

Listening to customers : a crucial element for effective e-reputation management

Fella Elaihar ^{1*} , Kahina Ait Elhadj ² , Souhila Djemouh ³

¹ Lecturer, ALPEC Lab, Boumerdes University, Algeria, Email : f-elaihar@univ-boumerdes.dz

² Lecturer, ALPEC Lab, Boumerdes University, Algeria, Email : kahinaaitelhadj@gmail.com

³ Lecturer, ALPEC Lab, Boumerdes University, Algeria, Email : dj.souhila@yahoo.fr

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Abstract :

The aim of this research sheet is to determine the extent to which listening to customers contributes to improving the management and control of a company's e-reputation and to highlight the tools most used by the company in this area. One of the main findings is that a company's presence on the Internet has become an unavoidable necessity and that the management of its reputation through this network depends on the customers present on it. Consequently, it must monitor their statements, opinions and comments about it and send them appropriate communications and content, relying on several media, in particular its website, social networks, search engines, blogs... This will increase the number of its customers, build their loyalty and even make them ambassadors of the company.

Keywords : E-reputaion, socialnetwork, customer's recommendation, customer's reviews, word of mouth

Jel classification codes : M31, M39

1. Introduction

Managing a company's online reputation through Web 2.0 presents a complex mix of challenges, opportunities, and threats. In an environment where customers have increasing power to freely express their opinions and criticisms online, businesses must be particularly vigilant. The challenges include the need to respond quickly to real-time feedback, manage the massive volume of user-generated information, and ensure brand consistency across various channels. Opportunities, on the other hand, lie in the ability to engage directly with

* Corresponding author

customers, gather valuable insights into consumer preferences and behaviors, and foster brand advocacy from satisfied customers. However, the threats are significant: negative reviews can spread rapidly and damage the company's reputation, while cyber attacks can lead to the loss of sensitive information and significant reputational harm. Additionally, the loss of control over online conversations and cultural sensitivity missteps can also have adverse consequences. Despite these challenges, businesses stand to gain much by adopting a proactive and adaptive approach to managing their online presence, thereby building a robust digital reputation that supports their overall business objectives. Research question: We therefore propose the following research question: ***How can listening to customers contribute to better control of a company's e-reputation?***

We try to answer the sub-questions as follows in order to answer our main question :

- What is the difference between reputation, e-reputation, awareness and brand image?
- How can customer reviews and recommendations be a lever for the company?
- What steps should a company take to ensure good management of its e-reputation?

A descriptive approach was used to outline the main concepts related to the topic of this research.

This research paper is divided into three main sections :

- Section 1 : Definition of concepts (reputation, e-reputation, brand image and notoriety)
- Section 2 : Customers: how do they influence e-reputation? (customer reviews and recommendations and word-of-mouth)
- Section 3 : The contribution of customer listening to managing the company's e-reputation (steps for good e-reputation management, consequences and solutions for bad e-reputation)

2. Definition of concepts :

2.1 Definition of Reputation and E-Reputation

Warren Buffett, renowned financier, businessman and investor, ranked by Forbes as the world's third richest billionaire in 2019 (with an estimated fortune of \$82.5 billion), famously known as the Oracle of Omaha, once said : "It takes 20 years to build a reputation and five minutes to destroy it." This statement highlights the fragility of reputation, which is never fully established and can be easily altered by numerous factors (L'Information, 2010, p. 5).

The analysis of this concept is still in its infancy and many questions remain unanswered. In marketing, reputation is the result of an organisation's efforts to generate sales and foster consumer loyalty. It is understood as the "story" of the brand, a story that is mostly controlled and generated by the brand itself. However, Web 2.0, driven by the notions of sharing and social presence (social networks, virtual communities, etc.), has empowered consumers to influence brand images and thereby influence reputation. Consumers become brand ambassadors and can change the perception of a company, thereby ensuring the success or failure of companies in terms of their reputation and e-reputation (Vincent, 2014, p. 28).

In terms of a company's reputation, it can be defined as the audience's perception of its qualities that are likely to inspire trust or mistrust. A company's reputation is therefore closely linked to the notion of trust, i.e. the ability to anticipate the actions of others. It influences the perception of the quality of its products, services, reliability and integrity, and these qualities in turn strengthen the company's reputation (Lévy, 2014, p. 805).

This reputation is based on many elements: the company's financial and commercial performance (turnover, size, profit), its expertise and know-how, its capacity to innovate, the competence of its teams and its values. The resulting reputation influences buyers' decisions, establishes a company's authority in a sector, shortens the decision-making process or reassures and justifies decisions (Lévy, 2014, p. 806).

However, e-reputation (also known as cyber reputation, web reputation, online reputation or digital reputation) encompasses two broad concepts: reputation and the internet dimension. It is the image of a person or organisation that is shaped by all the opinions expressed on digital networks such as blogs, forums, multimedia sites and social networks. This image is made up of elements generated by the person or company concerned and data generated by actors in their environment (consumers, experts, etc.). The specificity of the Internet is that a significant part of the content generation is outside the company, which is both an opportunity and a risk. In addition, the Internet offers a participatory and interactive dimension, as well as very short access times to information, especially with the rise of microblogging services such as Twitter and Instagram. The audience is also expanding considerably, as these media can potentially reach anyone in the world with internet access. Information can now be spread over millions of pages and every internet user becomes a publisher, although the credibility of their writings is rarely questioned (L'Information, 2010, pp. 6-7).

