E-C Identification through Theme Analysis in the *Unilever Heroes* Program[1]

Condra Antoni[1], Irham[2], Irene Ossi Widyastuti[3], Maria Christiani[4]
1. Politeknik Negeri Batam, Indonesia, condra@polibatam.ac.id
2. Maulana Malik Ibrahim State Islamic University Malang, Indonesia, irhamaladist@gmail.com
3. NovoLanguage, the Netherlands, irene.ossi.widyastuti@gmail.com
4. NovoLanguage, the Netherlands, mariachristianism@gmail.com

Abstract

The present paper discusses Employee-Company (E-C) Identification in *Heroes* program at Unilever Company. The company has 400 brands worldwide focusing on health and well-being and its products are sold in over 190 countries. It leads fast-moving consumer goods and many of these brands have long-standing, strong social missions, including Lifebuoy's drive to promote hygiene through hand washing with soap, and Dove's campaign for real beauty. In line with the company's social missions, Unilever creates an internal CSR program called *Unilever Heroes*. It is a CSR program for employees who have shown extraordinary initiative, integrity, and commitment to the company. Any employee can nominate a colleague who fits this criteria, rate & also give comments via Heroes platform. The platform demonstrates the most recent, highest rated, and most commented employee stories. Best selected stories are made into video case studies shown at the annual leadership conference and shared with interviews on digital channel (Youtube, Facebook, etc). The videos of employees' stories contain employees' utterances that may indicate how the employees perceive themselves and the company. This perception is in line with Employee-Company (E-C) Identification conceptualization (Kim *et al.*, 2010). On the basis of Kim *et al.*'s E-C identification model, the present study attempts to look at theme analysis of the utterances in the videos. Content analysis (Kohut and Segar, 1992; Ngai and Singh, 2014) is employed. In addition, this study underpins the contribution of linguistics in delving global corporate communication.

Keywords: E-C Identification, theme analysis, CSR

Introduction

The present paper discusses Employee-Company (E-C) Identification in internal CSR program by taking *Heroes* program at Unilever Company as point of departure. As extracted from the company's website, Unilever is a multinational company that has more than 400 brands focusing on health and well-being, 14 of which generate sales in excess of €1 billion a year, and its products are sold in over 190 countries. It leads fast-moving consumer goods and many of these brands have long-standing, strong social missions, including Lifebuoy's drive to promote hygiene through hand washing with soap, and Dove's campaign for real beauty.

The company has visions to make sustainable living commonplace, improve health & well-being, reduce environmental impact, and enhance livelihoods. It is committed to providing consumers around the world with the products to help people look good, feel good, and get more out of life. Its brand campaigns consist of five key priorities:
a. A better future for children
b. A healthier future

c. A more confident future
d. A better future for the planet
e. A better future for farming and farmers.

Unilever believes that to succeed requires "…the highest standards of corporate behavior towards everyone they work with, the communities they touch and the environment on which they have an impact." (Unilever.com, 2015).

Aligning with that belief, Unilever creates an internal CSR program called *Unilever Heroes*. It is a CSR program for employees who have shown extraordinary initiative, integrity, and commitment to the company. Any employee can nominate a colleague who fits this criteria, rate & also give comments via Heroes platform (a digital platform linked to country-specific intranets).

The platform demonstrates the most recent, highest rated, and most commented employee stories. Best selected stories are made into video case studies shown at the annual leadership conference and shared with interviews on digital channel (Youtube, Facebook, etc). The winners are exceptional and from different backgrounds of business. Their actions have contributed towards Unilever sustainable growth mission and their efforts have exemplified Unilever values.

The videos of employees' stories contain employees' utterances that may indicate how the employees perceive themselves and the company. This perception is in line with Kim *et al* (2010)'s study on Employee-Company (E-C) Identification. On the basis of Kim *et al.*'s E-C identification model, the present study attempts to looks at theme analysis by employing language use in the videos of Unilever Heroes' program.

