effect, an organizational presence on social media is not mere representation—the organization *is* online. However, as we have seen from this study, in most cases a limited number of individuals are asked to speak on behalf of the organization. In every case recorded here, it is a single individual that logs into the organizational account on a daily basis and *becomes* the organization. So, while there is an organizational *it* present online under its own name, logos, visuals, legal statements (such as disclaimers), and "About" section, this *it* is always "made present" by a *me* or a *we*.

To *make present* the organization, which is at the heart of *present*ification, a social media professional must take on the "organizational voice," and eschew their own individual identity. This is an interesting twist on the CCO theoretical framework, because the MSA usually focuses on translation from the "I" and "we" to the "it" of organization, not the opposite. However, when the discussion goes from communicative constitution to organizational identity representation in the present work, the role of the

individual as an identity hub cannot be understated. To operate as the organization on social media, the individuals in this study had to literally "become another" in the sense of Ricoeur's (1992) hermeneutics of the self—where narrative identity, identification, and action are tied together.

To presentify an organization on social media is to effectively become its story and identity in a narrative made up of multiple daily public conversations (posts and comments), and do this in the voice of the organization that corresponds to an agreed upon identity or brand statement. To be authorized to be *it* and tell stories on its behalf, one *must* identify with the organization. In the results, participants reported that public identification was a requirement in social media circles, a precursor to the identity work in the social media context that is discussed in this study. The idea that organizational presentifiers perform identity work as part of their professional duties to the extent that they do is one that has not been discussed before. Further, the meaning of identity work in the social media context suggests once again a differentiation between individual and professional identification. In terms of the individual in-house social media professional the process of identification is one of ebb and flow (a traditional conceptualization of fluctuating feelings about the organization). This is complemented by a professional sense of identification, which for all intents and purposes might be characterized as "faking" identification when communicating with stakeholders.

However, individual identities are as fluid as organizational, "crystalized" and reflective of many aspects, urging us to accept that "fake" identification does not exist, but rather, it represents another aspect of who we are. It is in this complex view of identity that the plenum of identities becomes insightful. I derive the term from Cooren's

(2006) concept of the world as a plenum of agencies, in which anyone and anything has the ability to act on behalf of various entities, where the actants and the acted upon are not limited to being human. This is easily seen in the context of organizational representation on social media platforms. In this study, such relationships are easily identified in the ways organizations are presentified by the participants, and the collectives and communities that organizations stand for. A plenum of agencies can be recognized even in the ways social media platforms act upon organizations (including the organization itself, and the individuals behind them, speaking on its behalf) through frequent design and algorithm changes. The plenum of identities plays on this multiplicity and suggests that there are many and various identities behind the agencies enacting the organizational–social media context.

The plenum of identities is perhaps best exemplified by the often-repeated organizational goal of using social media to make the organization seem "more human." As I have already discussed, the anthropomorphization of organizations is required in order for us to study their identities, what I am interested in here is the issue of agency multiplicity. In the results, the details of presentification are seen when participants discuss becoming *it*, speaking on behalf of the organization, in *its* voice. At the same time, participants claimed an identity of their own of sorts, striving to be more *human*, instead of organizational, at least in terms of discourse. The process of presentification then is a recursive one that continuously plays on this identity twist when it comes to the social media contexts, making good use of the plenum of agency notion and providing for the conceptualization of the plenum of identities.

Summary of Theoretical Contributions (Research Question 1)

To summarize, the main theoretic contributions that come out of my exploration of the first research question and its subquestions include the following: the co-construction of organizational identity, to the extent that it happens, develops through the scaling up of identity conversations. I found that this co-construction begins in individuals who speak on behalf of the organization, acting as identity hubs. I contend however, that co-construction is not an individual process here, but one engaging a multitude of identities and agencies. In this sense, I found that organizational identity representation is carried out through presentification, which occurs when an individual acts to represent a collective entity, allowing it to become an *it* (as an organizational voice) for social media stakeholders.

This study also found that stakeholder comments can be confirming and disconfirming of organizational identities, with different comments leading to different sensemaking practices on behalf of the organizational representatives and on behalf of the organization. Confirming and disconfirming identity messages lead to identity discussions within organizations, challenging practices of knowing "who" an organization is. The identity co-construction process is subtle, revealed in the identity work, sensemaking practices, and continual translation of stakeholder comments up the organization. However, this does not mean to suggest that there are different organizational levels per se, but instead that organizations are woven together (i.e., they are constituted) in conversations that include multiple voices. This conversation now includes stakeholder comments on social media platforms.

Finally, one of the more pronounced signs of identity co-construction can be

detected in the organizational communication driven effort of “being human” to connect, engage, and form communities around the organizations’ identities, thus opening them up for discussion and creating what some have called “social” organizations.

Social Media Scaling Up the Organization

In this section I discuss the findings pertaining to research question 2, which asks about the lamination and imbrication of social media conversation into the organization. In this vein, the subquestions ask about the impact of interactions taking place on social media platforms on decision-making, strategy, and practices.

To answer this question I focused on the imbrication of social media conversations to organizational text, which may include unwritten “common sense” practices and written guidelines. A finding of this research is that practices in organizations become sites for continuous authoring of identity, effectively making organizational practice (text) inseparable from organizational identity. In fact, the very negotiations between organizations, their representatives, and various stakeholders result in an understanding of organizational identity as a “discursive interface similar to a hub of mediation” (Piette, 2013, p. 151). I discovered that what seemed an unresolvable contradiction initially—the unrelenting immediacy of social media and its insistence on a different kind of stakeholder communication altogether (exemplified by what participants called the “relationship era”) vs. the data driven organization, focused on recording, analyzing, interpreting, and planning with the goal of increase on dividend, was really not a contradiction at all, but simply an example of interaction scaling up the organization. As a result, I believe that a discussion about the imbrication of daily communicative acts to the level of organizational practice is still very much a discussion on organizational

identity. This statement echoes my earlier position that the two questions I am answering in this study complement each other.