E-reputation is therefore the image and notoriety of a person or entity on the Internet, i.e. in its entire online "relational ecosystem". It is a concept that goes beyond the field

of communication marketing and represents the degree of occupation of the Internet space (websites, forums, blogs, social networks) and the efficiency with which it is managed to carry out influence actions, whether defensive or offensive (Mazenod & François-Bernard, 2010, p. 72). Thus, e-reputation can be defined as "the reputation built up from the overall perceptions that stakeholders have of the company, based on all the information circulating on the net". According to this definition, we can deduce that e-reputation is considered the image of the company created by users of virtual spaces using electronic communication tools. However, according to Frochot and Molinaro, "e-reputation is the image that Internet users form of a company or a person based on the information disseminated about them on the Web, what others say about them, the messages disseminated by various Internet users (customers, competitors, employees, etc.), or even the traces left unintentionally". In the literature, the two concepts of reputation and e-reputation are not treated in the same way. "In fact, reputation and e-reputation are not as far apart as the literature suggests, insofar as e-reputation is an extension of reputation on the web" ((Maoudj, 2018, p 17).

2.2 Brand Image, Reputation, and Notoriety : Three distinct concepts

2.2.1 Brand image

The following definitions are related to the concept of Brand image :

According to Kotler, brand image is the set of perceptions and beliefs that consumers hold about the brand, as they appear in the mental associations stored in memory (Kotler, 2009, p. 323).

Jean-Jacques Lambin defines it as "the set of cognitive and affective mental representations that a person or group of people has about a brand". He identifies three levels of brand image (Farhat, 2013, p. 36):

- Perceived image: This is how the target segment (the intended audience) views and perceives the brand.
- True image: This is the actual reality of the brand, with its strengths and weaknesses, as known and felt by the company.
- Desired image: This is how the company would like to be perceived by the target segment, as a result of a positioning decision.

One of the objectives of an organisation to control its brand image is to reduce the gap and limit the dissonance between the perceived image and the desired image, while remaining true to the true image (Farhat, 2013, p. 36).

Brand image, which is an important factor for both consumers and distributors, is the main criterion for product listing before advertising and promotional activities. Some companies have built a very positive brand image through effective commercial policies like Sony (Demeure, 2008, p. 128).

Brand image can therefore be described as the set of signs associated with a brand and perceived by the consumer. This results in an attractive force (a brand that pleases) or a repulsive force (a brand that displeases). These signs are conveyed directly by the product itself, the visual components of the brand (name, colours, symbols, graphics), the permanent slogan that often accompanies the brand (called the signature) and the advertising communication surrounding the brand. In addition, word-of-mouth and the imaginary aspect of the brand, which is perceived by each individual based on their personality, also contribute to the brand image. An attractive image strengthens the purchase intention, and the post-purchase experience consolidates or modifies this image. A positive repeated experience creates or reinforces a sense of trust in the brand, and vice versa for a negative experience (Andreani, 2010, p. 182)

2.2.2 Reputation

Reputation, according to the Larousse dictionary, is "the way in which someone or something is known and regarded by the public" and also "the public's favourable or unfavourable opinion of someone or something" (Farhat, 2013, p. 36).

Thus, reputation has two aspects: the perception of someone or something by a public (a community of people or an individual) and the result of the cognitive process that leads to the formation of an opinion. Therefore, reputation can be seen as a result rather than a cause (Farhat, 2013, p. 36).

2.2.3 Notoriety

Notoriety is an indicator of brand knowledge and recall. It makes the brand familiar in the consumer's mind, and high notoriety contributes to increasing purchase intention (Andreani, 2010, pp. 179-180).

According to Kotler, brand awareness measures the tendency of customers to cite the brand under different conditions, either spontaneously when the product category is mentioned (spontaneous awareness) or when asked if they know the name of a brand mentioned (assisted awareness) (Kotler, 2009, p. 323).

Jean-Jacques Lambin defines it as "the ability of a potential customer to identify a brand in sufficient detail to propose, choose, or use it" (Lambin & De Moerloose, 2008, p. 110).

Notoriety thus establishes a link between the brand and the product category to which it belongs. This information on notoriety can be obtained quite simply by surveying a sample of potential customers about the brands they know in the studied product category. Three types of notoriety can be distinguished (Lambin & De Moerloose, 2008, pp. 110-111):

- **Spontaneous Awareness:** When asked, "Which brands of [product category] do you know?" the potential buyer spontaneously cites a few brands. Among these, the first mentioned enjoys a privileged and envied position: top of mind, or top spontaneous awareness. The others enjoy simple spontaneous awareness, which is particularly valuable for favoring the brand in the customer's mind when preparing purchases.
- **Assisted Awareness:** When asked, "Which of the following brands do you know? (yes/no)," the potential buyer can add to the previous list brands that did not come to mind spontaneously but are remembered with a bit of help. Assisted awareness is useful at the point of sale when the buyer makes a choice. Furthermore, low spontaneous awareness but high assisted awareness for a brand indicates latent potential that advertising could easily revive.
- **Qualified Awareness:** When asked, "How do you know the following brands? (I don't know it / I know it by name only / I know it by reputation / I know it from experience)," the buyer indicates their level of knowledge of the brands. It is good to know these different levels to differentiate and compare subsequent brand evaluations by current customers based on personal experience from those by potential customers based on reputation alone. This comparison can lead to corrective actions on different images, depending on the case.

