

Managing corporate image through social media



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Received date: 04/12/2024

Accepted date: 26/12/2024

Publication date: 01/01/2025

Abstract:

This research paper deals with the significance of utilizing social media in order to manage the corporate image. It sheds light on the importance of corporate image in business environment, and the most important requirements of building a positive corporate image. It highlights also the main mechanisms followed in managing corporate image on social media. Finally, the study concludes that building corporate image through social media is a long-term goal that's why it requires continuity, strictness, and diligent work in order to ensure reaching a respectable and positive image.

Keywords: Corporate image; Social media.

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Introduction:

In the recent years, the world has known a huge digital revolution that affected all aspects of life, including the communicational side, which has completely changed due to the emergence of new means of communication such as phone calls, short text messages, e-mails, and social media.

Social media platforms are considered as the most beneficial communication medium in the current era owing to the large features they provide, such as: facilitating sharing contents, immediate interaction, wide spread of information and news, the ability to connect with people...etc. These advantages have encouraged corporations and businessmen to adopt this technology in order to achieve the organizational objectives, including approaching the company from its customers and bringing new clients from all over the world, in addition to its ability to influence and convince the targeted customers about the product or the service offered by the company.

All of these characteristics pushed the companies to think of implementing social media to manage their corporate image, by developing a strategic plan which is put into practice during a specific period of time, generally a long one, under the supervision of a qualified team in order to meet the visionary goals of the company concerning its corporate image.

From this perspective, this research paper came to shed light on implementing social media websites to manage corporate image, by asking the central question: **how do companies implement social media platforms to manage their corporate image?**

The following questions arise from this question:

- What does the terms "Social media" and "Corporate image" mean?
- What are the main characteristics of social media platforms?
- What are the essential mechanisms of managing corporate image through social media?

1. Theoretical framework of corporate image:

a. Definition:

The term "Corporate Image" has been defined from various perspectives that are mainly related to marketing, public relations, and economy.

In view of the origin of the word, the word "IMAGE" is derived from the Latin origin "IMAGO" which is related to the verb "IMITARI" that means "resemble".

In the late 1800s, the term "corporate image" was used by architects and designers who were the first to use this term by integrating the design of indoors and outdoor furniture, equipment, and trademark of shops, they aimed to

persuade people's perceptions of a company through regular presentations of the company to its large public. (Hansen and Christensen, p113)

Claud Robinson and Walter Parlo consider corporate image as the mental image formed in people's minds about institutions and companies, this image can be built due to direct or indirect experience, and it might be wise or unwise. It can also rely on evidence, documents, or on rumors and uncertain sayings. (Adjwa, p6)

It has also been defined from Reddi Narasimha as the impression of an organization in the minds of people, based on knowledge of its activities and experience of its behavior (Reddi, p209)

Philip Cutler has established that the corporate image begins from the product that the company afford to its public, it represent the most significant element from which the organization try to create a specific place in their customers' mind . (Choucha and Attia, 2020, p585)

The concept of corporate image has progressively grown from a simple context to a complex one due to the huge transformations that occurred in business environment, especially with regard to the technological advancements that had a remarkable impact on companies and consumers as well. The major enterprises in modern society discuss now what is known by "electronic corporate image" which refers to the efforts done by a company in order to build its image through the different digital platforms such us: websites, social media...etc.

Overall, we can say that corporate image refers to all perceptions, feelings, impressions that publics have about the company, these impressions might appear in the three following different forms:

- Negative: the company seeks to transform it into positive impressions.
- Positive: the company seeks to maintain and strengthen it.
- Neutral: the company seeks to bring it into alignment with its position.

b.Categories of corporate image:

Corporate image is classified according to the scholar Beatch into the four essential following categories: (Allal and Bekka,2021, P89)

- Personal image: it includes all the beliefs, ethics, and values applied inside the company on which its objectives are based.
- Future image: it is mainly linked to the vision of the company and its objectives.
- Current image: it refers to the image that the public have about the company, which is based on the current practices of the corporation.