Unlike identity co-construction and the other "identity issues" described above, social media's impact on the communicative constitution of the organization is more straightforward. Social media and organizational presence online impact decision making, strategy, and other organizational practices and routines through an elaborate translation of stakeholder comments and entire conversations to the different form and medium of organizational texts. While this dissertation is not a study on organizational change, certain care should be taken toward the changes social media and frequent, often disparate, stakeholder communication are bringing to organizations. The changing organization was perhaps most pointedly exemplified in participants' comments about resistance and managerial buy-in. Resistance not-withstanding, communicative acts between stakeholders and organizations in the digital space laminated and imbricated up through translation provided by the identity hub roles performed by social media professionals.

Conversation–Text Dialectic Intersection with Social Media

Social media interaction provoked much talk within the organizations of this study. In my observations, this was most obvious during the meetings about social media that I attended; however, based on the interview data it also appears that social media professionals do interact with a wide range of organizational members. This interaction was necessitated by their hub role and it was also a result of this role. One of the biggest findings of this study, albeit a descriptive one, is that organizations use social media as an environment-monitoring tool. Although the idea of organizations monitoring their

environment is a classic one, of significance in the social media context is where the monitoring is applied to—primarily at stakeholders. Through current social media platforms organizations create and follow communities of stakeholders and actively manage these communities to align with branding and identity. While I am admittedly already describing a practice which is a result of social media adoption, I am also making the point that by dedicating special resources to social media presence and social media community management, organizations mandate that the information received through social media channels is to be deemed legitimate.

As noted in the results, participants in this study regularly met with colleagues, managers, and other departments to discuss ongoing social media communication events. The theoretical significance of these meetings emerges when considered within the framework of Nicotera's (2013) suggested model of the emerging organization. The meetings I attended were very much coorientational and organizational events that communicatively constituted the organization every time they occurred. In this respect, I apply Nicotera's thinking about the larger organization to the constitutive process of meeting to *create* the organization. The model of the emerging organization consists of basic human goal-oriented interaction (I), construction of a social collective (we), construction of text and self-conscious collectivity (it), and finally, presentification (the organization *becomes* the moment it is incarnated or presentified by an individual agent).

In the realm of the decision making and strategy meetings about social media this process was enacted every time. This is the process in situ: A social media professional would come into the meeting prepared with samples of basic human interaction, innocuous conversations that have been deemed somehow significant by the individual

(based on the extent they confirmed or disconfirmed organizational identity). The group of people meeting already represents a collective (at two levels at least—association with the organization and association with the group attending the meeting) that is about to enter a process of sensemaking based on the presented communicative events. A text is constructed rather quickly thanks to the intermediary role of the reports brought in by the social media professional ("what does this mean?" and "what do we do about it?" are two main decisions that ought to be made). Decision making and strategy in these meetings are always built with the self-conscious collectivity that comes from knowing that *it*, the organization, exists. Then, a communication plan for social media interaction, called a content calendar is created, and the organization is about to be presentified by the individual social media professional. This modified process of organizational authoring happens in every meeting about social media.

The meeting-organization model above suggests that 1) social media conversations are appropriated by the organization in that they always generate some form of at least semipermanent text and 2) the text generated from these conversations becomes the basis of planning for next conversations, thus successfully reifying the organization through recursive presentification and interaction. It is in this sense that a social organization of the kind posited by Kuhn (2008) and his communicative theory of the firm is achieved. It is in this bouncing tension between conversation and text (Putnam, 2013) that future organizational communicative action, and its presentification online, is born. It is in presentification that an organization (*it*) exists and presentification, as demonstrated earlier, is in the heart of the organization–social media context. In this sense, it is a conceivable argument that in the context of continual social media

conversation the organization is created and re-created to infinity.

Lamination and Imbrication

One of the big findings of this study is in how lamination and imbrication of social media interactions happens organizationally. Lamination and imbrication begin in the conversations of various organizational members and stakeholders. As described in the literature review and results, I see lamination and imbrication as forms of scaling up where lamination refers to past experience organizational members turn to for guidance, and imbrication as a step up that involves the "tiling" of these practice-generating experiences through conversation to constitute semirigid organizational text.

The meetings I attended are examples of laminated practices that resulted in even more laminated practice (strategy and planning), ultimately affecting what and how it is posted online. The content that organizations posted online was in itself the result of laminated experience based on previous social media conversations and their analysis in meetings. This was most notably represented in the fairly formulaic social media posts on behalf of the organizations participating in this study (i.e., I called this "company talk" when discussing participant responses to negative messages). From my discussions with social media professionals, it became obvious that whenever online interaction happened there was a relatively clear way of going about it—both during the interaction itself, and organizationally in meetings. Depending on the organization, interactions were more or less scripted, monitored, and in effect sometimes made to sound overly "bureaucratic" causing some of the study participants to openly disagree with the organizational take on "how to do social media." Whether these laminated experiences came from an organization's own concerning interactions with stakeholders, or it originated in stories of

other organizations having these interactions, narratives of such past experiences led to certain ways of practicing social media.

In this sense, stakeholder interaction, as suggested by communicative theory of the firm (Kuhn, 2008) does have a profound effect on organizational constitution. This is revealed in the very fact that based on social media practices, some organizations in this study called themselves "social." Additionally, this effect is revealed in several places, which highlight an enduring process of laminating and imbricating experience. Similarly to Kuhn's research setting, meetings proved to be the space where groups of organizational members and nontraditional organizational members (agency employees) discussed communicative events that had occurred online. In these discussions new communicative events were created that include past experience and continually imbricated up organizationally to be reflected in enduring practices (i.e., way of engaging with negative comments, times of posting, types of messages).

It is also important to note the role of the intermediary text in the processes of lamination and imbrication: social media events "came" to the organization in the form of summaries, reports, and emails, which were referenced during meetings. It is in reference to these reports that I am led to the conclusion that organizational sensemaking of social media talk is achieved through text or "reported." This does not mean of course that individual sensemaking, not mediated by text, doesn't take place—it does indeed, I have demonstrated this in the results and discussions of the role of the social media professional. These people adopted practices that facilitated job accomplishment all the time—participants frequently talked about what one can and cannot say online, especially when a stakeholder entered into an argument.

While some of the discursive practices were authorized by organizations, others were simply "common sense." The practices that emerged from meetings were generally outlined in written texts to guide interaction on additions to common sense. In this study, guidelines for best practices were written; policies, on the other hand, surprisingly were often reported as unwritten, agreed upon by organizational members, or simply a matter of "common sense"; and content calendars were written and provided a form of premade decisions. Because common sense practices seamlessly encompassed both personal beliefs about doing social media and organizational guidelines, an argument can be made that it is in the common sense practice that the highest level of imbrication is achieved.

