

A critical analysis of the improper usage of social media in online organizationa...

[Business](#), [Management](#)



Introduction

The use of the internet for basic communication, social networking, and for profit purposes such as marketing, advertising, and announcing promotions have rapidly and continuously spread throughout the world economy . Gone are the days when only large-scale and highly profitable companies from developed countries have access to this powerful communication tool.

Almost every owner of a business, or even an individual, can have access to the internet and use it for whatever purpose that may serve that individual or organization's interest today. The World Wide Web has dramatically changed the way how organizations plan their business processes. The internet is the technology that gave birth to social media. Social media is, in fact, a process wherein a people create, share, and or exchange ideas and information within a virtually created world, community, or network. In this case, that network would be the internet. Over the years since the use of the internet was first introduced, companies have invested huge amounts of resources to create social media platforms that are aimed to capture as large a share of the booming social media and internet marketing market that they can get. Some of the biggest names in the social media industry today are Facebook, Twitter, and Google. There are a lot of other social media platforms available out there but these three simply outclass those relatively smaller and less popular social media platforms by a huge margin both in terms of profitability and the number of users. There are many organizational processes that may benefit from the use of social media-based strategies. Out of those many business processes, only one will be focused on in this paper. This paper will focus on the use of the internet,

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particularly the social media, in online organizational reputation management.

Exploration and Critical Analysis of Social media Usage in the Context of Online Organizational Reputation Management

For starters, reputation management pertains to a host of activities and processes that are aimed at not only influencing but also understanding the factors that contribute to the overall reputation of a business or basically any other type of organization. The term reputation management is not definitely not as popular as the term public relations management, at least when conducting surveys. The truth is that reputation management and public relations management share a lot of things in common. In fact, reputation management can be considered under the larger umbrella of public relations management. The same is true for the use of social media only that it refers to a specific strategy and not an entire discipline or field of study .

In the past years, it can be seen how people and businesses have been more willing to spend resources for maintaining a public-friendly online reputation. We can see how businesses have started to take more seriously anything, be it positive or negative, that is being said about them in social media platforms. This is, in fact, a completely normal behavior at least when we try to relate it with the fundamental goals of public relations management. A propaganda is a propaganda and in almost any cases, there are only two sides, the positive side and the negative one. The use of social media can be a double-edged sword. It can either be used to positively or negatively impact an organization's public image .

There are aspects or strategies used in reputation management that may be classified as within ethical grey areas or those that do not confer with morally accepted ethical standards. Examples of such strategies may include flooding a reputable website with sponsored reviews or what is more commonly known as astroturfing (for a brief background about astroturfing, it basically pertains to the process wherein sponsors, businesses, pay reviewers to fabricate reviews about a particular product or service. That is like masking the advertisement or basically any other type of message that the sponsor relays to make it appear as if it originated or is supported by genuine ideas and perceptions), censoring negative comments and reviews in company blogs, social media accounts, and websites, and using black-hat search engine optimization practices.

While there are also other ethical forms of online reputation management that may be pushed using social media-based strategies such as rightfully responding to genuine customer complaints, establishing a tightly monitored and audited review website—one that takes both positive and negative comments about a particular product into careful consideration, and legally asking sites and posts to take down incorrect information, and other strategies that promote the use of a two way communication between the organization and its constituents, and the use of online feedback, the intense level of competition has made a significant number of organizations jump into the unethical or ethical grey area of online reputation management bandwagon.

This is indeed one of the many improper usages of social media in the field of online reputation management. We can see online-based firms

intentionally creating and spreading false information that damage another online-based firm's online reputation in an effort to bring the spotlight to them and be hailed as the more reputable organization. This is a clear violation of morality and ethics, especially when we consider the fact that much of the spread information, such as reviews and comments, are false and are merely fabricated. What makes a lot of people and organization do this is the fact that despite the high number of people and organizations using social media platforms for whatever purpose, we still do not have an internationally accepted and actually enforced laws and policies that govern the way how people and organizations use social media.

So far, it can be argued that the use and implementation of social media strategies have led to more good things than bad. While this may actually be true, if more people and organizations become more compelled or even encouraged to establish a stronger online reputation using ethically grey or worse, unethical reputation management practices, we would be heading towards a kind of virtual environment filled with lies and incorrect information. When that happens, it can be said that the fundamental goal of establishing a worldwide network for the transfer of correct and socially relevant information would have already been violated. If this trend continues, people would no longer know what, who, and which to believe. At some point social media users would get tired of the trend of lies for the sake of greater online reputation control and this could bring an end to a supposedly successful and very useful information sharing tool.

Conclusions and Recommendations

At this point in time, the argument that suggests that the benefits of social media use in the field of online reputation management still outweigh its disadvantages. There are a lot of things that organizations can make do with social media and that includes but may not be limited to greater, more direct, and more cost-efficient access to larger and more sophisticated markets—which can by the way be easily translated into larger earnings and profits. However, what most people tend to forget is the fact that the world of social media is not entirely filled with good guys who are willing to sacrifice potential increases in market shares and in profits and earnings for the sake of upholding a moral and ethical business environment.

Arguably, the number of unethical online reputation managers has been continuously increasing for years and as mentioned earlier, if this trend continues, things can get really bad for the entire social media and online reputation management industry. Any user who has been fed up so much with lies would surely get tired and stop believing and absorbing whatever it is that is being thrown at him, no matter how true or genuine that information may be.

What we need is a set of standards, or ideally, a set of legally-binding rules, laws, and policies that would enable a multi-laterally elected international body to investigate possible violations of ethics and morality as set by the established online reputation management rules, laws, and policies, and impose sanctions on individuals and groups that played a hand in the violations. The truth is that the online environment that people and businesses have taken advantage of for years is still in its early stages of

development and is still heavily deregulated. The only realistic way of solving problems related to social media such as those that are connected to improper usage is to start to regulate it.

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