From this classification, we understand that building corporate image involves many factors, which makes this operation more challenging, the company should pay attention to the individual differences of the large public when transmitting messages and creating contents in order to avoid any conflicts that can occur due to racial or ethnic insinuations. The company is also required to have a clear image

about its vision and objectives so that it can possess the ability to establish the main features of its future corporate image, with keeping alertness over the external environment and being aware of any threats that might menace its stability or damage its current and future image.

c. Advantages of a positive corporate image:

The majority of modern organizations are now aware of how important it is to have a positive corporate image considering that it provides a lot of benefits to the organization. These benefits are reviewed in the following points :

- **Increasing sales:** a good image of a company can significantly boost its sales due to its ability to enhance customers' trust and reinforce their faith in the products or the services that the company provides.
- **Customers loyalty:** customers' fidelity is closely linked to the image they have about the company, they cannot sustain being loyal to a company that have a bad reputation or a negative image, especially if this image was caused by a direct engagement or a disappointing experience with a company, so that companies should be very aware about the importance of preserving loyal customers.
- **Bringing new customers:** when a company has a positive corporate image, it stimulates people's curiousness and pushes them to try the products or the services that the company offers, also a loyal customer is expected to influence and bring at least 2 or 3 new customers.
- **Employee's satisfaction:** there is a strong relationship between a positive corporate image, and employee's satisfaction. When the workers think positively about their company, they achieve a state of satisfaction, which leads to a better performance, and permits to enhance the quality of the products or the services offered by the company.
In our present time, employees are considered as a brand embassy, they can help in reinforcing the positive corporate image, as they are also able to damage it, that's why the companies nowadays show a great interest in developing internal relationships with employees.
- **Showing a good performance:** a positive corporate image provides a stable and productive organizational state, which permits the company to upgrade its capabilities and show high standards performance.
- **Reinforcing competitive advantages:** a positive corporate image serves to strengthen the company's competitive advantages, which allows the company to afford innovative ideas in the market.

d. Requirements of building a positive corporate image:

Developing a positive corporate image is a long-term goal that requires consecutive and hard work. There are a lot of conditions that should be taken into consideration through this process, the key points can be summarized as follows:

- **A motivated team:** determined and ambitious teamwork is a very crucial factor for building corporate image, the collectiveness of the team members enables to reach organization's goals and reinforces its image.
- **Communication plan:** a well-organized communication strategy is required in building corporate image, this strategy includes all the programs that should be done internally and externally by the company in order to develop a strong image in the market.
- **Social engagement:** social engagement is one of the most significant components that serve to enhance corporate image, it shows high level of responsibility towards society and individuals, which helps the company to improve its image.
- **Consistency:** the process of developing corporate image necessities sustainable work and continuous efforts, it requires persistent supervision and evaluation in order to reach this goal.

2. Social media: theoretical overview:

a. Definition:

The word social media has been defined by scholars from several perspectives, some of them emphasize in their definitions on the technological side, while others focus on the social aspect.

The concept of social media usually refers to the means of interactions among users, institutions, firms...etc, in which users create and share information in digital platforms, which means that social media have relevance not only for users and corporations but also on the human society. (Zhong, p15)

The term social media can be used to refer to any web 2.0 platform that allows two-way communication, comprising social networking sites, blogs, microblogs, and media sharing sites. The prominent characteristic of these technologies is that they allow the publics to participate, engage and express their opinions, therefore the users are often called participatory media, they are not just receivers of the content but they also participate in creating and sharing it. (Hadley, p23)

The term social media, as the majority of terms linked to technology, has a lot of characteristics; the main ones are explained as follows:

b. Main characteristics of social media:

- **Interactivity:** it is one of the main features of technology and social media as well, it refers to the ability of interacting and exchanging ideas and information among users. It also includes all virtual reactions such as: likes, emojis, stickers.
- **Digitalization:** in the context of business, the word digitalization refers to the use of technology advances in producing items and offering services, it

includes all the processes of marketing, public relations, and communication.

- **Virtuality:** all interactions and relationships that occur in social media are virtual, they happen in digital environment and not in real one.
- **Dispersion:** it refers to the fastness of delivering messages, information, and contents on social media. It is generally not possible to have control over the spread of content in virtual environment.
- **Contribution:** in this context, the term contribution refers to participations of users on social media, including engagements, sharing posts, pictures, videos, articles, or any kind of content.
- **Variability:** it signifies the wide diversity in contents, audiences, reactions, trends...etc.

c. The most famous social media platforms:

Facebook: it is a digital platform that was founded by Mark Zuckerberg in 2004, it enables the users to connect with people via messages or video calls, it also permits sharing ideas and expressing opinions through posting pictures, statuses, videos, or even live streamings. Nowadays Facebook has been a vital website for companies and businessmen, due to the benefits and that it offers such as the ability of selling and purchasing products in marketplace, launching sponsoring campaigns, and creating business accounts.