Also, while meetings are where we have traditionally seen communicative constitution of the organization to occur (because they represent a cooriented collective), it is a mistake to ignore the role of the social media professional in this discussion. As already suggested in an earlier section, these individuals mediate and enact organizational identity representation online. It is up to these people, who I discovered are often poorly trained, to not only outwardly presentify the organization, but also decide on and *translate* communicative events in meetings, thus effectively initializing the lamination and imbrication processes. As a result, the role of these organizational stakeholders has been central in this study when it comes to identity and communicatively constituting the organization.

Finally, communication between organizations and their (mostly internal) stakeholders has long been defined as a negotiative process (Deetz, 2001) and while the role of the (external) stakeholder in the constitution of the organization has been suggested (Kuhn, 2008), we have not had the opportunity to study the role of the

stakeholder in organizational constitution in a context with the intriguing characteristics of social media platforms. Social media, with its public nature, editability, persistence, and immediacy has been shown to ruin businesses (Scott & Orlikowski, 2012), consequently giving rise to theoretical and practical interests in the materiality of the phenomenon. Through this research I have demonstrated the empirical process of how social media contextualized communicative events of any kind imbricate to the organizational level and result in organizational communicative action.

Institutional Narrative

Lastly, I would like to focus attention on narrative as constitutive. Although this dissertation is not theoretically focused on narrative identities, as expressed early on, I believe that all identity is always somewhat socially constructed and always at least partially results from and is maintained by discourse. Clearly, this belief in organizations as discursive entities is in the basis of the present dissertation and its communicative constitution orientation. So, as I name this subsection “Institutional Narrative” I don’t want to detract attention from anything already said but simply relate that here I wish to discuss two specific features of the organizational discourse that surpass any one organization participating in this study and instead take on a more generally descriptive function.

Throughout the results of this study I point out the stories told by participants. In effect, these stories, which are at least partially co-constructed by communicative acts taking place on social media platforms, constitute the lamination and imbrication processes described here. Here I would like to point out two discursive features that emerged from the data and are unique to the social media–organization context: 1) “the

relationship era" and 2) the "being human" phenomenon.

I realize that in influential organizational literature (Czarniawska, 1997), institutional narratives and organizational narratives are often conflated, so to clarify, I specifically call these "institutional narratives" because they surpass any one particular organization in this study to become institutionalized among the social media professional and marketing communities that participated in the present work. I suggest that "the relationship era" and "being human" form an institutional social media narrative, which can be distinguished from other institutional narratives for its focus on organizations building relationships and acting human in the digital space. Because institutional discourses have been shown to help professionals in institutional settings to create meaning of their own actions and work and because institutional narratives play a tremendous role in the constitution of organizational identities (Czarniawska, 1997), I find that discussing "the relationship era" and the "being human" phenomena is key to explaining the experiences of individuals and organizations alike.

"The relationship era" as a feature of professional discourse emerged quickly from the data and has come to denote not only a strategic perspective but also a way of being for organizations in the social media space. Social media professionals frequently use "the relationships era" as an explanatory mechanism and justification for specific organizational practices. The phrase is also used as an argument point against resistance and towards the promotion of buy-in from management. These uses suggest that behind the expression and for the people who use it, there is an entirely different conceptualization of the organization that can be called "social."

The social organization according to Kuhn (2008) is one that imbricates external

and internal stakeholder feedback into its actions and structures. Although not in CCO terms, this is also how Bradley and McDonald (2011), who write on social media use by organizations, define the "social" organization, suggesting that an organization is only social if it has fully integrated stakeholder feedback crowd-sourced on social media into its organizing model. In the context of this study, such integration is seen in 1) altered and entirely novel practices focused on social media presentation *and* listening, 2) swifter decision making based on stakeholder feedback, such as product and service changes, 3) strategy and planning shifts with the social media stakeholder in mind, and 4) some structural changes, such as departmental reorganization and enhanced coordination. "The relationship era" as a discursive feature of an institutional narrative of social media by the people who do social media for organizations then suggests a deeper understanding of the implications social media interactions have on organizational worlds.

Similarly, the desire organizations expressed toward being perceived as "human," a "friend," and as "someone you can trust," indicate a shift from what might be characterized as a more traditional or functionalist perspective on organizing toward a more postmodern perspective. Through the "being human" discursive feature, a few interesting things can be noted that are not unproblematic, but are insightful. While considering organizations as "superpersons" (Czarniawska-Joerges, 1994) facilitates organizational identity and identification scholarship, for many who take a cultural critical stance toward social media and organizations, corporations wanting to be perceived as human pose serious questions. My perspective here is of organizational identity and in this sense I view the "being human" discourse as relatively non-threatening. I do so mostly because in the context of this study, I see the "being human"

discursive feature as identity defining of not a single organization, but an entire institution. When narratives become institutionalized, they become identity sensemaking mechanisms that act recursively for the organization along with every single organizational member and even customer. In this study "being human" was associated with organizational practices that aimed to highlight communication, community, engagement, and connection.

In this final part of the discussion, I argue that through this research an institutional narrative of social media has emerged. Through the discursive features of "the relationship era" and "being human" organizations and their traditional and non-traditional members who work with social media platforms begin to make a different sense of their organization's identities. By employing this narrative throughout the organization, they co-construct an identity that goes beyond any one individual organization and begins to define the institutional space for social media.

Summary of Theoretical Contributions (Research Question 2)

In posing and answering my second research question I aimed to seek contributions to the Montreal School Approach to CCO. Specifically, I wanted to empirically show that social media stakeholders communicatively constitute the organization. Within the MSA and CCO, stakeholders have largely been treated (at least empirically) as traditional collectives, usually organizational members who coorient toward the same discursive and physical goal. Then, in a complex communicative process, the organization is created and continuously re-created through communication. I think that the challenge in this model has always been, where do "external" stakeholders fit and do they at all?