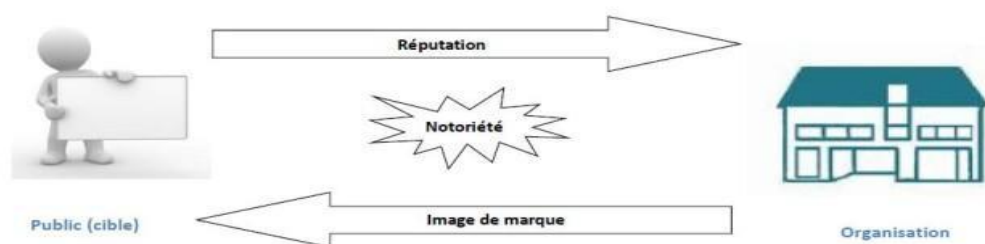
A high notoriety rate constitutes a valuable asset for the company, often requiring years to build and significant and regular advertising investments. Despite their simplicity, these notoriety measures are very relevant indicators of the "capital" a brand possesses (Lambin & De Moerloose, 2008, p. 111). If we associate the notion of notoriety with that of "brand," notoriety becomes the measure of a brand's presence in individuals' minds. It is somewhat the result of the brand image projected by an organization and the resulting reputation in individuals' minds (Farhat, 2013, p. 37). Applied to the community web, notoriety becomes complex. Indeed, depending on the communities, a brand will be known or not. On the web, a brand's notoriety becomes its level of visibility: in virtual communities (social networks, forums), on search engines (based on certain keywords), on sites or blogs related to the brand's areas of expertise, etc. Is the brand present? Is it being talked about? (Farhat, 2013,

p. 37). Thus, to summarize, we can define the different notions as follows (Farhat, 2013, p. 37):

- **Reputation** : The image perceived by the public.
- **Brand Image** : The projected image.
- **Notoriety** : The result of the projection and the memory that the public retains.

These three notions are therefore complementary. The relationships between them can be schematically represented as follows (Farhat, 2013, p. 37).

Figure 1. Relationship Between Brand Image, Reputation, and Notoriety



Source : (Ben ferhat. O, 2013)

An organisation intentionally or unintentionally projects a certain brand image to the public. The public interprets this image, which then becomes a reputation in their minds. This reputation is communicated back to the organisation through mediated discourse. Notoriety is the quantitative measure of the traces left by the projected image and the perceived image (reputation): the public remembers or does not remember the brand and/or certain attributes. After measuring its notoriety and evaluating its reputation, the organisation can readjust the brand image it sends to the public and send it again. This holistic approach to the concept of reputation and its related terms (brand image and notoriety) forms the basis of the concept of e-reputation (Farhat, 2013, pp. 37-38).

E-reputation is an increasingly evolving concept that includes awareness, management and monitoring of one's digital presence. Organisations and service providers are striving to formalise the concepts and practices associated with e-reputation in order to keep up with the rapid evolution of the web and to establish an effective methodological framework for the constantly changing '2.0' landscape (Farhat, 2013, p. 38).

2.3 Profiles, sectors, and channels concerned with e-reputation :

2.3.1 People and departments concerned with e-reputation :

All departments within a company are impacted to varying degrees when facing negative information, rumors, or malicious actions. General Management decides on strategy and coordinates departments for adaptive responses. The Communications Department monitors media and disseminates official messages to control the company's narrative, ensuring alignment with customer-facing departments and implementing corrective actions to protect the company's image. The Monitoring or Competitive Intelligence Department identifies and analyzes threats, mastering social media for crisis management, often linked to the communications department and crisis management units. The Legal Department addresses legal aspects, balancing freedom of expression with protections against defamation, privacy violations, and other rights issues. The Marketing Department, in partnership with communications and customer relations, manages product strategy and monitors competitive threats, coordinating responses with the communications department. The Customer Relations Department collaborates with communications to address consumer concerns and attacks. The Sales Department interacts directly with clients and suppliers, detecting distrust and its impact on sales and employee morale. Human Resources and Internal Communications ensure internal dissemination of information so all employees are aware of external challenges and coordinated responses.

2.3.2 Sectors concerned with e-reputation :

Potentially, all sectors can be affected by e-reputation. However, sectors that target the general public and/or produce goods or services that are widely commented on the web are particularly affected. This is especially true for consumer goods: high tech, food, cosmetics, travel, tourism, etc. Consumers increasingly rely on the opinions of other users to form an opinion before making a purchase. As a result, the company's message becomes secondary in certain areas, with the network of peers being the most credible. Listed companies are also more sensitive to this type of threat, as they are very vulnerable to rumours that can have significant financial consequences (l'information, 2010, p. 13)

2.3.3 Various channels of a company's e-reputation ;

Companies use several channels to build and maintain a strong e-reputation, ensuring favorable perceptions both locally and globally. Search engines are crucial as the first displayed results significantly impact reputation, necessitating strong SEO efforts to highlight positive pages. Online review platforms like TripAdvisor, Yelp, and Yellow Pages are essential

as consumers increasingly rely on these reviews ; numerous positive reviews are vital to avoid revenue drops and decreased website traffic. Social networks serve as modern public squares, making it easy for users to engage with brands and spread information quickly ; companies must focus on the platforms most relevant to their target audience, whether LinkedIn for professionals or Facebook and Twitter for the general public. Local SEO is also key, with Google My Business and Google Maps playing fundamental roles in local visibility ; companies need to regularly update their Google My Business page to optimize their local presence. Effectively managing these channels helps companies maintain a robust e-reputation and achieve a positive perception among their audience.

