A Study of Qualitative Method in Public Relations and Social Media Use
งานศึกษาสำรวจข้อมูลเอกสารของงานวิจัยที่ใช้วิธีการแบบเชิงคุณภาพที่ศึกษาเกี่ยวกับ การประชาสัมพันธ์และการใช้สื่อสังคมออนไลน์ใน

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ABSTRACT

This paper will focus on document analysis on the research articles that use the qualitative approach to explore the concept of social media use in organization. The results show in-depth interview and focus groups methods have been used to find the in-depth information for deeper understanding. The main ideas of results show the understanding of using social media with stakeholders and modern public relations management that use new social media for organization effectiveness.

บทคัดย่อ

งานศึกษาวิจัยนี้มีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อสำรวจข้อมูลเอกสารของงานวิจัยที่ใช้วิธีการแบบเชิงคุณภาพที่ศึกษาเกี่ยวกับ การใช้สื่อสังคมออนไลน์ในองค์กร ผลการวิจัยพบว่ามีการใช้การสัมภาษณ์เชิงลึกและการศึกษาเจาะจงเฉพาะกลุ่ม เพื่อหา ข้อมูลเชิงลึกเพื่อความเข้าใจอย่างลึกซึ้งด้านการใช้สื่อสังคมออนไลน์ ความคิดหลักของผลสรุปชี้ให้เห็นว่าการใช้สื่อ ออนไลน์กับผู้มีส่วนรวมในองค์กรและการจัดการของนักประชาสัมพันธ์สมัยใหม่มีผลที่ดีต่อองค์กร

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Introduction

Communication has become more complicated since the introduction of new electronics and devices. New technologies and digital platforms create online networks for both individual and organizations (Agarwal, Gupta & Kraut, 2008). Advancement in technologies included Web 2.0, which took activity in society to a new level of online communication (Constantinides & Fountain, 2008). People today have become more reliable on social media, which changed the way organization management thinks and practices in communicating to their online audiences.

Social media

Sweetser and Weaver Lariscy (2008) describe social media as, "a set of technology tools that are just as they sound-mediated opportunities for bringing people together and encouraging social networking and dialogic communication" (p.180). Chua and Banetjee (2013) stated that social media refers to, "a collection of online services that supports social interactions among users and allows them to co-create, find, share, and evaluate the online information repository" (p.239).

For organizations, the choice of social media tools depends on the type of user targeted (Chikandiwa, Contogiannis, & Jembere, 2013). The technology features will be shaped by the way people use online media.

Social media are used for internal organization

Social media is not only used between organizations and the public, but it is also used as a tool to communicate within the company. Social media tools become useful instruments in an organization to connect people together and discuss, create, comment, and generate ideas and votes (Vuori, 2012). Online forums and wikis are useful tools for sharing expertise among people in the company, and allow them to interact across departments and company boundaries (Vuori, 2012).

Social media are used for external organization

Many organizations use Facebook, Twitter, Flickr and Youtube to communicate to consumers and create brand awareness. Vouri (2012) stated that an organization's Twitter account is used as a support communication channel, which allows customers to get and share advice and engage in chats and comments. Chikandiwa, Contogiannis, and Jembere (2013) indicated that Facebook and Twitter are more effective tools than others, simply judging by numbers. Many organizations use online social media for interactive customer service, mass communication, advertising, sale promotion, brand awareness, and reputation.

Social media serves as an effective branding and marketing instrument for communication to customers by updating them about products, activities, events, and services (Chua & Banerjee, 2013). Social media offers conversation communication between an organization and public, allowing an organization to draw knowledge from customers, in order to serve customer expectations and preferences (Chua & Banerjee, 2013).

The motivations that make people use social media are their basic needs to communicate, socialize, and be part of a group and maintain relationships

(Baltaretu & Balaban, 2010). Moreover, Baltaretu and Balaban (2010) showed that people use social media because it is easier to communicate with friends and to find out updated information about their friends. Kelleher and Sweetser (2012) mentioned that social media allows users to engage in and interact with each other in order to share information, create, and maintain relationships. Engagement and conversation with the public has become an important method for organizational success.

Many researches show that social media has been used for both internal and external support for outcomes toward an organization's success. The link between target audiences and characteristics of social media used by organizations can influence effective outcomes. A qualitative method would seem to be beneficial for finding the best answer with social media use by people in organizations. The qualitative method allows researchers to get more detailed information by interviewee's real experiences. Therefore, the objective of this paper is to understand social media used by organizations. For this study, the researcher focused on the studied that using the qualitative method designs in the issues of social media used by organizations.

Research Question:

RQ 1: Which areas in social media and public relations or organizations have been investigated by the qualitative approach?