With this dissertation I have shown that social media conversations with external stakeholders impact organizations. I have also elaborated on how this happens. This impact is best explained through MSA's signature dialectic of conversation–text and the processes of lamination and imbrication. While the impact is not necessarily direct, its mediated nature is fairly typical in organizational contexts. Organizations appropriate social media communicative events through the employees in identity hub roles, intermediary texts, imbricating discussions of these texts (usually in meetings), and resulting plans and practices. This process is a recursive one, meaning that it creates a circle of social media communicative event–engagement/conversation–intermediary text–planning meetings–organizational practice–communicative event... and so on. Figure 6.1 below makes clear that sensemaking is ongoing in this model.

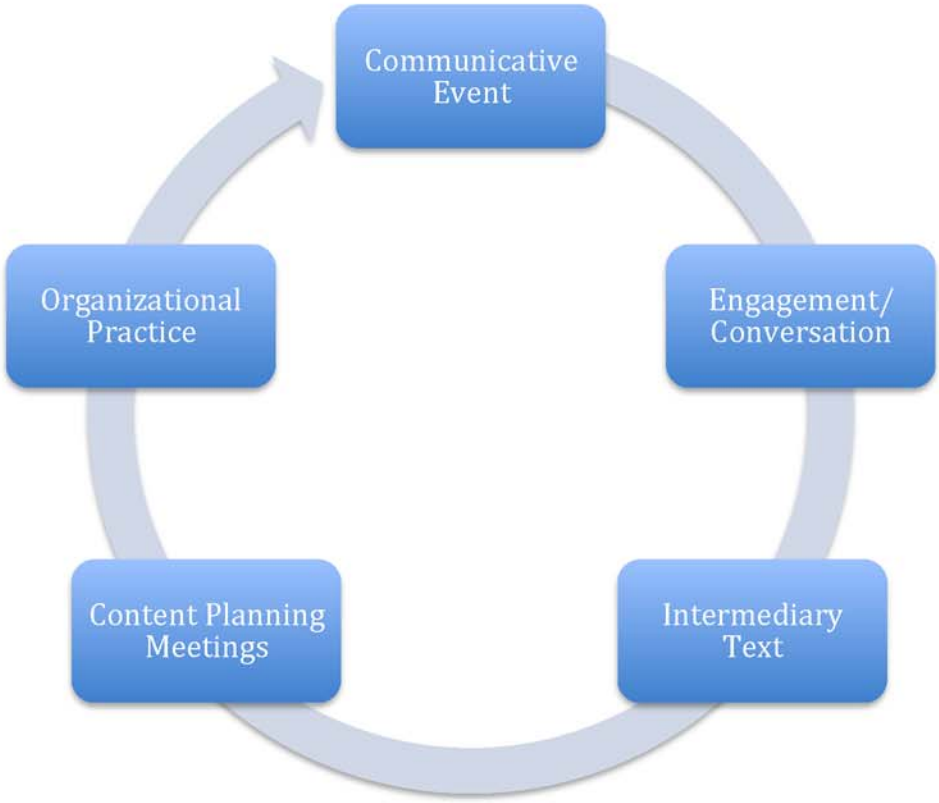

Figure 6.1 Imbrication of social media communicative events

Ultimately, the results of this dissertation and the model presented in this discussion constitute a thorough, rich description of a previously undescribed context and showcase a novel application of theory. This dissertation has augmented our understanding of identity processes in organizational and social media contexts, in addition to paying attention to and applying theoretical concepts that have not seen wide empirical application yet. Next, I discuss how this research might be useful to practitioners.

Practical Implications of the Study

Its own participants, the people who work in social media, would likely perceive this study as abstract and theoretical. They would perhaps even say that I am stating what is obvious to them, a statement that is sometimes used to describe the practical impact of research in the social sciences (Flyvbjerg, 2001). In this study I aimed to follow Flyvbjerg's guidelines to phronetic social science: "phronetic research is a pragmatically governed interpretation of the studied practices. The interpretation does not require the researcher to agree with the actors' everyday understanding nor to discover some deep, inner meaning of the practices" (p. 251). While I admit to straying from Flyvbjerg's position that phronetic research does not aim to develop theory or method (I have tried to frame my research in theory and I aspire to contribute to it), I do believe that my research is socially relevant and its participants would find it has practical implications. Here is where I think they reside.

First, in terms of the individual, this study describes the role of the social media professional and by doing so it argues that these individuals have an important mediating organizational function (as "identity hubs" and interpreters) and thus, a specific

organizational power. In their role as identity hubs, social media writers and strategists presentify the organization and, in fact, become it in the digital space. Presented like this, the role of the social media professional, which according to the participants in this study is perceived as frequently diminished organizationally, becomes key to managing stakeholder perceptions and communities. Additionally, as identity hubs, these organizational representatives are responsible for recognizing and translating communicative acts that might need organizational attention, interpretation, and action, thus actively contributing to both the lamination and imbrication process of the emerging organization. The importance and difficulty of navigating two challenging contexts (the organizational and the social media) should not be understated. Similarly, the power social media participants enact in their roles of identity hubs and interpreters is significant and should be organizationally recognized. A practical recommendation based on this research is for organizations to commit and invest in the training and development of social media professionals, something that currently is anything but widespread practice.

Second, in terms of the organization, this study contributes to practice by recognizing and emphasizing the role of various organizational stakeholders. While the role and importance of internal stakeholders should be obvious, it often isn't as attested by the organizational legitimacy issues that some social media professionals face. However, the main focus of this work was on various external stakeholders, the individuals, groups, and other organizations that are not traditionally considered organizational members. I have shown empirically that these stakeholders, through their participation on social media platforms, impact organizations in very specific ways

described in this study. In fact, this study suggests that albeit slowly and not explicitly (i.e., through specific comments), external stakeholders might be able to co-construct organizational identities and perhaps even change how we conceive of the traditional organization (i.e., the "social" organization). A second practical recommendation of this study then consists in the articulation of specific organizational practices, beyond marketing and product sales, that are continuously impacted by social media conversations with external stakeholders.

Limitations and Future Studies

Every research has its limitations and this one is no exception. As it often happens in organizational studies, we can't get access to the organizations we need to in order to do the research we originally conceived of. Perhaps more detailed information on organizational processes would have emerged had this been a case study of one or two organizations. The level of data both from interviews and attended meetings may have been detailed enough to produce different or more insightful findings. In this dissertation I explored a context that still makes many organizations (and individuals within these organizations) uncomfortable due to its novelty and likely lack of organizational buy-in. Due to the exploratory nature of the study, as a researcher I was compelled to follow my data, which resulted in a much broader and hopefully more impactful study.