3. Customers : Impact on E-Reputation :

3.1 Recommendation : customers' most trusted medium

Advertising is no longer the queen of customer acquisition. On the contrary, with the development of the Internet, consumers are placing much more value on the judgement of other consumers, namely the company's customers. In fact, the majority of consumers now cite reputation, through online customer reviews, as the most important criterion when choosing a company. Moreover, according to an IFOP report published in 2021, 75% of them actively consult reviews to obtain information about a company that interests them. For this reason, customer recommendations must be at the heart of any rational marketing strategy, as they contribute to the company's turnover and commercial development (KASTELEYN, 2020).

3.1.1 Definition of customer recommendation :

Customer referral, also known as commercial customer referral, is the action of a customer recommending a product or service they are satisfied with to potential prospects. These prospects can be close friends and family in a private setting, but these recommendations can also occur online in exchanges with even unknown peers (KASTELEYN, 2020).

3.1.2 Customer referrals in the service of business development :

The positive impact of a good customer recommendation on prospects is essential for the commercial development of brands. There is a simple reason for this: the trust of potential customers is primarily gained through word-of-mouth, i.e. through recommendations and customer reviews. This is logical, because before making a purchase, consumers seek information from people who are already familiar with the company, its products and

services. This feedback allows them to assess the customer experience offered by the company; the potential customer can learn about both the quality of the final product and the return policy in the event of a problem. If a company accumulates negative reviews, it risks damaging its brand image and its business may stagnate or even decline. The recommendation of a product or service therefore contributes to its commercial development. To avoid this situation, it is necessary to work on the brand image and online presence. To do this, it is important to implement a true customer-centric strategy, which has two advantages :

- Customers will give more positive recommendations to potential customers.
- The company's customer base will become more loyal.

To achieve these objectives, the company must excel in customer relationship management. Good communication and a personalized offer enable the company to obtain the best recommendations, favoring the purchase act. Trust capital and recommendation are linked; therefore, it is necessary to meet customer expectations and build a relationship of trust with them. This involves, for example, considering the customer individually by providing personalized responses to their requests and questions. These tailor-made contacts maximize customer satisfaction and convert more of them into brand ambassadors. This is fundamental because prospects listen closely to the advice of customer ambassadors (KASTELEYN, 2020).

3.1.3 Where are customer recommendations visible ?

Every company must pay close attention to the impact of both satisfied and dissatisfied customers, as these customer recommendations are easily visible on the web and can be shared orally or in writing (KASTELEYN, 2020):

- Social networks : On social networks, consumers dare to say anything, protected by anonymity or their screen. It is therefore a privileged place for the dissemination of customer recommendations, especially as many consumers exchange views on different topics. The points of contact are numerous, as a single interested party can receive the opinions of dozens or even hundreds of customers in the space of a few days. This speed of information dissemination on social networks is important for any brand strategy ; it must be taken into account and an appropriate social media plan implemented. Otherwise, the company risks suffering the consequences of the anger of a few dissatisfied customers on its networks and those of its target audience.

- Google My Business profile : Another place not to be overlooked is the company's Google My Business profile, where customers can leave reviews and comments. These reviews are even more visible because they are linked to Google search results. All a customer has to do is type in the name of the company or brand to see the reviews on the Google My Business profile. In addition, these customer reviews also appear on Google Maps during local searches.
- Business website : Any product or service needs a positive environment to attract potential customers. So what better place to display customer reviews than on your own website ? It is an ideal way to showcase a satisfied customer who can then share their positive experience. A commercial testimonial reassures the prospect, so these elements should be on the company's website if it wants to convert prospects into actual customers.
- Word of mouth : Finally, word of mouth remains an important vector for the transmission of information. Whether encouraged by the company or spontaneous, it can be a source of significant long-term benefits. There are many reasons to speak well or badly about the company ; a satisfied customer can become a brand ambassador and speak about the company many times.

3.1.4 How can customer referrals be leveraged ?

For any business, the customer base is the foundation on which everything else rests. Consequently, customer referrals are a revenue lever for the business, facilitating the acquisition of new customers and potentially new sales to existing users. All these positive customer reviews and recommendations create a climate of trust for potential customers and help to retain existing customers. In addition, the influence of ambassador customers on potential customers allows the company to spend less time on commercial prospecting. As a result, the company can focus on its customer relationships to improve the quality of its services. To implement this approach, the company should :

- Collect lots of feedback : Gather positive and authentic feedback from its customers by creating and sending personalised satisfaction surveys.
- Distribute the collected reviews automatically : Where they are critical to the company's reputation and visibility.
- Analyse the feedback : Left by customers in order to continuously improve the company's strategy (KASTELEYN, 2020).

3.2 The influence of customer reviews on e-reputation

Customers have seized the power by posting their reviews online, influencing the e-reputation of companies in sectors as diverse as e-commerce, hospitality, catering, travel, tourism and even healthcare. This phenomenon can be a threat or an opportunity for the company.

3.2.1 The importance of customer reviews

The importance of customer reviews continues to grow. While 92.7% of internet users use Google as a search engine, 96% of them pay attention to ratings and reviews and 89% find them useful in their purchase process. These reviews carry significant weight in the goods and services sector, such as hospitality and catering. In contrast, they are less important for technological goods (where expert and professional opinions or press reviews are more influential) and very low for cultural goods (where evaluation is more subjective and individual). Internet users are interested in both positive and negative reviews: 93% of internet users abandon a purchase after reading a negative review, while 95% buy after reading a positive review. They prefer the testimonials of other users to the rating or number of reviews. Finally, they are aware that fake reviews exist (90% of internet users have seen them) without questioning the credibility of the company or its products and services.