-YouTube: it's a website that allows sharing content in a form of videos which can be short (less than 1 min, and they are called shorts), or also long. YouTube is characterized by the wide variety of content such as: music, sports, economy, lifestyle, cooking, books...etc., it has provided the ability of creating content to everybody with favorable conditions which facilitated the appearance numerous content creators across the world who became famous just because of what they share on their channels on YouTube.

-Instagram: Instagram is a social media platform that allows people to share and create content in the form of reels (short videos) IGTV (long videos) pictures, and stories. It is considered as a significant tool of marketing either through influencers, or via sponsoring campaigns.

-Tiktok: it's a Chinese platform that was launched in 2016, it is based on sharing visual content in a form of short videos. A lot of modern companies now became aware about the importance of using this website in marketing and advertising their products due to its ability to make any content spread virally and appear to the right category of users depending on their interactions and engagements.

-Twitter: Twitter is one of the most widely utilized websites by companies, it allows sharing content as a form of posts (commonly called tweets) , images, videos..., it serves to enhance the public's awareness about the company, and reinforces the position of the company in the market.

-LinkedIn: it's a famous platform known among businessmen and institutions, which permits to connect and engage with other professionals by making the relationships of the business network perceptible. (Viveka, 2012 , p4)

This network permits to gather colleagues, clients, employers, competitors, and all categories linked to the business environment, so that they can exchange information, data, experiences, ideas...etc. On this social platform, the users are able to create personal profiles, on which they share their skills, academic qualifications, educations, and achievements. It also allows companies to introduce themselves by sharing articles, pictures, videos, which helps in building its corporate image.

Snapchat: it is a popular social platform among teenagers and youngers, which was created on 2001 by Evan Spiegel, Bobby Murphy, and R Reggie Brown. (phil, 2021, p10)

it permits chatting via messages or video calls, and sharing pictures, videos, and stories. It is considered as one of the most efficient marketing tools when targeting a young audience through the usage of influencers or snap Ads. The ability of building corporate image by implementing this platform is nearly possible, although its effectiveness depends on the targeted public.

On 2021, Snapchat had 265 million daily active users and over 5 billion snaps every single day. In the United States over 75 percent of 13 to 34-years-olds use Snapchat, with similar statistics for users in Germany, England, France and Australia. (phil, 2021, p10)

WhatsApp: it is a messaging platform owned by Facebook (Meta group) that allows people to connect to each other's via messages and video calls, it also facilitates sending and receiving pictures, videos, files, location...etc. Whatsapp has grown from a famous and unprofitable chat application to a comprehensive market due to the large benefits it offers such as: enabling interactions between ordinary users, small and huge businesses, advertisers, and companies. (Jhons, Fernandez, and Baulch, 2024, p37)

Pinterest : it is an application that allows people to share ideas in a form of pictures, videos, and links. Pinterest is considered now as a significant tool of inspiration due to the large creative content that it provides to the users depending on their interests and the keywords searches they use.

d.The importance of social media in business environment:

Nowadays, the majority of companies have become aware of the power of social media in achieving growth and success, this fact was agreed due to the existence of many reasons that pushed companies to rely on social media platforms when putting their communicational strategy into practice, these reasons can be mentioned as follows: (Lahouel and Nahar, 2018, p322)

- Advertisement campaigns are less expensive on social media, comparing them to the traditional campaigns that used to be broadcast over radio stations, television, or even in a written form on newspapers.
 - Direct target to the correct niche.
 - The speed of delivering messages and information about the company or the product.
 - The ease of spread and fame at the national and international scale as well.
 - The variety of platforms, so that the company can choose the appropriate website which matches with its goals.
- And we can also add:
- The smoothness of dealing with customers.
 - The effectiveness of promoting services and products.
 - High potential of reinforcing the company's reputation and image.
 - A successful tool for managing customers' relationship and interacting with them.
 - Affording a juicy environment that serves to approach the company from the different stakeholders such as: clients, suppliers, media, competitors, and society.