With this said, another limitation of this study is in the fact that although broader than a case study, it is still just one study of a relatively small group of individuals and organizations. As with all qualitative approaches and analyses, the results of this work are not generalizable to every organization that uses social media or every individual who works with social media on behalf of an organization. However, my hope is that these

results are transferable and more research will be inspired to explore this new territory. It is also important to note here that full exploration of the social media context might never be achieved for the same reason why research on this subject generally lags behind. The social media context is one of rapid change creating the possibility that by the time a study is completed, it is already outdated.

Last but not least, I must note my own role in this study as an impressionable human being, albeit one who also does academic research. I would be remiss if I didn't mention my own interests and interpretations of all the data collected for this study. In qualitative work the researcher co-creates meaning along with the study participants and in this involved process there are benefits and drawbacks. The use of research questions and carefully designed study and analysis procedures mitigate some of these and don't do anything for others. One thing that as a qualitative researcher I cannot control for is if my participants were always genuine in their responses. I have argued that an organization's identity is a co-constructed, fluid, and discursive phenomenon and I would be insufficiently reflexive if I did not acknowledge that the language and practices constituting this identity as presented to me by study participants are also part of a carefully constructed discourse.

A future opportunity of this work is that it generated a large amount of qualitative data that go beyond the scope of this dissertation. Some aspects of the data never made it into this study and others that did could be covered in greater detail had the research questions been different. Thus, there are many future directions to go to from here. For example, it would be justified to extensively explore knowledge work as it relates to the organization–social media context. Specifically, what qualifies as tacit and explicit

knowledge when interpreting a rapidly-changing communicative environment? Along with this, and based on some initial results in the present work, exploring how organizational social media success is defined and how organizations know that they are being successful also appears of importance. Exploration of these knowledge topics seems necessary given the strong focus on data advocated by most organizations in this study that wanted to "know" what social media platforms did for them and how.

From this study we have learned that organizations strive to create and grow vast virtual communities through social media platforms. I have outlined the basic make up of these communities here, including the strange, but no less important, community of naysayers. However, I recognize that this is a rich topic that begs further exploration. One such direction might be to look into what kinds of communities are supported through social media, and what kind of communities do not seem to work out. As I pointed out in the results, when it comes to volunteering, virtual communities in this study seem to underperform, perhaps confirming that "slacktivism" characterizes social media communities (Gladwell, 2010; Morozov, 2012).

Finally, a strength of this study is that it explores a combination of communication contexts—organizations and social media, thus allowing for an argument that addresses both internal and external organizational processes (and research locales that might constitute interest for organizational and corporate communication scholars separately). The Montreal School Approach, with its detailed focus on conversational dynamics, seems ripe for exploration of internal, organizational member social media use. Treem and Leonardi (2012) recently wrote about the behavioral affordances of social media platforms when used internally, suggesting that the impact of the new media in

organizations might be even more interesting. However, their study of four affordances remains one of very few (or still none) that explores what impact socializing has on employees at work—in terms of knowing, connection, personal expression, and visibility. Now that we have learned that social media conversations with external stakeholders do impact organizations communicatively, it is necessary to explore how much further this impact spreads and what structures and activities might be affected.

APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW GUIDE

1.) Can you tell me about the time when you decided to use social media as an organization? When was this, what prompted you, how did you do it, what platform did you go to first? How did the decision come about? What was this time like? What worked well and what didn't? Can you tell me a story from that time?

2.) Why do you think an organization should use social media? Why does your organization use social media, what do you hope to achieve?

3.) What determines social media use? In your organization, who decides what platforms you use? How do you (individually or organizationally) make this decision?

4.) In this interview I would like to focus on you and your experience with social media, however, I am curious, do you consider yourself authorized to speak on behalf of your organization? Is this something people in marketing and social media assume in general? What does it mean to you to represent your organization online (and elsewhere)? Give me an example of a time when you may have acted as an organizational representative?

5.) Organizational identity has been conceived of as a collective understanding of who you are as a company. How do you see your organization's identity? Describe your organization to me?

6.) Now, think about what you described. How do you go about representing who your organization is on social media? Are there specific elements of your company's identity

that you focus on, or do you aim to provide a core identity representation? Are there any discussions within your department or entire organization about how this representation is to be done (strategy)?

7.) Think about what your organization stands for in the eyes of various audiences. How do you negotiate the various aspects of your organization in social media contexts? For example, do you have different accounts? Or maybe utilize different platforms for different audiences? And with this, do you ever feel that the various audiences your organization communicates with clash? How does this affect what you do and how you do it?

8.) Can you describe a situation when your organization's reputation has been challenged through social media? How did you react? Did you feel that what your organization stands for was threatened?

9.) Did you make others in the organization aware of this challenge? Who? Tell me about what happened? How did you decide how to respond? Who was involved in this decision? What did you consider (organizational strategy, organizational identity, something else)?

10.) Can you describe a situation when your organization was praised on social media? How did you react? Did you feel that what your organization stands for was reinforced? Did you make others in the organization aware of this interaction? Who did you tell?

11.) How do you feel about your organization?

12.) When you talk about your organization on social media, do you ever feel that you have to defend what your company stands for? Do you ever have to discuss (negotiate) this position with people posting/commenting on your site? How does this discussion

impact your feelings about the organization you work for? (Show examples from organizational site if applicable/possible.)

13.) Think about how you feel about your organization, do you think that dealing with social media, and interacting with stakeholders there, has influenced (changed) the way you feel about it? In what ways?

14.) Has social media changed the way in which your organization communicates with stakeholders? Who would you consider your stakeholders (publics, audiences) to be? (Perhaps explain you mean under stakeholder.)

15.) How do you interact with stakeholders on social media? Do you respond to posts and comments? Are there any particular conversations (topics, comments) you try to downplay (squelch)? Are there conversations that you especially encourage? How do you do this?

16.) In your experience, what kind interactions are most common on your social media sites (negative or positive, general or specific requests, customer service assistance, suggestions, etc.)? Do you relate these interactions or your impressions of them to the organization you work for? What departments do you talk to?

17.) Are there particular things you like and prefer to post on social media versus others? Can you give me an example? What determines these preferences? How do you decide what is appropriate to post?