3.2.2 The Influence of customer reviews :

According to a study by Médiamétrie/Orange Labs, internet users react to online reviews in various ways: only 10% are disinterested, 15% remain passive or skeptical, 23% incorporate reviews into their decision-making process, and 52% consider them decisive in their purchasing decisions. Additionally, it is interesting to note that internet users also write and share reviews on social networks and platforms. In fact, 79% of people preparing their purchases share their opinions online, either to help other users, express their feelings to the company, or respond to a website's request.

3.2.3 When user reviews become a threat or opportunity :

The first page of Google is vital, as user reviews displayed there can significantly affect revenue, customer loyalty, the company's e-reputation, and even its long-term viability, for better or worse. The Médiamétrie/Orange Labs study highlights that the primary consequence of such visibility is on revenue. Many professionals can now quantify the impact of a negative rating. Evidently, negative consumer reviews on the first page will have an overall detrimental effect on the brand.

3.2.4 Five tips for managing user reviews :

These can be summarized in the following advice :

- **Tip 1 - Consider negative reviews:** It is important to remember that having a certain proportion of negative reviews is normal. It is especially an opportunity for the company to improve its organization, products, services, customer relations, etc.
- **Tip 2 - Prioritize customer support:** When negative online reviews are prevalent, the company should highlight its "customer support" space to channel negative feedback. This allows the company to quickly resolve some customers' dissatisfaction and showcase its service quality in a space it controls.
- **Tip 3 - Encourage user reviews:** If a brand suffers from a poor e-reputation caused by a limited number of negative reviews, it is advisable to adopt a proactive strategy by encouraging the entire customer base to post reviews. This not only values important customers (creating trust) but also balances the dissatisfied customers' reviews (who express themselves more often) with more positive ones. The company can, for instance, send an automatic email after each online purchase to measure customer satisfaction and encourage them to give their feedback.
- **Tip 4 - Generate more user reviews:** Besides its dedicated "customer support" space, the company can also generate more user reviews via specialized platforms like Trustpilot (e-commerce) and TripAdvisor (hospitality and catering). It is advisable to focus efforts on one platform initially.
- **Tip 5 - Encourage user engagement on social networks:** With the development of social networks (such as Facebook and Twitter) and their Google page, the company can show users that it adopts an active communication and dialogue approach with its customers.

By following these five tips, the company should gain more trust from its customers and prospects, resulting in greater audience and reputation gains.

3.3. Word-of-mouth facilitates prospecting and recruiting new clients

3.3.1 Definition of Word-of-Mouth:

Word-of-mouth is the transmission of information from person to person through oral communication. In the business world, word-of-mouth often refers to customer acquisition through relationships, acquaintances, or directly from customers themselves.

3.3.2 How to Implement Word-of-Mouth in Business:

- **Satisfy Customers to Be Recommended:** The first step is to satisfy customers. For them to talk about the business, they must be happy with its products and services, as well as with after-sales service, teams, delivery service, etc. Therefore, the company must take good care of its customers in both substance and form.
- **Encourage, Ask for Active Word-of-Mouth:** The company should encourage customers to talk about it or its services to those around them. Satisfied customers should be suggested to talk about the company to their contacts or even asked to introduce the company to them. The company can also request contact information for potential customers and offer incentives (gifts, discounts, commissions) if these contacts lead to orders.
- **Provide Business Cards or Flyers:** Word-of-mouth should be supported with physical tools like business cards or flyers containing the company's contact details, making it easier for people to talk about the company.

3.3.3 The limits of word-of-mouth :

Word-of-mouth is not possible without customers and thus at the start of the business. It does not work alone ; few people will think to talk about the company's products or services if they are not directly visible. It's essential to be sure of what customers think; their satisfaction must be exceptional since they easily find faults, especially when paying. In some areas, word-of-mouth doesn't work, as people prefer to keep good addresses to themselves. Some customers feel that paying is enough and do not wish to advertise for others. Word-of-mouth is inherently limited to the circles of customers and gradually dilutes as one moves away from them. It is also limited by the willingness of the company's customers, making it impossible to anticipate for planning orders, production, and work. Therefore, it seems risky to base all client acquisition on word-of-mouth. Additionally, the company does not control the content shared by its customers, which might be incomplete or less positive. Therefore, word-of-mouth is an excellent communication and prospecting tool, but it cannot suffice for a company that wants to last. Therefore, it is necessary to diversify prospecting methods and accompany a word-of-mouth strategy with other communication means.

4. The Contribution of Customer Listening to Managing the Company's E-Reputation

4.1 Steps to effective e-reputation management :

From a marketing perspective, the possibilities of Web 2.0 are numerous for businesses. According to Victor Antunes (2012), digital technologies now enable marketing services to seize numerous opportunities to achieve various goals. Through Web 2.0, it is entirely possible to attract new customers, reduce the sense of waiting, and guide the consumer's purchasing decision. Each objective can be achieved through an online strategy. To be effective and optimal online, a company must include digital use in a real global strategy. But how to implement a real online strategy and its tools ? Here are some steps and key elements to follow :

4.1.1 Preliminary Work :

The tools available through Web 2.0 are numerous, and their uses are varied. Organizations today can no longer communicate through a monologue, merely providing information or communication elements to their customers. They need to be present and engage in dialogue with their stakeholders. This dialogue can take place via blogs, wikis, podcasts, emails, chats, etc. But before acting, companies need to know what is being said about them online.