According to the businessdasher.com, which is a platform that affords statistics about business field, the usage of social media has known a wide adoption by small businesses for different purposes; this is clarified by the following percentages: (Yakub, 2024)

- Typically, 93,79% of businesses use social media.
- 77% of small businesses in the United States use social media to promote themselves.
- 59% of small businesses implement social media for managing customer services and communication purpose.
- 44% of small business companies implement social media to enhance the brand visibility.
- 41% of small businesses rely on social media to generate revenue.
- 81% of small businesses integrate Facebook in their digital strategy.
- 83% of small businesses are active on social media all over the week.
- 87% of small businesses owners declared that the usage of social media has helped the growth of their business.
- 48% of small business owners admitted that social media platforms became crucial for their business' sustainability.

Based on these statistics we comprehend that companies rely on social media to guarantee their sustainability, however it is important to understand the nature of the digital world which is characterized by the high speed and transformations, which obligates organizations to adapt with the current changes and stay updated to any news or events that might occur in digital business sector.

e. Social media and corporate image:

Social media platforms play nowadays a crucial role in daily life, not only from the social side but also from the economic one, they are considered as one of the most significant tools used by companies and businessmen in order to strengthen their relationships with the large public and also to build a positive corporate image.

The company's selection of social media as the main tool of managing its image can be justified by the vast characteristics of social media that allow the company to reach the targeted public and empower the company's ability to attract new customers.

Managing corporate image through social media is a complex process, that occurs across a set of mechanisms which are summarized in the following points:

- **Raising awareness about the existence of the company:** through spreading information about the company's products or services, its goals and history, and any information that might inform the customers about the existence of the company.
Corporations must be aware about the importance of using its official colors and slogan for the purpose of enhancing the visual identity of the company.
- **Showing Positive interaction with public:** through their official pages on social media, companies respond on the public's comments and answer their questions, they also publish regular content such as stories, posts and videos in order to show their presence to the public.
- **Doing Regular surveys:** regular surveys should be posted on the company's accounts on social media in order to recognize the kind of image held by customers regarding the company.
This type of studies can also help in identifying the client's expectations from the company, so that they can be taken into consideration in the future.
- **Convincing the customer's about the quality of the products (services):** by sharing what goes on behind the scenes during the production, and showing the efforts done by the staff to ensure the safety of the customers.
- **Collecting information about the company:** the company should be aware of any rumors that menace its reputation and deny them promptly by official statements.
- **Revealing the social engagement:** sharing posts about the company's volunteer participations in the society is indispensable, this includes: solving social problems, supporting vulnerable groups...etc.

The process of building corporate image in digital environment is a challenging task that requires a lot of skills, starting with creating a page or an account on social media, to evaluating the effectiveness of the page and its impact on building the corporate image, this work can't be carried out by one individual only, it requires a

skillful group of people expertized in digital communication and possesses the following abilities:

- The ability of analyzing the page's data such as the number of visits, recognizing the peak times, identifying the preferred type of content for users...etc.
- The ability to identify the category of public which is more interested by the products (or services) of the company in order to target this specific niche in sponsorship campaigns.
- The ability to evaluate the role of the page from the communicational side.

For the sake of reaching the full benefits of social media platforms in managing corporate image, the company shall offer specialized trainings for communication staff to develop their skills and learn more about this unstable digital environment.

Conclusion:

This research paper aimed to shed light on implementing social media websites in managing corporate image, these virtual platforms such as Facebook, Instagram and Tiktok... have become a strategic marketing tool used by companies in order to reinforce their presence in the market and strengthen their communicational abilities with the publics.

The study concluded that the process of managing corporate image is a very complex operation that requires an entire control of communication channels. Therefore, communication staff are expected to keep up with the large technological transformations that occurs in business environment, it has also become necessary for them to learn some of the modern skills that did not exist before, including: graphic design, managing social media platforms, analyzing digital data...etc.

The operation of managing corporate image through social media is accomplished over continuous publishing of content that can take many forms as posts, videos, stories..., which serves to eliminate the barriers between the company and its customers and substitute them by a cordial relation based on direct communication and interaction with customers.

Sharing content about voluntary contributions over society and environment, and ensuring the social role of the company is highly recommended to reinforce its image throughout social media. Businessmen should also have technological awareness by being informed by all what is spread about the company on web like rumors or anything else that can affect the corporate image negatively.

In summary, managing corporate image through social media have become an essential factor in business sector, in order to reach the company's commercial and communicational objectives as well.

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