18.) How do the interactions you have on social media influence your decisions about your job? (Show example of interesting interactions, if possible.) Do you think that these interactions are important (should be important) to the entire organization? Why or why not?

19.) When you think about the people in your organization (or department), who can post on social media? How do you coordinate with them when to post, what to post, and how to respond to comments/posts?

20.) Do you discuss social media interactions between you and stakeholders outside of your organization with colleagues? What departments might be most interested in hearing about how your organization is doing on social media? What do they ask you/say to you?

21.) What decisions do you (in marketing) base on communication taking place on social media? Does any other department make decisions based on this information? What kind of decisions and how are they made (do you have a meeting, exchange emails, etc.)? Who else in your organization might be affected by what takes place on social media?

22.) What rules or policies do you keep in mind as you interact on social media?

Has your experience with social media interactions led to decisions about the creation of social media governance/policy? How was/were these/those policy/ies developed? When? What was the process and who was involved? If you do have a policy, what does this policy cover? Can I see it?

APPENDIX B

SOCIAL MEDIA GUIDELINES

NATURE SWEET SOCIAL MEDIA GUIDELINES

TABLE OF CONTENTS

NATURE SWEET APPROACH TO SOCIAL MEDIA INTERACTION

Approach

Nature Sweet products and business model are inherently social; a quick scan of the social space online reveals numerous groups and shout-outs happening around Nature Sweet. We need to treat the social space as a virtual get-together (which it is). If you're at a party and all you can do is talk about you, you'll find people migrating on to more interesting conversations. Too much overt brand information can be a bad thing. There is a delicate balance between maintaining a healthy dialogue with your fans/followers, seeding and responding to real-world conversations and shouting out about all things Nature Sweet.

Social media is the one place where brands—especially those without the customer interaction of say, a brick and mortar shop—can have a personal relationship with its customers. In fact, they expect it. This compels the brand to act like "more human." That is the simple litmus test we apply before we do anything, before we post, before we hide, before we respond: Does this sound like a person talking? Would a person react this way? If this community were my personal friends, how would I act?

Social was a behavior before it was media or strategy, so let's not do anything that makes it feel like we're using our fans to get to their friends. Instead, let's be a brand that's genuinely interested in what our fans have to say and act how we would want a friend to act on social platforms, like a friend.

SMALL FAMILY FARM GUIDELINES
(Created by Hired Consulting Agency)

Social Media Best Practices for The Relationship Era

We've entered the "Relationship Era," where the only path for businesses seeking long-term success is to create authentic customer relationships. Not through hip social media promotions, viral videos or blizzards of micro-targeted online ads. Those tactics, which simply disguise old ways of thinking with new technology, just don't work in the long run.

So what does work in this bewildering new era? Where do "authentic customer relationships" come from? The answers will make some leaders sigh with relief while others rip their hair out: Honesty. Transparency. Shared values. A purpose beyond profit. Sure you still need a high-quality product or service to offer, but that's not enough. Now that people can easily discover everything that's ever been said about your brand, you can't manipulate, seduce, persuade, flatter or entertain them into loyalty. You have to treat them like flesh-and-blood human beings, not abstract consumers or data points on a spreadsheet.

Social Media is an Extension of Customer Service. Any traditional advertising you are doing should be supported by social media.

FURTHER READING[13]:

1. Facebook as customer service
2. How to build trust through social media
3. How social media takes customer service to the next level

Facebook Best Practices

Posting

1. Posts with a photo AND a link get the highest engagement. Ideally, post a short link, but if the link is not originally short, use bit.ly to shorten the link. Never post a link more than 2 lines long.

2. Always include your own description of the photo you are posting, even if you are sharing from another page.

3. Posts should include a call to action—tell the reader what to do with the post. Do you want them to comment? Click the link? Like the post?

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[13] Links for further readings not provided in this example due to copyright.

4. When you're wondering if a post is going to get good engagement, use the self-test. Would you comment on this post yourself? Could you easily answer the question or engage in conversation? Remember that online users have a very SHORT attention span and don't want to do anything that requires a lot of time/work/thought.

5. The more original content, the better. People will engage most with content that is relevant to the brand. Try to minimize posting random quotes or memes. Photos that get the most engagement are of people who work for the business, give a look behind the scenes of the company and give the brand a personality.

6. Don't just blast the page with advertisements about the brand. Although you should let people know about fb-exclusive coupons and other insider info they can get by liking the page, people have not come to the page to only hear about the latest inventory. FB is a place to create a community and culture around your brand, not blast ads.

Increasing followers

1. Running ads is a necessity for growing a page, especially in the beginning. Dedicate a monthly budget to running FB ads. Always keep ads simple and enticing—questions and calls to action work best. Always direct your ads at a narrow audience (within the area, within a certain age group or within certain interests)

2. Running contests is the best way to increase your following quickly. However, you want to run contests directed at a demographic that will engage with your page once the contest is over. Likes are important, but engagement is more important. Think about your target demographic, then think of a contest that will entice those same people to like your page. Otherwise, people will ignore or unlike your page once the contest is over.

3. If you have a demographic specific to a certain region, run contests that involve businesses and people from that community. People respond well to contests that involve local charities and events.

Design

1. Make sure you keep up on the latest design options for business pages. Always have a fresh cover photo—change it about once every 2 months to keep it fresh. You can change your cover photo more than every 2 months, but that should be the most amount of time between cover photo changes.

2. Utilize the tabs. DO use the tabs to connect to your other social media networks. DON'T leave outdated tabs up from past contests

3. Make sure you always have a relevant post pinned to the top of the page. This can be beneficial to your fans who actually visit your page rather than engaging with you through the NewsFeed.

Engagement

1. Make sure you are posting content that naturally creates conversation—ask questions, and then make sure you respond to the comments you get back! As a general rule of thumb, people expect to be responded to on social media within a couple of hours at the MOST.

2. Do not ignore or delete negative comments. Use this as an opportunity to show excellent customer service. Respond as soon as possible and take the conversation offline once you have assured the person that you want to resolve the issue. Then, follow up with the person later on and make sure they are satisfied. Turning haters into advocates is social media gold.