Reputation holds particular importance here. A few simple key steps can help many companies avoid mistakes on Web 2.0, especially on social media, and manage their e-reputation professionally and proactively. Some professionals now offer specialized services to companies. For instance, "SEO vendors" (Search Engine Optimization) optimize their clients' search engine results. This service is effective in minimizing the negative impact of potentially harmful posts. However, this technique is particularly effective when considering that, as highlighted by Hoffman Thomas (2008), 95% of internet users only look at the first 30 results displayed by search engines.

While "SEO vendors" may seem attractive to a company suffering from a negative e-reputation and unable to resolve the crisis, this does not correspond to the real implementation of a comprehensive strategy. There are other methods for a company wishing to manage its e-reputation, avoiding the need for external service providers. A clear and effective methodology can help any company avoid simple mistakes and be proactive on Web 2.0.

- a) **Conducting Monitoring** : The first and crucial step is to conduct monitoring. Several tools are considered essential for relevant monitoring, including :

- **Google.com:** This tool allows searching what is being said about a company by "Googling" its name or industry and analyzing the results.
 - **Google and Yahoo Alerts:** Alerts can be defined using keywords, such as the company's name, creator, product, brand, service, etc. These alerts are received directly via email, keeping the company informed at regular intervals without effort.
 - **Twitter Search :** This tool allows tracking what is being said on Twitter through a simple search.
- b) **Social Mention :** This search engine allows selecting social networks for monitoring. This technique is also used by "Google Blog Search" and "Technorati" for blogs and "Board Tracker" for discussion forums.
- c) **Review Sites :** Analyzing review sites can help understand what is being said and what is being criticized about a company.
- d) **Defining Strategy and Means :** After conducting and analyzing the monitoring results, it's time to develop a strategy that meets consumers' needs. Creating a real strategy around social networks is challenging and requires clearly defined goals and objectives, such as strengthening the company's identity, increasing interactions to capture collective intelligence, or increasing the average basket size on the e-commerce site. The chosen media and its use will depend on these goals. For example, if the strategy aims to build closer relationships with the public, using Facebook or YouTube might be considered. However, the tone should be adapted to the medium and its audience.
- e) **Building Reputation:** Some tools are indispensable for building a company's e-reputation. Organizations can request to be listed in various tools and directories to increase their online visibility. "Google Place," for instance, works through geolocation, allowing a company to be displayed in search results for users looking for products or services in a specific location.

Once the online strategy is implemented, it is essential to create a dynamic and updated space. A company must be prepared to respond to possible "attacks" like negative comments. Managing these comments depends on the medium they are posted on, reinforcing the importance of the tools a company uses.

4.1.2 Practical Implementation :

After following the previous steps and avoiding potential errors, a company is still not immune to a crisis where its "e-reputation" might be tarnished. Therefore, it is important to

measure the results of its actions, be capable of managing online comments, and understand the specificities of the most common and widely used Web 2.0 tools.

Once an effective monitoring system is in place and a coherent online strategy has been implemented, it is necessary for a company to assess and measure the outcomes of its actions. This analysis can be conducted using specific tools. For example, Facebook's analytical tracking of Fan Pages allows a company to measure its interactivity through social media. Additionally, web analytics applications can provide a comprehensive analysis of the sources of a website's visitors.

These tools are useful in determining which platforms generate the most traffic, which media are preferred by the brand's consumers, etc. It is essential that these tools are understandable, easy to use, and relevant. The organization can use parameters such as revenue growth, conversion rate, average basket size, etc.

After each online operation, such as a contest on a Facebook page, a company can analyze whether the predefined objectives have been achieved. For instance, whether there has been an increase in revenue, traffic to the corporate website, etc., or if the action had no positive impact.

Analyzing these results allows the company to implement corrective actions if there is a discrepancy between the set objectives and the observed outcomes. However, an online strategy can be deemed successful when the audience begins to actively engage with the company through the deployed media (comments, dialogues, ratings, etc.).

When faced with negative comments or articles written by users, the question of whether to respond remains critical for companies. The solution to this dilemma depends on various factors.

It is possible to contact the author of the negative post or the blog owner directly and simply ask them to remove it. If they refuse and the damage is severe, the company may consider taking legal action against them. If neither of these solutions works, the organization can try to "bury" the harmful comment, for example, through press releases praising the company or brand.

Several contexts must be considered by an organization to judge the appropriateness of a response and how to approach it :

- If the company has already communicated on the incriminated point, it can refer the user to the previous communication issued on the subject.
- For a negative comment containing inaccurate information, it is advisable to simply correct the message with the true information.
- Depending on the type of media where the harmful content is posted, the methods may vary slightly. For example, a blog is a discussion space that can allow a genuine conversation between users and the organization. Managing comments on this medium should avoid a too formal tone.
- The characteristics of the poster's profile should also be considered. If the user addresses only a small community, it may not be wise to respond to avoid drawing attention to the comment in question.

If the company decides to respond, it is important to rely on factual information and avoid being defensive. Emotional responses should be avoided. It is essential to stay calm and not be emotional when expressing oneself on social media, avoiding controversial topics such as religion or politics.

