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CORPORATE STRATEGIES ON INSTAGRAM: CONTENT ANALYSIS FRAMEWORK

Author's name:

Mayyer Ling

Affiliation:

English Studies, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, Universiti Brunei Darussalam

Email:

Mayyer.ling@ubd.edu.bn

Telephone number:

+673 246 0922 ext 2009

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ABSTRACT

Research conducted on Instagram, and other social networking sites (SNSs), has primarily been focused on individual use and representation. The focus of this paper, however, is corporate use of Instagram. With over 25 million business profiles on this social media platform, it is time to shift some attention to the corporate use of Instagram. Corporations, including the private and public sectors, have grown reliant on social media as means of maintaining public relations – a platform where there is an attempt to represent the institution, promote corporate social responsibility activities and communicate with stakeholders. Uta Russmann and Jakob Svensson (2016) proposed a content analysis framework to study political parties on Instagram. However, it was found that the proposed framework was insufficient and should be revised for corporate use. The proposed revision of this content analysis framework is the focus of this paper to give rise to *corporate strategy framework for Instagram*.

Keywords: Instagram, Social Media, Corporate strategies, Corporate communication

1. INTRODUCTION

Instagram was launched in 2010 as a photo- and video-sharing platform where users can upload posts which may include captions, hashtags and location tags. With the growing number of users daily, and the dominance of the 18-35 years old age group in the demographic for this social networking sites (SNSs), marketing efforts by corporations – including private and public sectors alike – have certainly been tilted off its axis. The one-way communication practice by institutions are merely a formality in today's day and age. Newspapers, for example, still exist to house press releases issued by a corporation when corporate social responsibility (CSR) activities are carried out, but online versions of the same document shared on social media opens up dialogues with the target audience. Dialogues may include requests for more information, encouragements for further CSR activities of the same kind, or even ideas for future endeavours by the corporation deemed suitable by the stakeholders. This brings about the culture of active engagement that can be of benefit for corporations when put to good use. Marketing can be less of a hit-and-miss, and theoretically, institutions are able to serve their stakeholders in a direct and satisfying manner.

Research conducted on Instagram, however, has primarily been focused on individual use and representation. This comes as no surprise that '#followme', '#me' and '#selfie' are still some of the most popular hashtags on Instagram to date, and selfies are among the top uploaded pictures in the social media platform. The abundance of academic literature on social validation, narcissism, and (projected) personal identity are necessary to shed light on this movement, and the effect it has on the society.

There are only a handful of academic literature devoted to shed light on the corporate use of Instagram. In truth, corporations have grown reliant on social media as means of maintaining public relations – a platform where there is an attempt to represent the institution, promote corporate social responsibility activities and communicate with stakeholders – and as a marketing platform that can potentially have high reach and/or engagement and high return-on-investment. Uta Russmann and Jakob Svensson (2016) proposed a sound methodological framework to conduct

content analysis to study political parties' presence on Instagram. With the use of a data from Negara Brunei Darussalam's official government Instagram account @govbn from January to July 2019 (Mayyer Ling and Deterding forthcoming 2020), it was found that the framework proposed was inherently insufficient and should be revised. The proposed revision will be the focus of this paper, giving rise to the *corporate strategy framework for Instagram*.

2. EXISTING LITERATURE ON ORGANISATIONS USE OF INSTAGRAM

2.1. Politics dominating SNS research in government

In today's time, audience engagement is key (Hollebeek, Glynn, and Brodie 2014) to ensure that the corporations are able to provide services to the stakeholders which are attuned to their expectations while staying true to the core business and function of the corporations. There has certainly been some attempts in improving the academic body on the Instagram use in organisations, and many of these efforts have been concentrated on political parties (Bossetta 2018; Eldin 2016; Filimonov, Russmann and Svensson 2016; Lalancette and Raynauld 2017; Larsson 2017; Russman and Svensson 2016; Turnbull-Dugarte 2019) or utilisation patterns by individual candidates (Liebhart and Bernhardt 2017; Munoz and Towner 2017). Considering the fact that the public and private sectors – the mass of the corporations that uses Instagram as a form of tool for communication – is made up of more than just the political candidates and parties, and the corporation-public engagement long after an election is complete bears more lasting significance than the election itself, it is pertinent that governments' use of Instagram – and other SNSs – is well-defined and understood to ensure the public relation tool is effectively and efficiently utilised. In truth, the subsequent information on policies, introduction of regulations, and announcements of strategies to combat national issues are crucial in the running of a government.