The extant research use questionnaires to identify E-C identification (cf, Kim *et al.*, 2010) and thematic analysis to analyze CEO message, CEO letters, or annual reports (cf. Ngai and Singh, 2014; de Groot *et al.*, 2006). It is clear eventually that there is a gap in terms of research apporach that needs to fill in. Thus, the present study aims at enriching E-C identification study by employing linguistic perspective.

Literature review

Our study relies on the construct form proposed by Kim *et al* (2010) as the baseline. According to Kim *et al.* (2010), it is important to investigate the role of employees in internal CSR program since it contributes to "a key factor in terms of building an organizational commitment" (Kim, *et al.*, 2010, p. 565). Organizational commitment is associated with E-C identification. E-C identification is the perception on how the employees identify themselves toward the company they are working for. Analyzing E-C identification should take CSR initiatives; i.e. CSR association and CSR participation, into account. CSR associations are employees' perceptions towards company's external CSR that build company's identity. CSR associations do not directly associate with E–C identification of a firm. Rather, CSR associations influence E–C identification through Perceived External Prestige (PEP) or how external stakeholders (e.g. community, consumers, etc) perceive the company. In other words, good impression from society plays an important role in determining whether employees have sense of belonging to their company. CSR participation is defined as employees' participative behavior towards external CSR activities. The result from Kim *et al.*'s study finds that CSR participation influence E-C identification. In the end, E-C identification leads to employees' commitment to the company.

In regard to theme analysis, there are some previous studies that address theme analysis in corporate communication. Kohut and Segars (1992) study the difference between high

performing and low performing firms as seen from language in use within corporate presidents' letters. Analysis of language use includes frame of themes.

The study yields wordier technical characteristic of high performing firms compared to low performing firms. This means that presidents' letters in low performing firms are statistically less elaborated than high performing firms. By employing content and statistical analysis, it is found that high performing firms indicated higher percentage of addressing some past theme compared to low performing firms. In contrast, low performing firms gained higher percentage of "future references to operating philosophy" (p. 14) in comparison to high performing firms. Kohut and Segars analyze language use in written data in their study. Hence, this research gives a valuable avenue to the present study to further investigate language use in the spoken data from the videos of Heroes program.

Ngai and Singh (2014), in another extent, examine the use of CEO's message and CEO's addressee in China and Greater China websites. The former refers to "corporate messages as an instrument or complements to action", whilst the latter refers to "formal speeches delivered to an audience" (p.355). Their study listed leading corporations and multinational corporations in Greater China.

The use of CEOs' addresses and messages in website can be delved by language use, themes, and linguistic style. To Ngai and Singh (2014), examining the theme is a worthwhile doing due to the fact that there are only a limited number of studies adopting theme in the research.

In accordance with the two mentioned studies, de Groot *et al.* (2006) look at text theme and photographic theme in managerial forewords. Text theme is defined as "a cluster of words that are conceptually related within text boundary" (de Groot *et al.*, 2006, p. 233), albeit having incoherent meaning. De Groot *et al.* (2006) exemplify 'future performance' theme which can be derived from the words or phrases such as "prospects, outlook we expect, forward, recovery, continue, Company X will be investing" (p. 233). In relation to keywords, they further argue that keywords may not be restricted to single theme per se. One keyword can be attributed to one theme or more. Photographic theme, on the other hand, is regarded as a nonlinguistic element that constructs the concept of text theme.

Whilst previous studies focus on theme analysis on top management documents, (e.g. CEO, chairman, and president), which are in written form (Kohut and Segars, 1992; Ngai and Singh, 2014; de Groot *et al.*, 2006), we think it will also be worthwhile to employ theme analysis on verbal communication in managers' and employees' level via Heroes' videos.

Research Questions

In this study, we will investigate E-C identification of Unilever Heroes videos through linguistics approach. Our research questions are proposed as below:
1. What are the themes of the language use in "Unilever Heroes" videos?
2. Do the themes in "Unilever Heroes" videos support E-C identification?

Method

Rather than utilizing questionnaire like Kim *et al* (2010), we employ theme analysis used by Ngai and Singh (2014) and de Groot *et al.* (2006) in order to elucidate E-C identification, CSR initiative, and PEP. Yet, we incorporated the construct from Kim *et al.* (2010) when determining E-C identification, CSR initiative, CSR association, PEP, and commitment.