Each Web 2.0 tool has particular specificities, and here are the usage possibilities offered by the most well-known and used ones:

- **Website:** Starting with the most common, the corporate website of a company. It should not be neglected as its utility lies in the role it plays in the company's image and promotion. It helps build an emotional connection between the company's online audience. Thus, it contributes to building a reputation and formalizing the company's character and personality through its goals, objectives, and vision. The creation of a website is a showcase for the company; however, regular updates are necessary to keep it "alive."
- **Blogs:** A blog is a tool with a strong "corporate" footprint and serves as an influencer. It generally has a less formal tone than the company's institutional website, promoting a more open discussion space. For the company, it is an opportunity to attract new customers, showcase their expertise, become accessible, and build a network with influential bloggers who, with a certain legitimacy, will enhance the company's image. A blog is an opportunity for a company to be truly present in a Web 2.0 environment and communicate directly with its targets. Moreover, this type of tool supports the inclusion of other multimedia elements such as videos, photos, sounds, etc., allowing for greater interactivity between the company and users. A blog, with a less "corporate" approach, puts the organization's clients at ease and ensures more direct contact.

- **Facebook:** With its large number of users and the time spent on it, Facebook has become an indispensable tool in an online strategy. The possibilities offered by Facebook are numerous. One advantage is the ability to send emails to the entire community of fans, promoting multiple exchanges. It also helps retain customers and reach new prospects. This tool allows, among other things, the customization of the URL, tabs, menus, providing multimedia content to fans, organizing contests, increasing newsletter sign-ups, tracking statistics, designing e-commerce sites, etc. To allow wide dissemination of the company's or brand's name, a very effective tool exists: the Open Graph. It represents a significant visibility tool for a company. The interest in creating these pages also lies in the "Like" button. When a user "likes" a company's page, this information appears on their "wall" and is visible to all their friends. The user then becomes a "brand ambassador" and increases the company's visibility. Regarding direct advertising, "Facebook Ads" facilitate precise target segmentation. These ads can be generated based on interests, location, language, and/or the professional social category of the target the company wishes to reach.
- **Twitter:** A strong characteristic of this tool is the hashtags (denoted by the pound sign "#") included in the message. They help contextualize the message, indicating its reference to a company, event, person, etc. Twitter offers various uses. It can serve as a monitoring tool and represents a "live blogging" instrument. This feature allows a company to relay information almost instantly during meetings or events. It also serves as a promotion tool for services or products, or even for personal branding. The benefit of this tool is being followed by "followers" and following publics of interest to the company. This provides access to users' profiles to send targeted and thus more relevant messages. Beyond gathering information about followers, Twitter allows a company to maintain contact with its audience through frequent publication of messages. Tweets must be effective and impactful.
- **Viadeo:** This tool is more oriented towards B2B. This social network allows searching for business contacts, i.e., profiles matching the company's needs, to communicate and share information (e.g., press releases), exchange and argue, and also enhance the organization's e-reputation. The tone on this tool should be balanced. A company should avoid being too corporate without adopting a too creative approach that might surprise the target audience of this tool. Visibility on Viadeo is gained by joining Hubs, communities, and "Business Clubs." These memberships can lead to real meetings. Monitoring and benchmarking are also possible using this tool to study competitors' practices in terms of visibility. Viadeo is a tool for finding future collaborators for a company and expanding its social business network.

- **YouTube:** This tool represents an opportunity for optimal exposure for the company through videos it can publish. Creating a YouTube channel offers enormous visibility for the company, its image, and its products. It can promote its offerings, communicate, and drive traffic to the corporate website. A YouTube channel allows the company to edit its videos and optimize their search engine ranking via Google's instant indexing. YouTube facilitates video access and sharing through playlist creation. The interactivity of this tool, through video sharing, creating viral online campaigns, and comments from users, provides a great opportunity for a company to communicate and be "seen." YouTube allows companies to widely disseminate information, such as a new product launch, in an engaging way : through video.

With a clear methodology and a coherent strategy, a company can choose the Web 2.0 tool(s) that will enable it to achieve its set objectives.

4.2. The consequences of a poor online reputation :

Today, all businesses must have a web-specific marketing strategy; it's a necessity, not an option. Consumers rely heavily on reviews when choosing restaurants, hotels, or services. While opting out of an online presence and relying solely on word-of-mouth and regular clientele is possible, it forfeits the benefits of local SEO. The best advertising strategy involves being present locally, on social media, and search engines. However, criticism from a disgruntled client, fake reviews from competitors, or negative Google reviews can harm a business. The stakes of online reputation are enormous, as information circulates globally, often multiplying and becoming persistent. Without proper control, harmful information can pose significant risks. Identifying and addressing these risks is crucial to prevent severe impacts. Poor online reputation management can greatly damage a company, with rumors, brand denigration, uncontrolled information dissemination, or bad buzz causing detrimental and irreversible consequences. Viral content, driven by human needs like amusement or shock, can quickly distort and exaggerate negative information. Long-term, poor online reputation practices or clumsy posts can damage brand image, revenue, and client trust. It's better to acknowledge mistakes, apologize, and use the right of reply than let false information spread. Responding to negative feedback is also crucial, as deleting it can exacerbate the issue.