However, in reality, knowledge of the governments' use of Instagram is scarce. Mergel (2013a; 2013b) consistently found that the government disseminates information in a traditional manner where the agencies do not expect responses from the public and there is a lack of effort to initiate dialogue, bearing in mind that both response-seeking and dialogue-providing are two of the many affordances in the use of SNS. This is reflective of how impractical the adoption of SNS is in corporations, especially the government sector, where the implementation of 'push' strategy dominates the medium not dissimilar to the traditional practices of media communication. A more recent finding revealed that there are six broad areas of categorisation that can be implemented to systematically review government's use of social media (Medaglia and Zheng 2017) including management, context, user characteristics, user behavior, effects and platform properties. Acknowledging the lack of enlightenment in the governmental practices of the SNS – discounting political candidates and political parties – and the scarce body of knowledge on the organisational use of the popular SNS Instagram the gap in literature is hope to be filled with the current study.

2.2. Significant gap for institutional SNS practices

There are currently 25 million brands on Instagram, and at the time of writing 60% of its users discovers new products from the social media site (Smith 2019). Clearly, Instagram is a potential marketing tool that can benefit businesses in reaching customers – especially when the target market consists of population in the dominant age group of 18-35 years old. The advancements in online banking and the affordances of direct interaction between customers and businesses not only increases the ease in conducting sales, but also improves customer satisfaction, especially after all queries have been satisfactorily responded to by the businesses.

There are some studies that investigates corporate use of Instagram. For example, one attempts to categorise the corporate (not politics-bound) use of social media, specifically Twitter (Lovejoy and Saxton 2012). Textual analysis of NGOs usage of Twitter found that the SNS was used to disseminate *information*, create a sense of community through dialogues, and call for *action* (italics are the coding criteria by Lovejoy and Saxton 2012). Granted, Twitter was dominating the SNS scene when the research was conducted, but Instagram has taken the social media platform by storm and thus, it is pertinent that literature for this particular SNS is reflective of the increasing popularity and significance.

Research on the use of the fast-growing picture- and video-sharing platform, Instagram, is scarce and far apart. For example, McNely (2012) investigated the potential of Instagram in constructing a desired corporate image as it is, quite literally, already an image-sharing platform. Santarossa and Woodruff (2018), on the other hand, confirmed that there is potential in the use of social media (they investigated the reach of Instagram and Twitter) in disseminating information about and promoting health campaigns on campus. These studies validate the practicality and relevance of SNSs such as Instagram in communicating ideas, images and roles of particular corporations that uses Instagram as a tool for public relations. However, as shall be seen later, these studies only partially address the significant variables found on Instagram, and thus, is only partially informing corporate practices on Instagram.

3. UTA RUSSMANN AND JAKOB SVENSSON'S (2016) CONTENT ANALYSIS FRAMEWORK

Figure 1 is an adopted version of the variables identified by Russman and Svensson (2016) which was claimed to be applicable to study 'other types of organisations and their use of the [Instagram] platform' (p. 3). To date, this framework is the most comprehensive content analysis tool found in literature as far as SNS as a public relations tool is concerned.

The framework has four major variables addressing the different aspects found on the Instagram platform (italics added to emphasise variables). First, *perception* considers the impression of the followers upon viewing the visual posted by the poster, which includes both picture and video formats. Impressions are recorded in terms of *perspective*, *broadcasting* and *mobilisation*. This *perception* variable is particularly significant in the Instagram platform, according to Sheldon and Bryant (2016), as the visual cues are basically the main form of communication. Therefore, posts without captions can still be uploaded and shared, whereas captions without visual uploads is not

possible on the platform. Second, *Image management* concerns the representations presented to validate and support the impressions found in *perspective*. The very nature of SNS is integration, and there is still a wide practice in the use of traditional means of communication with stakeholders. The third variable *integration* was identified as part of the framework that acknowledges the co-existence of both traditional and new media in corporate communication strategies. This variable includes *hybridity*, *shared content* and *campaign reference*. Finally, one of the main affordances of SNS that was not present in traditional medium of communication is *interactivity*, which happens to be the fourth and final variable in the framework. This variable records the captions posted by the poster and the reactions by followers in the form of *captions and comments*, *tonality* and *reciprocity* (for full discussion, see Russmann and Svensson 2016).

