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Etter, Michael Andreas ; Nielsen, Finn Årup

Published in:
Corporate Communications

Link to article, DOI:
[10.1108/CCIJ-09-2014-0059](https://doi.org/10.1108/CCIJ-09-2014-0059)

Publication date:
2015

Document Version
Early version, also known as pre-print

[Link back to DTU Orbit](#)

Citation (APA):
Etter, M. A., & Nielsen, F. Å. (2015). Collective remembering of organizations: Co-construction of organizational pasts in Wikipedia. *Corporate Communications*, 20(4), 431-447. <https://doi.org/10.1108/CCIJ-09-2014-0059>

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Corporate Communications: An International Journal

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Michael Andreas Etter Finn Årup Nielsen

Article information:

To cite this document:

Michael Andreas Etter Finn Årup Nielsen , (2015), "Collective remembering of organizations: co-construction of organizational pasts in Wikipedia", Corporate Communications: An International Journal, Vol. 20 Iss 4 pp. -

Permanent link to this document:

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/CCIJ-09-2014-0059>

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Collective remembering of organizations co-construction of organizational pasts in Wikipedia

Introduction

“In 1938 he welcomed German filmmaker and Nazi propagandist Leni Riefenstahl to Hollywood to promote her film *Olympia*.” This sentence, referring to the relationship between Walt Disney and the Nazi regime, was authored by Wikipedia user Tiggerjay on a sub-page of the Wikipedia page of the Walt Disney Corporation on the 9th December 2012. Ten days later, another author added the sentence “Disney was also rumored to be a racist”. Whereas the latter sentence was deleted shortly after its creation by another user, the first claim is visible until today. To demonstrate the validity of the information, the anonymous author Tiggerjay refers to an article of *The New York Times* that dates back to the 21st September 2011. Since the day the information was altered, over 5.3 million interested people have visited the website (Wikipedia article traffic statistic, 2015), where the inglorious aspect about the founder of one of the world’s biggest toy and entertainment companies is still accessible. These exemplary changes of a Wikipedia entry give indication, how the textual presentation of a corporation’s past in the largest online encyclopedia of the world is subject of constant negotiation within a network of authors and sources. By adding, deleting, or altering information about an organization, various authors contribute to the construction of the textual representation of an organization online. The presentation of an organization and its past to large audiences is highly relevant, because it influences the reputation of a company (Deephouse, 2000; Janssen, 2013). Corporate reputation is a central element of corporate communication (Benoit, 1997) and can be understood as the perception of an organization based on the impressions of past organizational behaviors or related events (Fombrun, 1996; Gray & Balmer, 1998; Mahon, 2002). These impressions are

built through personal experience or mediated by infomediaries, such as newspapers, corporate communication or other sources (e.g., Carroll & McCombs, 2003; Rindova, Petkova, & Kotha, 2007; Coombs & Holladay, 2012).

Scholars have often investigated the textual representation of organizational events of the present or the immediate past involving news media, corporate communication, activists, or consumers (e.g., Coombs & Holladay, 2012; Byrd, 2012; Deephouse, 2000). The focus on the present and the immediate past can be explained with the nature of news media (Schudson, 2011) and formal communication, such as crisis communication (e.g., Coombs, 2007), which provide stakeholders primarily with information about ongoing events. Marketing scholars have coined the notion of brand heritage (Smith & Steadman, 1981) and inspired a considerable line of research that regards the organizational past and history as a resource for strategic communication (e.g., Balmer, 2011; 2013; Blombäck & Brunninge, 2013). While these scholars provide fruitful insights into the strategic use of the past, the networked and collective construction of an organizational past by various authors that is facilitated through ICT, similar to the co-construction of brands by consumers in online-brand communities (e.g., Kozinets, Valck, Wojnicki, & Wilner, 2010), is so far unexplored. The rise and increased use of ICTs, such as Wikipedia, facilitate a bottom-up “digital memory culture” (Hoskins, 2009b), where various stakeholders contribute to the ongoing process of public remembering.

