
Research question (max. 400 words)

Introduce the research question and explain clearly how it is embedded in the literature

Facebook is one of the most popular social networking sites (SNSs) of the world. By September 2012, Facebook has over one billion monthly active users (Facebook, 2013). Despite the positive experiences on Facebook, there is a notable proportion of negative outcomes experienced by users, like being accused of misbehaviour by ones' (known or unknown) Facebook friends in public space ("Wall postings") online (Rainie, Lenhart, & Smith, 2012). Research has shown that people make judgements about an individual based on the comments left by the individual's Facebook friends, and negative comments reduce attractiveness of profile owners in the eyes of observers who are not in a close relationship with the profile owner (Walther, Van der Heide, Kim, Westerman, & Tong, 2008). It is important to examine how to deal with accusations on Facebook in order to learn how to "save your image in public". We analyze the effects of negative comments and potential reaction strategies of profile owners from the point of view of trust rebuilding.

There are some controversial findings when it comes to the problem of interpersonal trust rebuilding online and offline (Kim, Ferrin, Cooper, & Dirks, 2004; Matzat & Snijders, 2012; Utz, Matzat, & Snijders, 2009).

Two types of trust violations were identified in studies: competency-based trust violations and the integrity-based trust violations. In addition, two common reaction strategies to an accusation are distinguished, namely denial and apology.

Kim et al. (2004) proposed a model of offline trust rebuilding, that is, "apologize for violations concerning matters of competence but deny culpability for violations concerning matters of integrity". However, the findings of Utz et al. (2009) indicate that this model is no longer applicable to the environment of eBay. To be specific, in the context of eBay an apology always works better than a denial in terms of trust rebuilding independently of the type of accusation (Utz et al., 2009). By having a close look at the trust rebuilding model on Facebook, this study contributes to solving the problem of contradicting results.

Formulate the research question as adequately as you can, possibly together with sub questions and hypotheses

The research question is formulated as following:

How can a profile owner on Facebook rebuild his/her public image after a public accusation on Facebook?

To be specific, we analyze what type of reaction will be more effective to repair trust after a competency- and an integrity-based accusation of trust violation on Facebook?

The hypothesis will be:

An apology is more effective than a denial to repair interpersonal trust for both (a) a competency-based and (b) an integrity-based accusation of trust violation on Facebook.

However, there are more types of reactions to an accusation, for example, apologies with internal/external attributions (Kim et al., 2006), no reaction and just deleting what you don't want to see on your own Wall. More hypotheses about the effectiveness of these reactions will be developed.

Scientific and TIW relevance (max. 150 words)

Explain why your project fits the Innovation Sciences/ Human Technology Interaction domain (dealing with technology AND people) and how it connects or contributes to IS/HTI science.

As a student in the cluster of "Life in a virtual world: the social science of the Internet" in IS study, I am interested in researching how Internet has changed the perception and behaviour of people. We already have some knowledge about effective trust rebuilding strategies in offline life. My study will further explore effective online trust rebuilding strategies in the context of Facebook, which is the most popular social networking site of the world. This study could not only give practical suggestions about how to rebuild the image of Facebook users in public, but also help to explain the contradicting findings of the previous IS studies.

Method (max. 200 words)

Indicate HOW you are going to answer your research question. Describe for example what the (in)dependent variables are, what methodology you will use or develop. How are you going to collect your data? For example interviews, and if so, who are you going to interview and what for? How will you analyze your data?

This study will implement a two (violation-type: competence vs. integrity) by five (violation-response: denial, apology with an internal attribution, apology with an external attribution, deletion vs. none) design, with the violation type as a within-subject variable and the violation response as a between-subjects variable. Several Facebook profiles will be mocked up in an online experiment. The participants' perceived trust in the accused profile owner will be measured under different treatments (combinations of type of accusation and type of reaction). Trusting disposition and demographic factors like gender and culture will be controlled. About 200 Facebook users are needed who will be randomly allocated to the treatment conditions. In addition, a pilot study will test the effectiveness of the treatment. Manipulation checks will also be done in the pilot. Regression analysis and ANOVA will be used to analyse the data.

References

Provide three references of scientific articles and/or books that underlie the research proposal. Make complete references (refer to: *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association*, 6th ed. (Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2001).

- 1 Kim, P. H., Ferrin, D. L., Cooper, C. D., & Dirks, K. T. (2004). Removing the shadow of suspicion: The effects of apology versus denial for repairing competence- versus integrity-based trust violations. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 89(1), 104-118.
 - 2 Utz, S., Matzat, U., & Snijders, C. (2009). Online reputation systems: The effects of feedback comments and reactions on building and rebuilding trust in online auctions. *International Journal of Electronic Commerce*, 13(3), 95-118.
 - 3 Matzat, U., & Snijders, C. (2012). Rebuilding Trust in Online Shops on Consumer Review Sites: Sellers' Responses to User-Generated Complaints. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 18(1), 62-79.
 - (4) Facebook. (2013). Key facts. from <http://newsroom.fb.com/Key-Facts>
 - (5) Rainie, L., Lenhart, A., & Smith, A. (2012). The tone of life on social networking sites: Pew Internet Report.
 - (6) Walther, J. B., Van der Heide, B., Kim, S. Y., Westerman, D., & Tong, S. T. (2008). The role of friends' appearance and behavior on evaluations of individuals on facebook: Are we known by the company we keep? *Human Communication Research*, 34(1), 28-U60. doi: DOI 10.1111/j.1468-2958.2007.00312.x
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