The framework was used to study political parties' use of Instagram in days leading up to campaigns (Filimonov, Russmann and Svensson 2016). The researchers found that the variables identified were useful in strategically compartmentalising content analysis of the corporate use of Instagram. They found that the platform was used mostly to disseminate information to the public rather than mobilisation (calling the public to action), and there parties often leverage on the popularity of top candidates in their posts. It was also found that posts found on Instagram were only half-hybridised, where only half of these posts made references to traditional forms of marketing (i.e. posters, newspaper coverages of the campaign). The framework was indeed helpful in creating a picture that was clear and indicative of the practices by the political parties or candidates.

4. METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK REVISION

Despite the meticulous approach adopted by Uta Russmann and Jakob Svensson in developing the content analysis framework to study corporations on Instagram, the analysis of a 6-month data from @govbn (Negara Brunei Government's official Instagram account) was not able to be performed satisfactorily (for full analysis, please refer to Mayyer Ling and Deterding forthcoming 2020). The framework needs to be revised on several basis, each of which will be discussed in this section. Variables are, again, italicised for emphasis in this section.

4.1. *Language used in captions and comments*

The framework by Uta Russmann and Jakob Svensson posits two assumptions, (1) captions are not mandatory for posts to be uploaded on Instagram, and (2) Instagram is a monolingual platform. While the first assumption is true, institutions and corporations hardly ever leave captions blank in posts. At the very least, hashtags would still be found and, for the most part, as demonstrated in Mayyer Ling and Deterding (forthcoming 2020), for corporations with multilingual audience, multiple languages are used in posts. Following the second assumption, Instagram is an SNS that is utilised worldwide, and a large portion of the world's population is bi- and multi-lingual (British Academy 2013; Cambridge Assessment English Perspectives 2018). Language has long since been found to be reflective of the political agenda and power structure in a society (Van Dijk 1989) and therefore, should be integral to the content analysis of corporations' use of Instagram and other SNSs. The language use in posts as captions and comments would be crucial in understanding the subtle cues such as corporations' and stakeholders' attitudes, political inclinations, power distance

– some variables that are certainly of importance in communications research.

4.2. Replacement of *personalisation* with *accountability*

The second variable that warrants reconsideration is *personalisation*, referring exclusively to the extent in which Instagram is used to manage the corporation's image. The scope of this variable originally focuses on an individual's engagement with the followers. This was assumed to allow followers to identify with the poster who happens to presumably be a political candidate. If Instagram is a platform that can only be used by individuals – and not corporations – this variable will perhaps make sense. In reality, this is not the case. Corporations – including the private and public sector – use them too. Considering the expanse of potential posters for these various institutions, there are probably a team of posters instead of only one person who decides what gets posted on the institution's Instagram page. They may even have public relations officers and offices that makes such decision on a daily basis. Instagram, in this case, acts much like the traditional mass media and so it is much less important the identify with the individuals who manages the Instagram page and much more important to find out whether the audience (followers) are able to know who the corporation is and what they represent.

Thus, there has to be a replacement for *personalisation* that encompasses this idea of ownership of posts found on Instagram, and this can be termed *accountability*. The redefined scope should essentially provide the response to questions such as: 'Do you know who posted this?' Corporations can choose to be at the forefront of the announcement, or background. Much like the traditional forms of institution-stakeholder communications, the foregrounding and backgrounding of actors is highly reflective of the ownership capacity and accountability. For reasons that can certainly be uncovered by further research, the redefined and replacement of *personalisation* would allow for a much broader content analysis for institutions' intention of use of Instagram.