Despite its relevance as information depository and alternative source (Zickuhr & Rainie, 2011; Shaw, 2008; Messner & South, 2011), not much research has investigated the role of Wikipedia for corporate communication. Prior work has shown that Wikipedia entries about organizations are constantly changed, grow over time and that crucial elements are added, such as “legal concerns” and “corporate scandals” (DiStaso & Messner, 2010). To investigate how an

organizational past is remembered by various authors, this article draws on concepts from memory studies. Memory studies are an interdisciplinary field that contributes to the examination of “forms and functions of representing the past” (Roediger & Wertsch, 2008, p. 9). The article stands in the tradition of Halbwachs (1950; 1992) whose work had a major influence on the field of media and communication studies (e.g. Schudson, 1992).

Recently, scholars have coined Wikipedia as a “global memory place” (Pentzold, 2009) in form of a participatory open access online-platform, where various authors contribute to the collective memory of an object. Accordingly, in this article we are not interested in the individual perception of an organization’s past, but in the process of its communicative co-construction and the reference to formal sources in this process. It discusses the importance of the repository of collectively aggregated information about organizations that emerges through contributions by various authors.

The article is structured as follows: In the first chapter the online encyclopedia is introduced as an important information source about organizations. Second, the conceptualization of Wikipedia as a global memory place is outlined. In the third chapter the fields of memory studies and corporate communication are intersected. The methodology chapter is followed by the presentation of the results, discussion, and final conclusion.

Wikipedia as important information source

Wikipedia can be seen as a part of a broader communication network in which different actors, such as organizations, news media, consumers, or activists, contribute to a constant flow of communication that influences the perceptions of organizations (e.g., Edwards, 2012; Gilpin & Murphy, 2008; 2010). Besides its wide outreach in this network, Wikipedia is highly relevant,

because of its limited organizational influence, collaborative nature, credibility, and constant change of the textual representation of organizations.

With 22 million articles, thereof 4 million in English Language, Wikipedia is the largest online encyclopedia worldwide. As one of the most popular websites in the Internet it attracts 488 million unique visitors monthly (Wikimedia Report Card, 2014) and loads in top range in search engines for company searches (DiStaso & Messner, 2010). A majority of 53 percent of adults use Wikipedia (Zickuhr & Rainie, 2011), and its influence reaches into news media, where journalists use it increasingly as a source (Shaw, 2008; Messner & South, 2011). Different to traditional encyclopedia Wikipedia allows any internet user to contribute or edit Wikipedia articles (Wikipedia: terms of use, 2014). It counts over 21 million registered authors, called Wikipedians, of which 77 000 are regularly active (Wikimedia Report Card, 2014). Authors are often well informed in their areas of authorship and primarily motivated by self-fulfillment rather than external recognition (Yang & Lai, 2010).

In comparison, the second largest online-encyclopedia is the Encyclopedia Britannica (EB), where around 4500 authors contribute to 120'000 entries (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2015). While authorship is restricted to selected specialists, general users can contribute with entries that are available in a separate non-specialist section after a centralized review process. While the number of users is not officially known, the access to EB is not free of charge and requires subscription. A study published in the journal Nature (Giles, 2005) revealed that Wikipedia and EB articles are similarly accurate.

Another competitor to Wikipedia with a similarly open and interactive approach towards storing and creating public knowledge is the popular website Quora, where users can ask and answer questions about any topic. Answers and questions are rated up or down by users, and can also be

re-edited. With a user base of 520'000 users and approximately 400'000 topics, Quora is significantly smaller than Wikipedia.

Whereas any Internet user can contribute to the network of aggregated texts in Wikipedia, the influence of corporations on Wikipedia articles is restricted. Wikipedia guidelines strongly discourage writing articles about organizations in which authors have a vested interest (Wikipedia: Conflict of interest, 2014). The same rule applies for paid authors, such as public relations agencies, which have to transparently display their employer, client or affiliation (Wikipedia: Conflict of interest, 2014). However, corporations can have an indirect influence on the editing. For example, Wikipedia articles about organizations oftentimes refer to formal corporate communication, such as annual reports or press releases (DiStasio & Messner, 2012). Indeed such practices are encouraged by Wikipedia guidelines (Wikipedia terms of use, 2014). However, whenever using these sources, a rule of Wikipedia prescribes that an article has to be written from a neutral point of view that needs to represent “all significant viewpoints that have been published by reliable sources, in proportion to prominence of each viewpoint” (Wikipedia: Neutral point of view, 2014, para 12).