Content analysis is employed in the study by further looking at themes in the language use in the Heroes videos. In this study, we replicate Ngai and Singh's (2014) methodology that use the baseline of theme based on the previous study; i.e. Kohut and Segar's (1992) findings. Hence, our study also benefits from the previous study of Kim *et al.*'s (2010) 'construct and measures' to be our thematic baseline. Construct items consist of CSR associations, CSR participation, E-C Identification, PEP, and commitment. Measures are statements which reflect construct items. For example, in CSR associations' construct one of the measures is "My company is committed to using a portion of its profits to help nonprofits." The present study aims at examining whether or not the tool is applicable when it comes to analysis of language in use in the Heroes videos.

The present study additionally employs explicit and implicit keywords to thoroughly identify the theme. Explicit keyword here is defined based on the notion of text theme (de Groot, *et al.*, 2006) which refers to "a cluster words that are conceptually related within text boundary, albeit having incoherent meaning" (p. 233). From this definition, it means that explicit keywords refer to the words or phrases that emanate in the video. Implicit keyword, on the other hand, is derived from Ngai and Singh (2014) who determine related keywords based on language use in the sentences under their study. This latter notion refers to a possible word or phrase that covers explicit keywords in more general meaning. Implicit keywords, afterwards, enable us to determine the central topic of what the speakers utter in the videos. The central topic therefore becomes the theme, which is the main focus of this study.

To sum up, the aforementioned thematic categorization process on previous studies provides an important platform for the present study which attempts to figure out language use manifested in the theme of Heroes program.

Procedure

To perform our analysis, we collected 12 videos of Unilever Heroes in 2012-2014 as our data. The videos mostly contain how the Unilever employees are engaged with CSR activities in the society. Some of the videos also contain how the Unilever employees dedicate themselves to the company and help the company to produce a creative approach for more effective working environment. We used speech spoken by employees in Unilever Heroes videos as our unit of analysis. We then transcribed the speech into text. From the transcription, we analyzed the language used by these employees to define theme; that is by defining explicit keywords used, related phrases, and implicit keywords. Finally, the themes are matched with the construct and measures by Kim *et al* (2010).

Result

In this section we will elaborate our result. The themes under E-C identification, CSR association, CSR participation, PEP, and commitment (Kim *et al.* 2010) are categorized based on the speech of Heroes program, as displayed more detail in table 1 and 2. In E-C identification, we found 'Sense of Belonging theme', 'Bonding' and 'Loyalty/Sincerity' themes which are comprised of words or phrases such as *main satisfaction for me, my market getting served, my delivery, fall in love with all my projects, my happiness* and *my whole team*. These keywords are conceptualized on related implicit keywords like 'feeling company's success or 'getting benefit from company'. CSR association, additionally, merely covers 'Beneficial Contribution' theme which can be detected through the use of words like *proud, our planet, and together*. The theme,

moreover, is hinted by implicit keywords such as 'benefits to environment', 'benefits to employee' and 'benefits to stakeholder' in another extent.

Unlike CSR association, CSR participation encompasses two major themes; 'Team Involvement' and 'Self Involvement'. These themes are supported by the use of words or phrases like *my team, together with, we, I, helping others*, and *happiness*. The following category is Perceived External Prestige (PEP) category. It is realized in two themes; 'external evaluation' and 'internal evaluation'. Being comprised in these themes are words or phrases such as *recognized, appreciated, image, one of the biggest in the world,* which can be represented by 'external positive feedback' keyword and *has changed my life completely, big achievement, and change my life* for 'internal positive feedback' keyword.

Surprisingly, within commitment category, we could not find any utterance that best represents employee's commitment towards the company, therefore we did not assign a theme within this category. The following are the examples of some sentences from the videos that belong to CSR association, CSR participation, E-C identification, and PEP.

CSR association
We have been looking for the right model to embed our USLP agenda into our brand and business plan in a way that our business, customers, and consumers all benefit from it.

