

Electronic reputation as a competitive tool in the new communication environment

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Abstract:-

Web 2.0, as one of the most prominent embodiments of digital media, includes a group of socio-technical systems (blogs, wikis, bookmarking systems, etc.) , which allows Internet users to communicate, inquire and establish relationships where the user is at the center of the interactive model, the penetration of the internet led to the emergence of a set of new values that affected markets and society as a whole through the impact of instant and permanent communication on business (and human) relationships , as the times for thinking and responding have shortened, the rise of social media has been accompanied by the emergence of the concept of electronic reputation, which engages the concepts of identity and fame with the dimension of the Internet, which imposes its restrictions on the spread in real time and the localization of information , this has led to a strong increase in the descriptive power of digital activity, at the top of social networks, connected consumers have become active, and more than ever before, they are consom'acteurs .

key words:

organizational reputation ; electronic reputation ; digital media.

Introduction:

The contemporary Arabic language dictionary defines reputation as: good or bad reputation that is heard about a person, and it is a general assessment of the positives or negatives that a person hasⁱ, this is why reputation is linked to hearing because of this sense's relationship to speech and conversation , reputation is what people say about a person or body, whether positive or negative.

While the Robert Dictionary of the French Languageⁱⁱ , it combines the concept of reputation with a group of symbolic values such as fame, glory, admiration, popularity, appreciation, honor, and status , the word reputation is often used as a synonym for those connotations, with a slight difference in the general meaning.

In the context of everyday life, various social entities are linked to the issue of reputation, we find, for example, in addition to the individual reputation of people, the reputation of football teams and the reputation of their supporters, the reputation of countries, and the reputation of commercial institutions that are linked to the reputation of various brands and productsⁱⁱⁱ, the use of the concept of reputation, as well as its areas of use, has multiplied in recent decades, due to the development of media technology - cinema, radio, television and the Internet - through the process of globalization, the latter led to the emergence of social phenomena that were closely linked to the issue of reputation, especially the emergence of celebrities such as movie, television, variety, and football stars as icons of international brands^{iv}.

In the economic and commercial field specifically, the issue of reputation has taken an important part of the attention of decision makers and strategy makers, a good reputation has become an essential resource and a pivotal component of the symbolic capital of large institutions and companies in the competitive environment, in light of the digital environment that has produced a series of new and renewed practices and dimensions, it has become necessary for institutions that wish to survive and continue to achieve what is called cyber-visibility as one of the most competitive fields for economic institutions, which resulted in a new concept or dimension of reputation in the commercial field in light of digital communication via the Internet, and the immediacy and interactivity it provides, which is what is known as electronic reputation, what is meant by electronic reputation (cyber/digital)? what distinguishes it from traditional reputation? how are they planned in terms of construction operations and management strategies?

Talking about electronic reputation as a competitive tool in the digital environment requires us to:

- Identifying a set of basic concepts associated with them and defining them precisely, such as the concept of organizational reputation, new media, or what is called Web 2.0, electronic reputation.
- Identifying the mechanisms of building electronic reputation.
- Identifying and maintaining electronic reputation management strategies.

1. The organization's reputation in light of the new media

Boistel^v points out that there are two theoretical streams for defining reputation: the first approach is to consider that reputation results from various corporate images and perceptions developed by all stakeholders, the second definitional approach assumes that

reputation is a reflection of the history of accumulated perceptions of the observed organization's identity, expertise, and experiences.

In general, the organization's reputation is linked to the reputation of its products and its members, including managers, employees, and shareholders, which leads us to talk about the reputation chain , as a complete and comprehensive assessment of a set of indicators , regardless of the approach adopted, it turns out that the reputation of something (company, brand, product, etc.) is built through:^{vi}

- The various signals that that thing emits,
- The experiences that each party involved has gone through in their relationship with this thing,
- Interactions between those parties.

This last point is considered essential, especially with the development of the Internet and Web 2.0 in particular, which has allowed:

- Multiplying sources of information, as all Internet users are likely to become senders of information about the company
- The widespread dissemination of new information, interconnected information, misinformation, opinions about information broadcast by different sources and other users, increase the efficiency of search engines .
- Increasing the amount of information emanating from each information source.

Accordingly, the discussion of electronic reputation and its management in the digital space is linked to the new media, through which the combination of new and traditional communication and broadcasting technologies is embodied with the computer and its networks and all digital communication and information technologies , which has made it possible to produce, publish, consume and exchange the information we want at the time we want and in the form we want, through electronic devices and media, connected or offline, and interacting with other users, whoever they are and wherever they are .^{vii}

The Internet is a means of communication through which individuals can easily gather together and create groups to exchange and present opinions... thanks to these groups, we must now realize that a trademark or name no longer belongs only to those who have legal ownership of it, but also to all users who will be able to talk about this name and influence its image and electronic reputation through different spaces that allow for the creation of conversations such as forums, blogs, websites, content sharing and networks, these are spaces

where Internet users can create and publish conversations about the institution and individuals without inviting them to express their opinions or controlling these contents produced around them against their will^{viii}, in this context, the conversation expanded from reputation to the electronic reputation of a thing, as it is the reputation built from the set of perceptions that stakeholders form about that thing based on any piece of information circulating on the network, accordingly, electronic reputation appears as an element of organizational reputation.