It has been argued that guidelines have constantly increased Wikipedia's credibility (Luyt & Tan, 2010) and newspapers have framed Wikipedia as a credible and accurate source of information (Messner & South, 2013). However, whereas users trust Wikipedia as an information source, they express doubt about the appropriateness of doing so (Flanagin & Metzger, 2011). In comparison with traditional encyclopedia, Wikipedia scored lower in credibility (Flanagin & Metzger, 2011), and most studies find a moderate level of credibility (Lim, 2009; Lim & Kwon, 2010). Users, however, deem Wikipedia as a good starting point for information searches. Once

information was found on Wikipedia, users often consult the sources that are listed in the article as “a way of verifying the information obtained” (Metzger, Flanagin, & Medders, 2010, p. 422).

Wikipedia as global memory place

Recent perspectives of remembering understand the concept of memory as an active process, whereby the memory is continuously built and reconstructed (Garde-Hanse, Hoskins & Reading, 2009; Ferron & Massa, 2014). The individual memory is thereby always mediated by some collectivity (Halbwachs, 1950) and influenced by the sources provided by the environment (Halbwachs, 1950; Hirst & Manier, 2008). Memory is collective, because it is supra-individual and located in the social sources that shaped it. Hence, individual memory cannot be seen as detached from social factors and social influences. “Even if it may be the individual who stores and recollects information, every step of the memory processes is embedded in the social environment and is influenced by the social resources provided by the environment” (Ferron & Massa, 2014, p. 23, referring to Eyerman, 2004). Wertsch (2002) argues that remembering is mediated by the sociocultural tools provided by the society. Hence, remembering is also a distributed process that involves both the individuals who remember and the tools that serve the remembering process, such as computers, news media, or the Internet (Ferron & Massa, 2014). Drawing on Pierre Nora’s (1989) idea of “site of memory” Pentzold (2009, p. 255) has coined the web-based encyclopedia as a “global memory place”, where memorable elements are negotiated in a complex process of article creation. A Wikipedia article at a certain point in time is “the representation of the crystalized collective memories, which are socially built through direct edits to the article.” (Ferron & Massa, 2011, p. 1). Here, the collective is not understood as a closely knit community but as loosely organized. The ‘community of memory’ (Irwin-Zarecka,

1994) of the Wikipedia authors is a geographically dispersed community, consisting of members with an interest in a given subject, such as a particular organization. Their different backgrounds reflect what Halbwachs termed different frameworks. The collaborative construction of a Wikipedia article hence can be interpreted as the active “participation in remembrance, where the collection of different accounts and pieces of stories can dialogue with each other and together compose a unique representation.” (Ferron & Massa, 2014, p. 26).

ICTs and the communicative construction of organizational pasts

Recently, the role of ICTs has been highlighted to have an important effect in shaping how memory is formed (Garde-Hanse et al., 2010; Van House & Churchill, 2008). According to Hoskins (2009a), the widespread diffusion of new digital media enable the production and consumption of media content, as well as the networked connection between individuals and institutions. A bottom-up participatory “digital memory culture” (Hoskins, 2009b) enables memory building processes, where not only formal communication, such as news media or corporate communication, but various members of publics contribute to the process of remembering in decentralized ways. As a consequence, the narration of an organization and its past can be collaboratively constructed, similar to the co-construction of brands in online brand-communities (e.g., Kozinets et al., 2010; Cornelissen & Christensen, 2013). In the online space consumers are regarded as active co-producers of brands, whose meaning construction can be idiosyncratic, creative, and even resistant (e.g., Brown, Kozinets, & Sherry, 2003; Muniz and Schau 2005). The contemporary bottom-up participatory culture results in an evolution of memory production processes, where memories evolve dynamically through digital practices and

interactions with technologies that grant accessibility to the collective memories (Ferron & Massa, 2013; Hoskins, 2009b).