4.3. Replacement of *privatisation* with *substantiation*

The third variable that needs revision is what Russman and Svensson (2016) termed *privatisation*. The former scope of this variable is the blurring of boundaries between private and professional lives of individual candidates; to bring an approachable nuance to the political scene. This blurring of boundaries happens when institutions perform their corporate social responsibility (CSR) activities too. It does not, however, have the same effect of blurring the boundaries between private and personal lives of the corporation – or rather, the lives of the people that makes up the corporation. The discrepancy in effect is not particularly disadvantageous. In a sense, CSR activities allow stakeholders to be familiar with the different layers in which the corporations operate and the communal causes that they advocate for. This is a more important function than merely being able to identify a particular individual from a corporation. For example, Bank Islam Brunei Darussalam (BIBD) is a bank that aims to provide *syariah*-compliant banking services to the public that is clearly reflected in their press releases (Mayer Ling 2016). However, among other things, they also advocate for early childhood education and lifelong learning opportunities which is reflected in their BIBD ALAF CSR programmes. BIBD's core business and their CSR endeavours may not be directly related, but both presents the different layers of operations for the financial institution.

In practice, SNSs should be reflective of the layers in which an individual or institution operates. Hence, the focus on the blurring of boundaries between personal and professional lives of an individual is less relevant and more restrictive in application than *substantiation* – the ability to decipher the various layers in which an institution operates. Questions that should be responded to in *substantiation* includes: Does the post signify contribution towards the core business of the corporation? Is that part of the corporations' CSR? Does it increase the familiarity of the follower with the institutions? Referring to the very nature of institutional communication, it would certainly be desirable should an institution is able to communicate their core businesses and CSR efforts through to their various audiences. The effect of *substantiation* is still arguably similar to *privatisation* wherein the followers are able to be familiar with the poster or owner (corporation) of the Instagram account.

4.4. Expansion of *celebrities* to *celebrity or non-celebrity influencers*

The rise of SNSs, especially one that is visually inclined such as Instagram has opened up opportunities that did not exist in the realm of traditional media – the mediation of messages. Passive receiving of mediated messages from corporations can no longer be assumed to be a norm, or even a possibility. There has to be a bigger and more influencing front that improves the probability of messages to be received, or at least, less questioned. Celebrities has always been appointed as ambassadors to endorse brands in order to boost brand reach and promote emotional connection with potential customers (Erdogan 1999). Granted, this result is certainly not guaranteed (Apejaye 2013), but it certainly is a practice that is done by corporations whether they are in the business of providing services or conducting sales. Celebrities, however, are not the only strong influencing actors on SNSs, certainly not on Instagram. Non-celebrity influencers are also able to reach audiences in a similar scale as celebrities, which includes travel blogger couple Jack Morris (@doyoutravel) and Lauren Bullen (@gypsea_lust), make-up tutorial blogger-turned celebrity make-up artist Michelle Phan (@michellephan) and kids' toy reviewer Ryan Kaji (@ryantoysreview). In fact, the playing field is level in SNSs such as Instagram when comparison is made between the influences, believability and reach of celebrities and non-celebrities (Parry 2018). Considering the dominant age group demographic of Instagram and the rise of non-celebrity influencers in the SNSs marketing scene, it is necessary to expand the categorisation in this variable from merely *celebrities* to *celebrity or non-celebrity influencers*.

4.5. Expansion of scope of *campaign reference* to include *corporate social responsibility activities*

Campaign reference needs expansion for the logical reason that non-electoral corporations will render this category unnecessary or not applicable. Considering the miniscule portion of political candidates or parties in the sea of corporate and institutional Instagram users, the previous framework would inherently be irrelevant to a large user demographic. The expansion proposed would include counts for corporate social responsibility activities and campaigns (in general) which contextualises the presence of the corporations in the society in which they are serving. This categorisation is broadly applicable to a spectrum of corporations as most would presumably have their CSR foci, and a wide range of events by respective institutions such as sales, and new product launches.

It is pertinent that *campaign reference* be revised as Instagram is used by the poster to reach out to the audience, and thus a reference to a physical event where audiences are welcome to get in touch would facilitate the achievement of this goal too. In addition, SNSs is not merely a tool to disseminate information and carry out promotion – it is also a site for research and development, branding and crisis management (Parveen, Jaafar and Ainin 2015). Therefore, contextualisation is crucial to give a sense of communal presence and, more importantly, relevance. Such contextualisation can be accounted for in the expansion of the *campaign reference* to *corporate social responsibility (CSR) activities or campaigns*.