FURTHER READING:

1. Steps to a successful Facebook campaign
2. Get creative with content
3. Don’t make these mistakes when writing calls to action

Twitter Best Practices General Tips and Suggestions

1. Get on Twitter at least 2 times per day (usually in the morning and afternoon). People need to know that you are an active twitter user! Respond to anyone who has responded to you. Never be the one to end the conversation, unless it’s completely run its course.

2. If you see that someone has followed you, send them a tweet to thank them for following, along with a personalized, witty comment or compliment.

3. If you have the time, comment on some of the tweets of potential followers before you follow them. Once they get talking with you, start following them. They are more likely to follow you back once they've conversed with you a little.

4. Getting retweeted is the ultimate validation/pat on the back. It also gives you more exposure! So try to get RTed as much as possible. Things that are more likely to get RTed are: funny/witty/sarcastic comments, trending topics or using a trending hashtag

5. Respond to negative statements like, "Ew why is this company following me?" by saying something witty and complimentary. Example response: "Because we thought you were a cool person!" or something like that.

6. If someone starts asking a lot of questions about the product, keep them engaged as long as possible. Be honest and answer the questions as best you can, if you do not know the answer buy some time, tell the user that you will figure out the answer and get back to them soon.

7. Twitter is the easiest place to seek out new fans and build one-on-one friendships, but

Facebook is the place to corral them all and keep them up to date on your brand. Direct anyone you've talked to for awhile to your Facebook page so you can keep up with them in the future.

8. Make tweets public by putting a period in front of your reply. You want people to see positive conversations about the brand, but only the followers of the other person will see them if you don't make them public. For example of this, please look at tip number one on this article:
http://www.fastcompany.com/3025886/work-smart/6-social-media-tips-that-will-improve-your-marketing?utm_source=facebook

Tips to build your following

1. Find fresh, new followers by entering in the name of the city in the search bar, finding hyper-local pages that may have followers in the same demographic as your client (like cool local restaurants or "mommy" clubs in the area or random things like that), then follow the people following their page

2. Also find new followers by following people that show up in the searches. These people are guaranteed to be active Tweeters and are more likely to follow back

3. You can only follow a limit of 1,000 people a day, and 2,000 people total. Try to keep things fresh and unfollow people who don't follow you back after a few days.

Managing your following

1. Use Manageflitter.com to do mass unfollowing of people and find out other interesting stats about your twitter account. Unfollow people who don't have a profile image, are SPAM accounts, or who haven't followed you back after several weeks. (Twitter will only let you follow up to 2,000 people, so you'll need to unfollow once you hit the max).

Twitter Faux Pas

1. Don't set up automatic direct messages to thank people who followed you or to direct them to your Facebook page/web site. People hate it and will unfollow you.

2. Do not chime in on trending topics/hashtags to promote your business if the tweet has absolutely nothing to do with your business. Twitter is a place to build friends and direct them toward your business, but don't take advantage of those friendships by SPAMing

3. If someone says something negative about your company, DO NOT ignore them. Reach out to the person and then direct the conversation OFF of social media. Ask them to DM you their email address and do your best to rectify the situation ASAP.

4. Avoid using any auto-replies, they can get you in trouble and people usually recognize them.

Instagram Best Practices

Growing your following

1. Since instagram doesn't have an advanced search bar to target a certain location, use your twitter search to find new followers. Just use the advanced search to narrow the search within 50 miles of your business, then search "instagram." This will pull up the photos of Twitter users that also have an instagram account in the area. Then click the link, find the username, type it into the instagram search bar on your phone and follow them.

2. Webbygram is another option for finding new people to follow

3. You can also search certain hashtags on the instagram app that pertain to your client's business, then follow anyone using the hashtag.

Posting photos

1. Uploaded photos should show real people at the business or be original photos of your products, not just random stock photos from the internet.

2. Compared to Facebook and Twitter, instagram photos should be uploaded sparingly. 2-5 photos per WEEK is standard. Most people don't upload photos to instagram hourly or even daily, so the photo will stay in the newsfeed much longer.

3. Always use at least one hashtag, but don't overuse them. Don't make up crazy long hashtags that no one else is likely to be using.

4. Feel free to join in on instagram trends, like #tbt (throw back thursday). This will assimilate you to the community and likely gain you more followers

5. Have fun with your photos! Show some character, show who you are and what you're about.

FURTHER READING:

1. Content ideas for Instagram
2. Why should marketers use Instagram?
3. 20 businesses who've mastered Instagram

Pinterest Best Practices

Growing your following

1. Like instagram, Pinterest does not have any way for you to search by location. There

aren't really any ways around this, so if you want people from your area to follow your Pinterest account, you'll have to advertise it on other networks, do a contest or advertise with point of purchase materials.

2. To grow your non-location-specific following, simply search for terms related to your brand, and follow anyone pinning things like it. You may also want to search for terms that your demographic is interested in, and follow those people.

3. You can create community boards that anyone can pin things to. You can invite people to pin on your board, which is a good way to get new followers.

4. Create one board that is just links to all of your other social media accounts and web site, which will help grow your other networks as well.

5. Start a Pinterest contest and advertise it on Facebook. Make sure you have a Pinterest tab that allows people to connect to your Pinterest account without leaving Facebook.

Pinning content

1. More than any other network, Pinterest is a place to portray a lifestyle and offer helpful tips to your audience. It's definitely a soft-sell approach. Don't post any content that doesn't look natural on Twitter (i.e. advertisements, coupons, etc.).

2. It's acceptable to pin about 5-10 pins at a time, but don't go over that amount. Otherwise, you will flood the newsfeed of your followers and they may get annoyed.

3. Make sure to have a wide variety of boards—some of which may not be directly related to your product. For example, if you are a car dealership, some example boards would be on the topic of things to do in the area, local food favorites, vintage cars that are on-brand, women with on-brand cars, etc.

4. Pinterest is a good place to spread how-to videos or infographics. Remember that Pinterest's number 1 user is young to middle-aged mothers, so try to appeal to that demographic. For example, with a car dealership, you'll want to pin how-to videos about cleaning your car, how to not get scammed by car salesmen, etc.

FURTHER READING:

Google + Best Practices

Google + is essentially the redheaded stepchild of the social media world. It is just as important as any of your other social networks, but is the one that is most easily forgotten. There aren't a ton of differences when it comes to posting strategy for G+ versus Facebook. Both networks are great for getting content to the masses and tend to work more as a community bulletin board rather than an engagement network.