The paradigmatic shift in memory studies parallels similar developments in the field of corporate communication (e.g., Edwards, 2012; Edwards & Hodges, 2011). An increasing number of scholars have pointed at the growing complexity, dynamisation and plurality of communication in a networked digital media environment that can disturb communication strategies (e.g., Holtzhausen, 2011; Gilpin & Murphy, 2008; 2010) and empower diverse voices that construct perceptions and form expectations towards organizations (Castello, Morsing, & Schultz, 2013). From this perspective, Wikipedia can be understood as a form of an “expert system” (Cozier & Witmer, 2001; Falkheimer, 2009) that engages in cooperative sense making processes, next to corporate communication, news media and other sources.

Corporate communication has so far not taken into account the digital memory culture for the construction of organizational pasts. Nevertheless, the notion of corporate heritage has been highlighted for the strategic communication of past actions and events for the perception of brands (e.g., Blombäck & Scandeliuss, 2013; Hudson & Balmer, 2013). This body of research advocates for the strategic use of history to create favorable images and influence reputations (e.g., Balmer, 2011). These fruitful approaches towards remembering embrace an organization centric view, whereby organizations leverage communicatively their pasts. However, the networked and collective construction of an organizational past facilitated through ICTs, where decentralized actors contribute to the construction of an organizational past, is so far unexplored. Memory building processes involve formal communication, such as news media or corporate communication, and various contributions by various sources in decentralized ways (Hoskins, 2009b; Wertsch, 2002). We therefore investigate which sources are referred to in the

remembering process by various actors of the loosely connected community in Wikipedia. Furthermore, because the construction of the past is fundamentally shaped by the present (Halbwachs, 1992), we investigate how present corporate communications, in form of press releases, impacts to in the memory building process.

Methodology

Rather than in the representation of organizations at a certain point in time, we are interested in the ongoing changes of Wikipedia articles. The locus of co-construction of an organizational past is thereby not located in the individual perception, but rather in the process of ongoing modifications of textual representations. For the analysis of the co-construction of the collective memory in Wikipedia by various authors we analyze the changes of corporate Wikipedia articles. We chose a random sample of 10 business-to-consumers companies (B2C) from the Financial Times Global 100 most valuable companies list (Financial Times, 2012). With the choice of B2C companies we aimed at including corporations, which members of the general public, i.e. consumers, know and therefore possibly edit Wikipedia entries about these companies. Furthermore, we chose the Financial Times List of major stock market listed companies, because publicly traded companies are required to communicate market relevant information. This regulation should ensure the necessary amount of corporate communication in form of press releases for this study. The 10 corporations were chosen with “random sampling technique” (Babbie, 2013, p. 206), whereby every B2C company of the Financial Times list had an equal chance of being selected. The final sample included companies from various industries, such as the entertainment, pharmaceutical, food, toy, oil, and financial industry (see table 1). Sub-pages from their Wikipedia entries were included, which were structurally and content wise linked to

the main page, such as information about the founder of a company or popular products. From the MediaWikiAPI files including the full revision history of all Wikipedia pages were downloaded. With an interest in the construction of an organizational past by human actors, edits made by bots were excluded from the dataset.

Changes of Wikipedia pages were manually coded. Wikipedia offers the possibility to access the change history of a Wikipedia page, with information about the edited change, author of the change and exact time. In the month of December 2012 1459 edits by 641 authors were identified, equaling an average of 146 changes per organization. Not surprisingly, a correlation analysis revealed that the amount of changes highly correlated with the amount of authors ($r = .96, p < .001$). In total the Wikipedia pages of the 10 companies had 888907 visitors in December 2012 (Wikipedia article traffic statistic, 2014), equaling 88891 visitors per organization on average.

All changes were coded with a quantitative approach that allowed us to identify to which degree Wikipedia edits concern the past, are of reputational relevance, are positive or negative, and refer to formal communication sources, such as corporate communication.

Past/present: Coding for past/present was binary, detecting if a change concerned the past of an organization or the present or immediate past respectively. Changes were coded as past, when the change concerned organizational behavior or an event that was older than one month at the time of change. Changes were coded for present or immediate past when the change concerned an event not older than one month at the time of change. If unclear, the temporal relation of a change was identified through research in the internet and newspapers archives.