CSR participation
Finally we set a clear goal to make joint efforts to help tackle environmental threat in Tibet, where 40% of its grassland has been desert. The more LUX product sold, the more grass we plant in Tibet.

E-C identification
And I am happy and feel proud that I can make a big difference to our planet, together with my team through daily work.

PEP
Go green go LUX was recognized and appreciated by many celebrities and local officials.

To recapitulate, the data show that language use embodied in Heroes videos are saliently attributed to E-C identification, CSR association, CSR participation, and PEP as they appear in Kim *et al.*'s (2010) study. However, unlike Kim *et al* (2010) who use questionnaire as tool of investigation, the present study meticulously looks at the language use performed by employees in the Heroes videos.

Table 1.
Implicit and explicit keywords associated to themes

Theme	Implicit keywords (Ngai and Singh, 2014)	Explicit keywords (de Groot *et al.*, 2006)
Beneficial Contribution	Benefits to the environment	I, happy, proud, together, my team, big difference, our planet

	Benefits to employee	I, value, our company, deeper understanding
	Benefits to stakeholder	we, our brand, increase social impact, give back to community, our business, decent living
Team involvement	Cooperation	proud, together with my team, make difference, happy, Miguel & I
	Team contribution	My team, together with, make difference, help tackle environmental threat, we
Self-involvement	Self-contribution	I, looking forward, give back to community,
	Enthusiastic involvement	I, love, helping others, happiness
Sense of belonging	Feeling company's success	main satisfaction for me, my market getting served, my delivery, fall in love with all my projects, my whole team
Bonding	Getting benefit of company's success	sustainability is my passion, has changed my life completely, I have grown,
	Happy to work	look forward to coming to work, lord, bless, job,
Loyalty/Sincerity	Declaration of enjoyment	I, love, my happiness, job
Responsibility	Responsibility	We, with commitment of the whole factory
External evaluation	External positive feedback	recognized, appreciated, local officials, celebrities, image, more shining, make big difference, move people
Internal evaluation	Internal positive feedback	change my life, big achievement, across the world, I, satisfaction and pride,

Table 2. Distribution of themes

Construct (Kim *et al*., 2010)	Theme (Unilever Heroes videos)
E-C Identification	Sense of Belonging Bonding Loyalty/Sincerity
CSR association	Beneficial Contribution
CSR Participation	Team Involvement Self-Involvement
PEP	External Evaluation Internal Evaluation
Commitment	-

Discussion

With regard to our first research question: what are the themes of the language use in "Unilever Heroes" videos?; the aforementioned result shows that the language used by Unilever employees in the Heroes videos forms 8 major themes, i.e. Sense of Belonging, Bonding, Beneficial Contribution, Loyalty/sincerity, Team Involvement, Self-Involvement, External Evaluation, and Internal Evaluation. These themes are based on 4 categories of Conceptual Model by Kim *et al*. (2010) that are E-C identification, CSR association, CSR participation, PEP. The themes that were selected from the utterances spoken by employees in Unilever Heroes videos represent how the employees feel and perceive their own company and how they see themselves in relation to the company.

As previously mentioned in the result section, we could not find any utterance from the employees in Unilever Heroes videos that expresses their commitment to the company. The possible reason underlying the absent of commitment in our finding is due to the method we use. Kim *et al*. (2010) intentionally design questionnaire to figure out the commitment, meanwhile, we merely depend on language use of the speakers in the video.

Related to our second question: do the themes in Unilever Heroes videos support E-C identification? We found that there are in total 16 utterances from 12 videos that represent E-C identification. We found that the employees in the videos expressed strong ties and sense of belonging to the company by their expressions of pride, gratitude, and happiness to work such as, *'And I am happy and feel proud that I can make a big difference to our planet, together with my team through daily work.', 'I look forward to coming to work', 'I love doing this job because helping others is my happiness', 'I usually fall in love with all my projects, but this one felt especially gratifying since the beginning.'.* These forms of expression reveal how the employees feel a strong bond with the company and that they perceive Unilever, or more specifically the programs in Unilever where they are working on, as something that gives benefits to themselves and the community so that there is a sense of pride when they work for Unilever.