Google + however, has the advantage of being owned by Google. Which means that there can be some serious SEO benefits to your brand. Because your G+ page is also linked to your Google listings (reviews) you have the added benefit of generally showing up high in your organic search rankings. What makes this even better, is that if you are consistently posting great content, that will give your page an extra boost.

Growing Your Following:

1. Unlike with Facebook, on Google+ you actually have the ability to reach out and grow your network organically. a. As mentioned before, you will start showing up in search results when people look for your website, because of this, you will start seeing a lot more traffic on your page if you start to post regularly.

2. Join communities!

a. Just like “groups” on Facebook, you can join communities and be a part of the conversation.

b. If you’re a Jeep dealership, there are plenty of Jeep Fan communities that you can hop in and join the conversation. If you’re a bakery, there are baking communities. The one thing to remember is to actually JOIN the conversation. Don’t just go into the community and post sales messages. Get involved. Comment on posts, share relevant content. You will be rewarded greatly if you actually become a member of the community rather than spamming the members.

Posting and Managing Your Page:

1. Make sure that you post regularly. Try to post at least a couple of times per week (3-5).

2. When you are posting, make sure your content is relevant. Treat your content similar to what you would on Facebook.

3. Use lots of images, gifs, videos and other rich media content. You will be rewarded.

4. Although it is very easy to just simply share content that you’ve already posted on other social networks, make sure you occasionally post content that can only be found on G+. This will help gain new followers and will also help with your organic search rankings when Google finds something that you’ve posted on your G+ page and nowhere else.

APPENDIX C

TABLES

Table C.1 Study Participants – Individuals

Participant Name	Organizational Role	Organization	Interview Location	Interview Length (min)
Rene	Social Media Writer	AlwaysSports	Café	32:39 min
Patrick	Social Media Strategist	ArtT	Office	32:50 min
Chris	Social Media Strategist & Writer	CityProm	Office	35:12 min
Ally	Social Media Writer & Strategist	EducationNow	Office	48:07 min
Scott	Social Media Writer	HealthOne	Office	39:20 min
Charles	Owner & Social Media Strategist	InteliBoot	Office	36:48 min
Jane	Social Media Writer	JobSearch	Restaurant	47:10 min
Tim	Social Media Strategist	LeaderM	Café	48:35 min
Carol	Social Media Strategist & Writer	Online Market	Office	31:25 min
Susan	Social Media Writer	Play Together	Office	37:39 min
Jim	Social Media Entrepreneur	PSMC	Café	48:00 min
Tom	Social Media Strategist & Writer	PSMC	Office	32:04 min
Aaron	Social Media Writer	RockyMtn Trans	Office and phone	40:00 min

Table C.1 continued

Participant Name	Organizational Role	Organization	Interview Location	Interview Length (min)
Linda	Social Media Writer	RockyMtn Trans	Office	53:48 min
James	Social Media Strategist	Runner High	Café	40:50 min
Dan	Social Media Strategist	SalesCall	Café and phone	59:03 min
Peggy	Social Media Writer	SalesCall	Café	30:50 min
Larry	Farmer & Social Media Strategist	Small Family Farm	Office	54:45 min
Tanya	Social Media Writer	Small Family Farm	Office	31:10 min
Brent	Social Media Strategist	SportsFan1	Office	60:15 min
Madeline	Social Media Writer	SportsFan1	Office	60:15 min
Val	Social Media Strategist	SunMoonWork	Restaurant	45:20 min
Robert	Social Media Writer & Strategist	Supplements 123	Office	30:47 min
Roger	Social Media Strategist	Todayin24	Office	42:08 min
Geraldine	Social Media Strategist & Writer	WildRose	Phone	32:08 min

Table C.2 Study Participants – Meetings

	Organization	Participants	Length (min)
Meeting 1 (focus)	Nature Sweet	Rachel, Geraldine, Alice, Alex, Sue, (Veronica)	60:18 min
Meeting 2	Nature Sweet	Rachel, Geraldine, Alice, Sue	35:01 min
Meeting 3	Nature Sweet	Rachel, Geraldine, Alice, Sue, Alex, Margo	53:55 min
Meeting 4	Small Family Farm	Tanya, Larry, Josh, Tom	60:03 min
Meeting 5	Small Family Farm	Tanya, Larry, Josh	36:58 min
Meeting 6 (focus)	Small Family Farm	Tanya, Larry, (Veronica)	30:54 min

Table C.3 Study Participants – Organizations

Organization	Facebook Likes	Twitter Followers	Instagram Followers	LinkedIn Activity	Pinteret Followers	YouTube
Nature Sweet*	20,551	1,905	509	No profile	1,669	No profile
Small Family Farm	3,730	120	105	No profile	108	No profile
Salescall	3,562	1,194	726	Active	No profile	75, active
RockyMtn Trans	9,162	13,800	No profile	No profile	No profile	307, active
EducationNow	20,129	3,670	699	No profile	No profile	1796, active
Running High	195,650	11,400	10,300	No profile	No profile	1,900 subscribers, active
SportsFan1	40,918	23,300	18,900	No profile	No profile	No profile
AlwaysSports	169,699	28,700	7,424	No profile	No profile	3163, active
Supplements123	1,796	No profile	No profile	Has profile, not active	No profile	12, present, no activity
WildRose	206	375	No profile	Active	37	No profile
JobSearch	80	222	No profile	Active	24	No profile
CityProm	20,063	24,300	6,351	No profile	120	133, only for competitor videos
PlayTogether	6,468	2,677	384	No profile	No profile	No profile
LeaderM	1,231	2,245	No profile	Active	No profile	40, relatively active
SunMoonWork	180	353	No profile	Active	No profile	No profile
Professional Social Media Club	1,418	4,414	150	No profile	No profile	No profile
OnlineMarket	1,021,121	50,600	5,144	Active	23,999	1,676, product, OI promotion
Todayin24	4,780	3,221	No profile	No profile	No profile	No profile
ArtT	891	772	No profile	Present, not very active	No profile	Profile, not active
HealthyOne	9,600	6,241	No profile	No profile	No profile	Profile, not active
InteliBoot***	68	No profile	No profile	Present, active	No profile	No profile

*All organizational names have been changed to maintain annonymity
***Least SM active organization

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