Reputational relevance: In this study we do not measure the reputation of organizations, but the reputational relevance of Wikipedia edits. In order to assess the reputational relevance of an edit,

it is crucial to know what kind information forms corporate reputation. Corporate reputation is often operationalized as a multi-dimensional construct and measured as the evaluations of various organizational dimensions that form the perception about an organization (Helm & Klode, 2011). What dimensions form corporate reputations is often assessed through qualitative research, such as focus groups, which builds the basis for the development of reputation dimensions (e.g., Helm, 2005). Because Wikipedia is used by several million individuals from various, international stakeholder groups, we base our study on the established multi-stakeholder measure of Fombrun, Gardberg, & Sever (2000) that is one of the most applied reputation measures in academic research (Walker, 2010). Based on qualitative research Fombrun, Gardberg, & Sever (2000) has developed six dimensions that have proven to be crucial and relevant for various, international stakeholders' reputation formation, and hence can be deemed as valid for the analysis of the reputational relevance of Wikipedia changes. The measure incorporates the dimensions *quality of product and service, innovation and management, vision and leadership, workplace, corporate social responsibility (CSR), and financial performance*. We coded an edit as relevant for reputation formation when it deleted, added, or modified content related to one or several of these reputation dimensions. An edit could, hence, incorporate multiple dimensions.

Sentiment: Because the construct of reputation includes some sort of evaluation or sentiment (Walker, 2010), we coded the reputation relevant changes for negative or positive sentiment.

When a positive sentence or part of a sentence had been added to a Wikipedia entry, the change was coded as positive, and vice versa; if a positive sentence or part of a sentence had been deleted from the Wikipedia page, then the change was coded as negative, and vice versa.

Formal sources: The changes were coded for the reference to formal sources. The sources were categorized as news media (including websites of news organizations), corporate communication (PR releases, websites, advertising, corporate publishing, etc.), and others (books, blogs, scientific reports, online archives, etc.). To ensure reliability of manual coding we coded a sample of 130 changes with two coders that resulted in an intercoder-reliability coefficient of 0.93, which can be considered as sufficient (Holsti, 1969).

Finally, press releases of corporations were extracted from their homepages for the month December and November 2012 in order to respect a one month time lag, resulting in totally 115 press releases. Press releases are a public relations instrument in form of prepackaged information, which corporations send to news media in order to influence media coverage. By reading and manually comparing the press releases with the changes of each organization, indication was sought, if press releases had an indirect or direct impact on the Wikipedia changes in December 2012. The comparison of press releases with changes in Wikipedia articles was done by two researchers. For a sample of 25 press releases coded by both researchers the intercoder-reliability coefficient of 0.96, can be considered as sufficient (Holsti, 1969).

Findings: The co-construction of organizational pasts in Wikipedia

The analysis of the 1459 changes reveals that 57% concern past organizational behaviors and related events, whereas 43% concern current or immediate past events. In total, 24% of the changes are of reputational relevance, and 76% have no relevance for organizational reputation. The sentiment analysis reveals that positive changes with reputational relevance are with 53.6% slightly in the majority, whereas negative changes account for 46.3%. For the changes concerning the past, 28% percent are of reputational relevance, whereas for the present and

immediate past it is 16%. With 43% CSR is the most negotiated reputation dimension in Wikipedia. For example the oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico of the year 2010 caused many alterations of BP's past in the online encyclopedia. On 23th December following sentence was added: "The spill is the 'worst environmental disaster the US has faced', according to White House energy adviser Carol Browner. Indeed, the spill was by far the largest in US history, almost 20 times greater than the Exxon Valdez oil spill." And emphasizing the role and responsibility of BP on 24th December another author added: "In addition BP agreed to pay a 4 billion Dollar fine, the largest criminal resolution in the history of the United States." Similarly, by referring to a news media report of the BBC website from the 2nd September 2009, following sentence about the drug Pregabalin was added to the Wikipedia representation of the pharmaceutical company Pfizer: "Pfizer illegally promoted the drugs and caused false claims to be submitted to government healthcare programs for uses that were not approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA)."

Whereas some authors added or deleted sentences, other authors changed only nuances. For example, the sentence "Linezolid *was* also used off-label for the treatment of infections caused by methicillin-resistant Staphylococcus aureus (MRSA), though Pfizer was penalized in 2009 for promoting such a use in US" was changed on the 12th December into "Linezolid *is* also used off-label (...)".