4.6. Expansion of items in categorisation of captions and comments by poster and by followers

In the current framework, it is assumed that comments and captions can only be in the forms of emoticons and/or words/phrases. In reality, comment spaces can include tags without emoticons nor words/phrases. There are two types of tags allowed in the current Instagram version, (1) account tags, regardless of whether these accounts belong to individuals or institutions, and (2) hashtags, which are unregulated and thus, users can create their own hashtags to generate conversations (Salazar 2017). These tags are powerful tools in SNSs whereby they allow the streamlining of conversations between users on the same platform, and simultaneously expand the reach of the poster. The current framework does not account for such practice and therefore, the expansion of the categorisation of *captions and comments* to include tags is a necessary addition.

4.7. Revised Framework for Content Analysis of Corporate Strategies on Instagram

Figure 2 is the revised content analysis framework to study organisations on Instagram developed by Russman and Svensson (2016) within the context of the 2014 Swedish elections. Despite the fact that the framework seem to work well when the analysis of political parties on Instagram was conducted (Filimonov, Russmann and Svernnson 2016), it could not maintain its relevance when applied to the bigger demographic of corporate use on Instagram. The revised or added elements on Instagram content analysis in Figure 2 improves the comprehensiveness and relevance of the framework to corporate use of Instagram.

Corporations – including the private and public sectors – operates on a level that is not too different from political parties, and the proposed revision that give rise to this *Framework for Content Analysis of Corporate Strategies on Instagram*, which encompass non-electoral activities carried out on Instagram. It is hoped that this revised framework will be adequately comprehensive to shed light in the practices and intentions of corporations in their use of the modern tool of marketing and corporate communications Instagram.

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6. LIST OF FIGURES:

Perception <i>Picture/video with or without its caption</i>	Image Management <i>Self- and organisation-representation to manage audience's impression</i>	Integration <i>Integratedness with existing information and communication strategies</i>	Interactivity <i>Number of likes and postings (by poster) and comments (by poster and followers)</i>
Perspective <input type="checkbox"/> (Rather) official <input type="checkbox"/> (Rather) snapshot/selfie <input type="checkbox"/> Not applicable	Personalisation <input type="checkbox"/> (Rather) personalised <input type="checkbox"/> (Rather) not personalised <input type="checkbox"/> Balanced/ambivalent	Hybridity <input type="checkbox"/> Reference to traditional communication instrument <input type="checkbox"/> Reference to new media <input type="checkbox"/> Not applicable	Contents or Captions and Comments by the Poster <input type="checkbox"/> Emoticons only <input type="checkbox"/> Postings with intrinsic value <input type="checkbox"/> Postings without intrinsic value Negative vs Positive tonality <input type="checkbox"/> Negative <input type="checkbox"/> Positive <input type="checkbox"/> Neutral/ambivalent Reciprocity <input type="checkbox"/> Reaction is related to previous comment <input type="checkbox"/> Reaction is not related to previous comment
Broadcasting <input type="checkbox"/> (Rather) broadcasting <input type="checkbox"/> (Rather) not broadcasting <input type="checkbox"/> Balanced/ambivalent	Privatisation <input type="checkbox"/> (Rather) professional context <input type="checkbox"/> (Rather) private context <input type="checkbox"/> Balanced/ambivalent	Shared Content <input type="checkbox"/> Shared <input type="checkbox"/> Not Shared	Comments by the Followers <input type="checkbox"/> Emoticons only <input type="checkbox"/> Postings with intrinsic value <input type="checkbox"/> Postings without intrinsic value Negative vs Positive Tonality <input type="checkbox"/> Negative <input type="checkbox"/> Positive <input type="checkbox"/> Neutral/ambivalent Reciprocity <input type="checkbox"/> Reaction is related to previous comment <input type="checkbox"/> Reaction is not related to previous comment
Mobilisation <input type="checkbox"/> (Rather) mobilising <input type="checkbox"/> (Rather) not mobilising <input type="checkbox"/> Balanced/ambivalent	Celebrities <input type="checkbox"/> Celebrity visible (and who) <input type="checkbox"/> Celebrity not visible	Campaign Reference <input type="checkbox"/> Explicit campaign reference <input type="checkbox"/> No explicit campaign reference	Comments by the Followers <input type="checkbox"/> Emoticons only <input type="checkbox"/> Postings with intrinsic value <input type="checkbox"/> Postings without intrinsic value Negative vs Positive Tonality <input type="checkbox"/> Negative <input type="checkbox"/> Positive <input type="checkbox"/> Neutral/ambivalent Reciprocity <input type="checkbox"/> Reaction is related to previous comment <input type="checkbox"/> Reaction is not related to previous comment