This relationship among those expressions can be an indication that E-C identification is influenced by other factors, such as CSR association, CSR participation, and PEP; i.e. how the employees feel strong ties and sense of belonging to the company is influenced by how the company makes social

contribution and participate to help the community and how the company is perceived from its external surroundings. However, the utterances in the videos are not enough to make such generalization. Further study is needed to prove such claim.

Scope and Limitation

As mentioned in the title, the scope of our study is only limited to the language use in Unilever Heroes videos so that we do not make generalization out of it. Despite the findings and discussion resulted from the previous sections, our study also has some limitations. Although the findings show that the themes extracted from employees in Unilever Heroes videos support E-C identification, the amount of utterances as the source of data was quite small (42 utterances from 12 videos in total of all categories, some utterances belong to more than one category). Besides, the videos may be scripted so that employees' utterances may not be as natural as in one-on-one interview.

Suggestion for Future Study

Related to our limitation in this study, we suggest that in the future study a one-on-one English interview can be conducted to get more insight on how Unilever employees perceive their companies through Heroes program as an internal CSR program. Questionnaires and survey can also be conducted to support the analysis. We emphasize future analysis on the use of English in internal CSR program, especially in global corporate communication for multinational company as it leads to global understanding in worldwide business environment since English is known as *lingua franca* in international business context (Nickerson, 2005).

Theoretical and practical/managerial implication

Heroes program as an internal CSR in its relationship to employees' participation is in line with global corporate communication in terms of integrating internal and external communication activities to create more positive image for stakeholders (Mazzei, 2014). This study corroborates the organization communication as the process of creating and exchanging messages within the network. By looking at E-C identification or how employees perceive themselves to the company, we can figure out how the company communicate within the organization to create a more positive image for the internal stakeholders, i.e. the employees in this case, that can also be integrated with company's communication towards external stakeholders (community, consumers, etc.); i.e. via external CSR activities.

This study will also encourage employees to have ideas that can improve companies and facilitate E-C identification for the company and society. The themes reflect the quality of CSR internal implications for the employee and the company itself.

Conclusion

Notwithstanding the limitation of the present study, it underpins the notion of linguistics position in delving global corporate communication. Not only does language use in Heroes' program postulate the essence of Employee-Company identification, it also exhaustively evokes a potential thematic analysis for future research in the similar study. As it is argued in the previous studies, (cf. de Groot *et al*. 2006; Ngai & Singh 2014) such coherence discourse is prevalently encapsulated within the theme that can be driven by the use of related (key)words or phrases. Thus, this study on language use in Unilever Heroes program found seven themes that undoubtedly support E-C identification.

References

de Groot. E., Korzilius, H., Nickerson, C., & Gerritsen, M. (January 01, 2006). A Corpus Analysis of Text Themes and Photographic Themes in Managerial Forewords of Dutch-English and British Annual General Reports. *IEEE Transactions on Professional Communication Pc, 49*(3), 217-235.

Kim, H., Lee, M., Lee, H., Kim, N. (2010). Corporate Social Responsibility and Employee-Company Identification. *Journal of Business Ethics, 95* (4)*,* 557-569.

Kohut, G., & Segars, A. (1993). The President's Letter to Stockholders: An Examination of Corporate Communication Strategy. *Journal of Business Communication, 29(*1), 7-21.

Mazzei, A. (2014). A multidisciplinary approach for a new understanding of corporate communication. *Corporate Communications: an International Journal, 19,* 2, 216-230.

Ngai, C., Singh, R. (2014). Communication with Stakeholders through Corporate Web Sites: An Exploratory Study on the CEO Messages of Major Corporations in Greater China. *Journal of Business and Technical Communication, 28*(3), 352-394.

Nickerson, C. (2005). English as a lingua franca in international business contexts. *English For Specific Purposes*, *24*(4), 367-380. doi:10.1016/j.esp.2005.02.001

Unilever.com,. (2015). *Unilever's Heroes | About us | Unilever Global*. Retrieved 23 March 2015, from http://www.unilever.com/aboutus/heroes/