

Accounting and Business Research >

Volume 41, 2011 - [Issue 5](#)

13,636 234

Views

CrossRef citations to date

0

Altmetric

Original Articles

A conceptual framework of impression management: new insights from psychology, sociology and critical perspectives

Doris M. Merkl-Davies  & Niamh M. Brennan

Pages 415-437 | Published online: 25 May 2011

 Cite this article  <https://doi.org/10.1080/00014788.2011.574222>

Sample our
Economics, Finance,
Business & Industry Journals
>> [Sign in here](#) to start your access
to the latest two volumes for 14 days

 Full Article

 Figures & data

 References

 Citations

 Metrics

 Reprints & Permissions

Read this article

Share

Abstract

In this paper we develop a conceptual framework, based on the concepts of rationality and motivation, which uses theories and empirical research from psychology/behavioural finance, sociology and critical accounting to systematise, advance and challenge research on impression management. The paper focuses on research that departs from economic concepts of impression management as opportunistic managerial discretionary disclosure behaviour resulting in reporting bias or 'cheap talk'. Using alternative rationality assumptions, such as bounded rationality, irrationality, substantive rationality and the notion of rationality as a social construct, we conceptualise impression management in alternative ways as (1) self-serving bias, (2) symbolic management and (3) accounting rhetoric. This contributes to an enhanced understanding of impression management in a corporate reporting context.

Keywords:

discretionary narrative disclosures

impression management

rationality

Acknowledgements

We are grateful to two anonymous reviewers for constructive comments on the paper.

Notes

The dichotomy between cognitive and emotional factors can be traced back to the Cartesian model of the mind. Descartes regarded rationality and emotions to be distinct spheres (Lakoff and Johnson [1999](#)). However, emotions, which are associated with the realm of the body, can influence the mind.

The predominant economics-based perspective on impression management is based on a closed-system concept of the organisation as 'separate from its environment and encompassing a set of stable and easily identifiable participants' (Scott and Davis [2007](#), p. 31). By contrast, the alternative perspectives (particularly the sociological and critical perspectives) introduced in this paper are based on an open-system concept of the organisation as being shaped, supported and infiltrated by its environment (Scott and Davis [2007](#)).

Another strand of research does not deny the existence of impression management, but regards reporting bias as 'cheap talk' (Benabou and Laroque [1992](#)) that is ignored by investors (see [Figure 2](#)).

The reporting bias may either be the result of impression management or managerial hubris.

Related research

People also read

Recommended articles

Cited by
234

[Accounting narratives and impression management on social media >](#)

Jessica H. Yang et al.

Accounting and Business Research

Published online: 26 Jul 2017

[Financial reporting of good news and bad news: evidence from accounting narratives >](#)

Mark Clatworthy et al.

Accounting and Business Research

Published online: 28 Feb 2012

[Do firms effectively communicate with financial stakeholders? A conceptual model of corporate communication in a capital market context >](#)

Niamh M. Brennan et al.

Accounting and Business Research

Published online: 4 Jun 2018



Information for

[Authors](#)

[R&D professionals](#)

[Editors](#)

[Librarians](#)

[Societies](#)

Opportunities

[Reprints and e-prints](#)

[Advertising solutions](#)

[Accelerated publication](#)

[Corporate access solutions](#)

Open access

[Overview](#)

[Open journals](#)

[Open Select](#)

[Dove Medical Press](#)

[F1000Research](#)

Help and information

[Help and contact](#)

[Newsroom](#)

[All journals](#)

[Books](#)

Keep up to date

Register to receive personalised research and resources by email



Sign me up



Copyright © 2026 Informa UK Limited [Privacy policy](#)

[Cookies](#) [Terms & conditions](#) [Accessibility](#)

Registered in England & Wales No. 01072954
5 Howick Place | London | SW1P 1WG



Taylor & Francis
by informa