Table 1: Analysis of changes in Wikipedia for 10 organizations in December 2012

	FT ranking	Page views December 2012	Changes	Author	Past in %	Reputation in %	Positive in %	Negative in %	Reference in %	PR releases	Triggered changes
Apple	1	145513	474	189	67.5	31.1	53.9	46.1	21.3	3	0
BP	37	86287	162	34	77.8	39.5	44.2	55.8	25.9	21	0
Coca Cola	26	1523	32	13	40.6	21.9	53.4	46.7	14.5	6	0
Disney	56	32534	235	121	65.5	14.5	52.1	47.9	10.2	21	1
General Electric	6	7502	41	22	75.6	29.3	46.9	53.1	14.5	61	0
Microsoft	7	483762	275	145	57.2	19.3	48.7	51.3	24.5	23	0
Nestle	9	11180	123	72	35.0	22.8	46.8	53.2	11.4	8	0
Novo Nordisk	91	8873	4	3	50.0	25.0	100.0	0.0	50.0	12	0
Pfizer	18	41211	47	21	44.7	29.8	46.7	53.3	40.4	21	0
UBS	96	70522	66	21	62.1	40.9	43.3	56.7	31.2	1	1
Total	-	888907	1459	641	-	-	-	-	-	177	2
Average	-	88890.7	145.9	64.1	57.6	27.4	53.6	46.4	24.4	17.7	0.2

The often negotiated concern of CSR is followed by the reputation dimension quality of products and services with 37%. For example, on 24th December a user added to the Wikipedia page of Apple: “In June 2009, Apple's iPhone 3GS was free of PVC, arsenic, BFRs and had an efficient power adapter.” In contrast, the bad product quality of the Windows Phone 8 by Microsoft was made public on Wikipedia on 11th December 2012: “Since the launch of Windows Phone 8, some users have reported problems, such as lost Wi-Fi connection, random reboots and freezes while in use”.

Further reputation dimensions, such as financial performance (13 %) and innovation and management (8 %) are less subject to changes and negotiation. Past financial performance of Pfizer was made visible on 7th December 2012 and deleted again a few days later: “Sales reached a record \$3.063 billion in 2010.” The sentence praising the innovative culture of GE was deleted on 26th December 2012: “GE has a unique culture and tradition of innovation and is well-known for its corporate management capabilities.”

The reputation dimensions vision & leadership (3 %) and workplace (1 %) are very little discussed topics. With regard to a trading scandal from September 2011 a Wikipedia user added the sentence pointing to leadership problems of the bank on 24th December 2012: “UBS's management was subsequently criticized for its "lapses" by the Government of Singapore Investment Corporation, the bank's largest shareholder, in a rare press statement on September 20, 2011; and on September 24, 2011 UBS announced Grübel's resignation, with Sergio Ermotti named Group CEO on an interim basis.”

The analysis in terms of references reveals that 21% of the changes refer and link to external sources, whereby the majority of these sources are news media (59%). For example by referring to an article in USA today from 7th October 2012 an author added on 5th December 2012: “Coca

Cola has paid a dividend, increasing each year for 49 years.“ In the co-construction of the past of BP an author added on 19th December recent evidence by referring to NBC NEWS online from 30th November 2012: “Two years after the spill, a study found that Corexit had increased the toxicity of the oil by up to 52 times.” Often, changes refer to even older news media reports, such as a change on the 18th December 2012 about the drug Donepezil of Pfizer that refers to a news article in the *LA Times* from 23th March 2011.

To less degree other sources (27%) and corporate communication (14%) are used as reference. For example, parts of the following sentence was added on 19th December to the Wikipedia page of UBS explaining the name of UBS referring to the Q&A section of the official corporate website: “The name "UBS" was originally an abbreviation for the Union Bank of Switzerland.” Other sources used are for example documents by public authorities, such as a United State Coast Guard in the case of BP: “At an April 30, 2010 press conference, BP said that it knew the cause of the explosion. Transocean chief executive Steven Newman described the cause as "a sudden, catastrophic failure of the cement, the casing or both." This sentence was added on 31.12.2012 referring to a movie on the website of the United Coast Guard produced in April 2010.