4.3. Solutions to minimize the impact of a poor online reputation :

- Maintaining a strong online reputation is absolutely critical for businesses today, as the internet has become the primary source of information for consumers. An IFOP

report underscores the significance of online customer reviews, which now outweigh factors like proximity and traditional advertising in shaping consumer decisions. Consequently, businesses must adopt a proactive approach to monitor their online presence meticulously : Utilizing tools such as Mention or Hootsuite allows companies to gather real-time feedback from diverse channels like forums, blogs, and social media platforms. This monitoring not only provides insights into what customers are saying—both positive and negative—but also enables the development of effective strategies to manage and enhance the company's reputation.

- Harmonizing communication across various social media channels is crucial to mitigate potential risks and maximize opportunities. Social media can be a double-edged sword, offering extensive visibility through influencer collaborations and targeted campaigns while also posing risks of negative publicity or viral backlash. Establishing clear objectives and regularly evaluating the reach and engagement of social media posts helps ensure that the company's message remains consistent and aligned with its brand identity across all platforms.
- Effective social media management, ideally overseen by a dedicated community manager or a well-trained internal team, involves more than just posting content. It requires fostering meaningful engagement with followers, responding promptly to queries and feedback, and diversifying content formats to maintain audience interest and loyalty. By building a community around shared values and interests, companies can strengthen customer relationships and enhance their online reputation organically.
- Responding to customer reviews, especially on high-visibility platforms like Google, is crucial. Positive reviews should be acknowledged with gratitude to reinforce customer loyalty, while negative reviews should be addressed calmly and constructively. Apologizing for any shortcomings and offering solutions publicly demonstrates accountability and a commitment to customer satisfaction, which can turn a negative experience into a positive one.
- Producing consistent, relevant, and high-quality content is another pillar of effective online reputation management. Regular updates not only improve search engine visibility and SEO but also help overshadow negative reviews by promoting positive aspects of the business. Content creation should align with customer interests and address common queries or concerns, thereby positioning the company as a trusted authority in its field.
- Building trust with clients and stakeholders is essential for long-term success. Transparent communication, reliability in delivering promises, and ethical business practices contribute to a positive reputation that withstands challenges and crises.

Internally, fostering a positive work environment and nurturing relationships with suppliers and partners further enhances external perceptions of the company's integrity and professionalism.

- In conclusion, proactively managing online reputation requires a multifaceted approach that integrates monitoring, strategic communication, responsive customer engagement, content creation, and stakeholder relations. By investing in these areas, businesses can not only protect their brand from potential harm but also cultivate a strong, resilient reputation that drives sustained growth and customer loyalty in an increasingly digital landscape.

5. Conclusion

In today's digital landscape, managing online reputation has become indispensable for businesses. With the evolution of Web 2.0, consumers have transformed into active co-producers who wield significant influence over companies' decisions and image, capable of rapidly impacting their reputations. Being digitally connected offers numerous advantages, including customer acquisition and retention, revenue growth, and the ability to harness collective intelligence for co-creation. This connectivity builds a competitive edge by fostering enduring relationships between businesses and their audiences, contingent upon a well-crafted online strategy aligned with organizational goals.

As consumer awareness about data privacy grows, businesses face heightened scrutiny over how they utilize personal information. Moreover, interactions with brands now originate from diverse sources, necessitating companies to continuously update their digital tools—from social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter to corporate blogs and beyond—to maintain relevance and engagement.

Effective online reputation management requires a comprehensive approach across all levels and channels of the company. Businesses must assess their current online presence, formulate a strategic plan, and diligently execute it. Central to this approach is maintaining control over responses and recognizing the importance of every stakeholder in achieving business success.

Some recommendations are formulated for effectively managing online reputation:

1. **Continuous Monitoring:** Implement robust tools (e.g., Mention, Hootsuite) to monitor online mentions, reviews, and discussions about your business across various platforms. Regular monitoring helps you stay informed about what is being said, allowing prompt responses to both positive and negative feedback.

2. **Proactive Engagement:** Engage actively with your audience on social media and review platforms. Respond promptly and professionally to customer reviews and comments, demonstrating transparency and a commitment to customer satisfaction. Positive interactions can enhance your reputation significantly.
3. **Strategic Content Creation:** Develop and publish relevant, high-quality content regularly. This content not only improves your search engine visibility but also shapes the narrative around your brand, highlighting positive aspects and overshadowing any negative reviews.
4. **Consistent Brand Messaging:** Maintain consistent messaging and visual identity across all online channels. This consistency reinforces your brand's credibility and helps build a strong, recognizable presence in the digital space.
5. **Customer Relationship Management:** Foster strong relationships with customers by listening to their feedback, addressing their concerns promptly, and showing appreciation for positive feedback. Building trust and loyalty can mitigate the impact of negative reviews.
6. **Data Privacy and Security:** Prioritize the protection of customer data and adhere to best practices in data privacy. Transparent handling of personal information enhances trust and reduces the risk of reputational damage due to data breaches or misuse.
7. **Adaptability and Innovation:** Stay agile and adaptable in your online strategy. Continuously update your digital tools and platforms to meet evolving consumer expectations and technological advancements.
8. **Employee Engagement:** Recognize that your employees are ambassadors of your brand. Foster a positive work culture where employees feel valued, as their interactions and behavior can impact the company's reputation.
9. **Monitor Competitors:** Keep an eye on how your competitors manage their online reputation. Learn from their successes and failures to refine your own strategies.
10. **Crisis Preparedness:** Have a plan in place for handling potential crises or negative publicity swiftly and effectively. Preparing in advance can minimize the impact on your reputation and mitigate long-term damage.

Implementing these recommendations can help businesses effectively manage their online reputation, enhance customer trust, and build a resilient brand presence in the digital age.

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