Figure 1: Figure 1: Variables for content analysis to political parties on Instagram adapted from Russmann and Svensson (2016)

Language <i>Language used in picture/video, captions, comments and hashtags</i>	Perception <i>Picture/video with or without its caption</i>	Image Management <i>Self- and organisation-representation to manage audience's impression</i>	Integration <i>Integratedness with existing information and communication strategies</i>	Interactivity <i>Number of likes and postings (by poster) and comments (by poster and followers)</i>
Picture/video <input type="checkbox"/> One language (and what) <input type="checkbox"/> Two or more (and what) <input type="checkbox"/> Not applicable	Perspective <input type="checkbox"/> (Rather) official <input type="checkbox"/> (Rather) snapshot/selfie <input type="checkbox"/> Not applicable	Accountability <input type="checkbox"/> (Rather) foregrounding <input type="checkbox"/> (Rather) backgrounding <input type="checkbox"/> Balanced/ambivalent	Hybridity <input type="checkbox"/> Reference to traditional communication instrument <input type="checkbox"/> Reference to new media <input type="checkbox"/> Not applicable	Contents or Captions and Comments by the Poster <input type="checkbox"/> Emoticons <input type="checkbox"/> Tags <input type="checkbox"/> Hashtags <input type="checkbox"/> Postings with intrinsic value <input type="checkbox"/> Postings without intrinsic value Negative vs Positive Tonality <input type="checkbox"/> Negative <input type="checkbox"/> Positive <input type="checkbox"/> Neutral/ambivalent Reciprocity <input type="checkbox"/> Reaction is related to previous comment <input type="checkbox"/> Reaction is not related to previous comment
Captions <input type="checkbox"/> One language (and what) <input type="checkbox"/> Two or more (and what) <input type="checkbox"/> Not applicable	Broadcasting <input type="checkbox"/> (Rather) broadcasting <input type="checkbox"/> (Rather) not broadcasting <input type="checkbox"/> Balanced/ambivalent	Substantiation <input type="checkbox"/> (Rather) substantiated <input type="checkbox"/> (Rather) not substantiated <input type="checkbox"/> Balanced/ambivalent	Shared Content <input type="checkbox"/> Shared <input type="checkbox"/> Not Shared	Comments by the Followers <input type="checkbox"/> Emoticons <input type="checkbox"/> Tags <input type="checkbox"/> Hashtags <input type="checkbox"/> Postings with intrinsic value <input type="checkbox"/> Postings without intrinsic value Negative vs Positive Tonality <input type="checkbox"/> Negative <input type="checkbox"/> Positive <input type="checkbox"/> Neutral/ambivalent Reciprocity <input type="checkbox"/> Reaction is related to previous comment <input type="checkbox"/> Reaction is not related to previous comment
Comments <input type="checkbox"/> One language (and what) <input type="checkbox"/> Two or more (and what) <input type="checkbox"/> Not applicable	Mobilisation <input type="checkbox"/> (Rather) mobilising <input type="checkbox"/> (Rather) not mobilising <input type="checkbox"/> Balanced/ambivalent	Celebrity or Non-celebrity Influencers <input type="checkbox"/> Visible (and who) <input type="checkbox"/> Not visible	Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) Activities or Campaigns <input type="checkbox"/> Explicit CSR/campaign reference <input type="checkbox"/> No explicit CSR/campaign reference	Comments by the Followers <input type="checkbox"/> Emoticons <input type="checkbox"/> Tags <input type="checkbox"/> Hashtags <input type="checkbox"/> Postings with intrinsic value <input type="checkbox"/> Postings without intrinsic value Negative vs Positive Tonality <input type="checkbox"/> Negative <input type="checkbox"/> Positive <input type="checkbox"/> Neutral/ambivalent Reciprocity <input type="checkbox"/> Reaction is related to previous comment <input type="checkbox"/> Reaction is not related to previous comment
Hashtags <input type="checkbox"/> One language (and what) <input type="checkbox"/> Two or more (and what) <input type="checkbox"/> Not applicable				

Figure 2: Framework for Content Analysis of Corporate Strategies on Instagram