The analysis of the 177 press releases shows that two press releases (equaling 1%) by the 10 companies had a direct or indirect influence within one month on the respective company entry. The press release by Disney on 4th December 2012 “Disney 4.12.: Netflix and The Walt Disney Studios Announce Multi-Year Premium Pay TV Window Agreement in the United States” was followed by a change in Wikipedia three days later on 6th December 2012: “Disney agreed on December 4th to have Netflix as its exclusive U.S. subscription television service for first run Disney Pictures, Walt Disney Animation Studios, Pixar Animation Studios, Marvel Studios and

Disneynature feature movies starting in 2016 to replace its agreement ending in 2015 with Starz.” The addition of Disney’s strategic alliance, however, is not referring to the press release, but to the website of the online news media *LA Business Journal* that released the news on the 6th of December. Similarly, the press release by UBS on 19th December “UBS Board of Directors authorizes settlements of LIBOR-related claims with US and UK authorities” was followed by a change two weeks later on 30th December: “On 19 December 2012 UBS agreed to pay regulators \$1.5bn for its role in the libor scandal over accusations that it tried to rig benchmark interest rates.”

Discussion

In this article we have shown how the textual representation of organizational pasts in the largest online encyclopedia Wikipedia is continuously changed by various authors by referring to various formal sources. More than half of the analyzed changes relate to past organizational issues, sometimes more than 70 years back in time (e.g., in the case of the Walt Disney Corporation). The changes made in Wikipedia range from the addition and deletion of new or old facts to the alteration of nuances in sentences. Furthermore, changes are often subject of negotiation and reversed after creation, resulting in small “edit wars” (Petzhold, 2009, p. 265). Overall, the sentiment changes are balanced, which can be interpreted with the ethics of Wikipedia’s community that encourages a balanced representation of entries. The slightly positive tendency on average in our results can be explained with the case of Novo Nordisk, whose single change with reputational relevance was positive and therefore accounted for 100 %. None of the organizations was in a crisis situation during the time of investigation. However, large scale scandals and crises have proven to cause high levels of collective remembering in

Wikipedia long after their occurrence (Ferron & Massa, 2014). The high amount of changes with reputational relevance and the negative sentiment trend for the companies UBS and BP can be explained with past crises of these companies that are still negotiated some years after their occurrence.

The predominant reference to news media sources for changes can be interpreted with the guidelines and ethics of the Wikipedia community that prescribe an article creation from neutral point of view. It is reasonable to assume, that news media are more likely to be perceived as a neutral source of information by the Wikipedia community. Of course, it has to be acknowledged that news media reports are likely to be influenced by corporate communication. Corporate communication, for example in form of press releases, has often proven successful in influencing media coverage (e.g., Kiouisis, Popescu, & Mitrook, 2007; Kleinnjenhuis et al., 2013). This is due to the fact that journalists often position themselves in a way that they have ready access to institutions, such as news agencies or organizations, which generate a useful volume of reportable activity at useful intervals at low cost (Rock, 1981, p. 68-89; Paterson & Domingo, 2008). In contrast to news media (Davis, 2000a; 2000b; Franklin & Carlson, 2011; Reich, 2010), Wikipedia is not subject of financial and organizational constraints that foster the use of press releases. In contrary, as a non for profit organization Wikipedia does not have to deliver news to publics on a daily basis.

The low impact of press releases on the ongoing remembering process and the high amount of visitors positions Wikipedia as a “discourse forum” in relation to large organizations (Demetrious, 2011, p. 130). Recently, scholars have highlighted new media technologies as promising for corporate communication because of their ubiquity, popularity and potential for relationship building (Breakenridge, 2008; Etter, 2014; Byrd, 2012). Our study puts the reach

and possibilities of classical corporate communication in a participatory media environment into perspective. The process of memorizing and reputation formation is decentralized and democratized: ‘Everyone has gotten into the act’ (Nora, 1996, p. 9). The analytical step to abstract communities defined by digital memory places outlined in this article enriches the understanding of corporate communication in a new media environment.