Method

The document analysis was used as a research approach to figure out the issues of social media with both public relations and organizations explored by the qualitative method. Bangkok university online library EBSCO and a Google scholar were used for searching articles. The researcher used key words to find articles, such as: social media, social networking and public relations, social media for public relations and marketing, social media as communication tools for organizations using qualitative method design. Topics and abstracts were read before selecting the article. The criteria used for choosing each article includes: qualitative approach used, social media use as communication tools for an organization, and the outcomes of using social media by an organization. This paper also attempts to choose the reading articles that were published in the last five years from 2009 to 2013, in order to get updated trends of social media research on public relations. There were nine articles related to the topic of organizations and social media use by public relations.

After reading these articles, there are three articles that did not match with the main theme of using social media and public relations for organizations. In particular, the articles are about personal opinions toward the use of social media. Hence, there are only six articles that were collected for analysis (See Appendix A). The articles were using qualitative method designs to clarify the results of social media and public relations. This paper explores the qualitative method approach to find issues with social media use and public relations.

Results

All three reading articles used the method consisting of focus group interviews, which are the properties of the qualitative method. Baltaretu and Balaban (2010) used three focus groups to find the motivation of students to use social media. Vorvoreanu (2009) also used the focus groups method to find out and understand people's perceptions of corporations using Facebook. Only one article by Turan, Tinmaz, and Goktas (2013) used case studies with focus groups in order to get a deep understanding of in-depth information about the reasons for students not using social media. All three reading articles above studied individual opinions on social media in daily life.

The other six articles focus on social media use and public relations. These six articles can be divided into two related areas. One main area is that social media has been used by public relations to communicate for relationships, and marketing. Another area is how public relations practitioners or organizations choose to use social media to communicate with stakeholders and the public. All six research articles used the qualitative method approach in their studies.

Kelleher and Sweetser (2012) and Chikandiwa, Contogiannis, and Jembere (2013) use in-depth interviews with key informants, such as a public relations practitioner, social media expert, and management. Interviews were used to get a better understanding of social media adoption. There are two articles that used a case study with interviews. Mitic and Kapoulas (2012) used a qualitative case study approach through in-depth interviews with upper management in organizations. Vouri (2012) used a case study with interviews consistings of both open-ended and semi-structured questions to explain the main uses of social media in global corporations.

Only one article by Chus and Banerjee (2013) used a combination of qualitative case studies and netnography on Starbucks. Chus and Banerjee (2013) mentioned that netnography is the online evolution of ethnography that provides authors data from social media services used by Starbucks. This qualitative method finds the uses of social media and how it can support customer knowledge management in organizations (Chus & Banerjee, 2013).

The last article by Dekay (2012) conducted the comment analysis between January 29, 2011 to February 20, 2011 with the ten largest organizations that have official Facebook pages. The comment analysis allows the researcher to know how organizations use social media and deal with negative comments. The researcher also can identify positive and negative comments to which responses were posted by public relations of a company.

The roles of public relations use social media to support organization effectiveness. The functions of social media allow public relations to engage in, collaborate, and interact with the public and stakeholders. Public relations use social media to communicate with the public in order to create positive vibes for the company. Moreover, organization managements use social media to support their marketing purposes. All articles with qualitative design have been investigated, for a deeper understanding of the role of social media and public relations, and its use for organizations.

Discussion

This paper has investigated the studies using the qualitative method approach of how social media used by public relations practitioners. According to the results, there are two main areas for which a qualitative method approach is useful. With this topic, most researchers use in-depth interviews for getting information from key people of public relations/ organization management.

In-depth interviews method is particularly a good qualitative method to explore this areas because it provides authors in-depth information and understanding about the issues under study. Hon (1995) mentioned in his research that, "the in-depth interviews with key people may go beyond study individual perceptions – identifying shared mental categories among participants as the primary goal" and still have "an opportunity for participants to speak for themselves" (p. 39). This qualitative in-depth interview allows interviewees to freely talk and explain the use of social media with specific social media tools (Kelleher & Sweetser, 2012).

Dyer and Wilkins (1991), and Yin (2009) stated that the case study approach was used in the qualitative method because its strength in revealing unique and deep insight in seeking answers for the "why" and "how" type of research questions. Mitic and Kapoulas (2012) also mentioned that "case studies allow researchers to obtain an in-depth understanding of the elements and factors that shape the way a phenomenon is accommodated in the organizational context" (p. 671). In this case, the main purpose of the qualitative approach with both interviews and case study methods helps the researcher get a better and deeper understanding of how social media is used by public relations practitioners.

Appendix A

The six articles include:

1. Exploring uses of social media in a global corporation (Vuori, 2012)

2. Social media adoption among university communicators (Kelleher & Sweetser, 2012)

3. The adoption of social media marketing in South African banks (Chikandiwa, Contogiannis, & Jembere, 2013)

4. Understanding the role of social media in bank marketing (Mitic & Kapoulas, 2012)

5. Customer knowledge management via social media: the case of Starbucks (Chus & Banerjee, 2013)

6. How large companies react to negative Facebook comments (Dekay, 2012)

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