Finally, this article provides valuable insights for the temporal dimension of corporate reputation formation. The formal sources, which are referred to for collective remembering often date back several months or years before the actual change in Wikipedia and surface past organizational behavior that exposes relevant information for reputation formation. Hence, press releases, corporate communication material, news media reports, or documents by official authorities might be exposed to wide publics long after initial creation. The use of publicly accessible archives, hence, can be a valuable tool to provide corporate communication material, such as PR releases, videos or reports, for a network of digital remembering. The revelation of past actions through these materials on digital platforms towards internal and external stakeholders can have considerable effects on corporate reputations (Janssen, 2013) and on corporate culture that is also influenced by employees’ perceptions of organizational pasts (e.g., Meek, 1988; Allaire & Firsirotu, 1984).

Limitations and future research

This study is conducted with a sample of the most valuable B2C-companies in the world. For a complementary understanding, future research might therefore be conducted for smaller companies or B2B companies. Furthermore, while we find that the actors participating in the public remembering processes in Wikipedia seldom refer to corporate communication as sources, corporate communication might exert influence more indirectly and less visibly. For example,

press releases are likely to impact news media coverage that itself might be used in public remembering processes. Because users have not been studied directly, we have no precise knowledge about the actual use of (corporate) sources. Future research therefore might investigate more closely the authoring process of Wikipedia articles. Also, it has to be acknowledged that authors might be paid or employed by organizations to alter corporate Wikipedia entries without displaying their affiliation. Nevertheless, because of peer control and strong Wikipedia ethics among the majority of the community that leads users to legitimize and approve their edits with formal sources, it can be assumed that the used sources found in our study draw an accurate picture.

Conclusion

With the analysis of the co-construction of collective memories in Wikipedia, this article has advanced the understanding of the spatio-temporal dimension of the formation of organizational pasts and corporate reputation. Organizations are remembered in a continuous active process of sense-making and negotiation between past and present. Similar to studies on media reputation (e.g., Deephouse, 2000) we have investigated the public representation of organizations and its reputational relevance. The impact of these representations on stakeholders' perceptions, and for example on organizational culture (Allair & Firsirotu, 1984), is yet to be explored. In that regard it has to be acknowledged that Wikipedia is one important source that impacts the formation of corporate reputation, next to other sources, such as news media, personal experiences, or various online tools.

The applied cross-fertilization of corporate communication with concepts from the field of memory studies, such as collective memory (Halbwachs, 1992) and digital memory culture

(Hoskins, 2009b), enhances our theoretical understanding of reputation building in a new digital media environment. Particularly the idea of decentralized remembering as an ongoing process reminds corporate communication scholars how new digital media have democratized and pluralized the formation of corporate reputation. While traditional research has primarily focused on news media (e.g. Rindova et al., 2007), research on organizational reputation has to take into account the online realm. Furthermore, the process perspective inherent to the concept of remembering can enhance theory building in the field of corporate communication. A theoretical lens that regards the formation of organizational reputation as an ongoing process accounts for the continuous communication and changes that occur - not only in Wikipedia but by the various communicative actors that constantly evaluate organizations publicly. Particularly with the rise of social media, the formation of organizational reputation has evolved into an ongoing process that involves a network of distributed communicative actors that constantly spread and exchange evaluations about organizations through electronic word of mouth.

Communication professionals need to keep in mind that a multitude of public discussions beyond organizational control build perceptions about organizations. Traditional public relations tactics, such as press releases, have to be complemented with new media strategies that take into account online interactivity. While the direct corporate influence on Wikipedia is limited, other public platforms, such as Facebook, afford higher engagement and allow corporations to transparently discuss their view points and their past with various stakeholders.

For the general public, open platforms build an opportunity to engage and retrieve information about organizations and their pasts, which might not be covered by traditional news media.

While Orwell's novel "1984" warned us about the dangers of autocratically rewritten pasts,

Wikipedia offers democratic access to past inglorious aspects of organizations, it enables participation in the negotiation of these pasts, and partly safeguards from biased influences.

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Biographical Details

Michael Etter is an Assistant Professor at the Centre for CSR at Copenhagen Business School. He investigates questions of CSR communication in a new media environment.

Finn Arup Nielsen is a senior researcher at DTU Compute at the Technical University Denmark. He has an interest in Wikipedia and uses data mining techniques in his research.