1.1 From reputation to electronic reputation

In the human sciences, approaches to organizational reputation vary across disciplines, for economists, reputation is an approbation mechanism as a signal to reduce an actor's uncertainty in a choice situation regarding his future actions and behaviors^{ix}.

For managers, reputation is the “comprehensive picture” (as the sum of various “mental images” of individuals) represented by the various parties related to the organization based on their past actions and the information produced about it^x, therefore, the reputation of an organization is based on some rational elements (information that can be captured), and on cognitive and emotional processing (image) as well.

In sociology, reputation is a social process that produces seals of approval that affect the status of a unit (individual or organization), its interaction with it and its social representation, Almida asserts that reputation falls within the theory of governance: it crystallizes the totality of opinions and judgments about the actions of a unit (individual or organization), beyond this, we can say that reputation is meta-opinion as an opinion formed from judgments about facts, or beliefs, and based on other opinions expressed whether for or against unity.^{xi}

In information and communication sciences, Oreggi^{xii} asserts that reputation is the informational value of an entity's actions, from the point of view of organizational reputation management, communication is considered pivotal because reputation is linked to the organization's identity (what it wants to show), and thus organizing communications work is at the heart of talking about organizations' reputation.

1.2 Electronic reputation: a proposed definition:

If we move reputation to the web, we ask what is “online reputation” or “online reputation”? , according to the Federation of E-commerce and Distance Selling (FEVAD), 66% of Internet users share their opinions about products and services on the web either

through notifications or feedback on commercial websites or on blogs, forums and social networks , the Internet plays an important role in preparing for purchases, with 81% of Internet users in 2010 (compared to 78% in 2009) stating that they had viewed a website before purchasing a product online or offline.

Accordingly, the term electronic reputation refers to the image that Internet users create about a brand or person , this digital reputation forms the brand's identity, distinguishing it from its competitors, E-reputation is known by several names, such as electronic reputation, reputation on the web, or cyber reputation , what is meant is the common opinion that is formed in the digital space about a specific individual or entity , this collection of heterogeneous information arises directly from digital interactions and information transformation spread between physical space and cyberspace .^{xiii}

1.3 Appearance and development:

The first questions about shifting or transferring one's reputation to the digital space were raised in the mid-1990s , this was accompanied by the development of video games and the first competitions between online players who built their reputations through their performance in the game mode .

The concept of online reputation first appeared in 2000-2001 in an article published by McDonald et Slawson^{xiv} in which they addressed the topic of online reputation , the authors use the context of a large online auction website to highlight the interactions between sellers and buyers in this system, product prices and the role of emerging reputations , it has been shown that indicators or scores resulting from positive or negative reviews (transaction history, general messages and number of stars) directly affect the final selling price of the items , it has also been shown that it contributes to determining the degree of trust necessary in the transaction, in this way, we find that many researchers, Anglo-Saxon ones in particular, approached online reputation at the beginning of its emergence from an instrumental angle, as a set of information systems directed at generating trust in electronic selling sites and determining information priorities on websites such as Ebay.com.

Academically, the term “electronic reputation” was first used by Chun and Davies in 2001. They analyzed the emergence of electronic reputation based on the dissemination or broadcast of conformity signals in cyberspace , so that these signals build and enhance the reputation associated with the physical space, similar to what resides in virtual spaces such as the websites of institutions, subsequently, e-reputation became a term commonly used by

practitioners to define all factors and actions aimed at developing and ensuring an organization's reputation via the social network^{xv}, procedural approaches are based on transferring reputation to the Internet as the image that is formed among Internet users, these are approaches that are largely based on the Web 2.0 vision, which is based on the idea of user authority.

Many articles between 2002 and 2005 discussed ways to measure the electronic reputation of a customer through his activity on a system, the period 2006-2009 witnessed a multiplication of research and reflections on this topic in light of the development of tools and software for evaluating the electronic reputation of a unit, during this period, many agencies and service providers specializing in electronic reputation emerged, since 2009, media exposure of the topic has led to public awareness of the commercial, economic, legal, psychological and strategic stakes of electronic reputation, electronic reputation management now occupies a strategic position as it is increasingly integrated into enterprise information systems, mobilizes special technologies and contributes to the creation of customized functions.

2. Electronic reputation between influence and activation:

Consumer and webcast monitoring, like brand monitoring, is a major issue for online reputation management^{xvi}, in various forms (forums, likes, ratings, consumer opinions, votes, comments, etc.), Internet users refer to and evaluate a large number of products, brands, places and people, through the logarithmic system on which the digital space is based, these evaluative measures can be counted and aggregated to produce indicators that reflect public opinion about these objects and people, hence, the terms “online reputation” or “electronic reputation” appeared to refer to a general perception of all that Internet users publish regarding a brand, individual, or institution, work on online reviews has shown their ability to influence demand and reshape, define and distribute attributes on products. ^{xvii}

In this context, online communication agencies provide their clients, companies and individuals, with a diagnosis of their electronic reputation, that is, providing an authorial view of the way they are talked about on the web, accordingly, electronic reputation arises from the process of repeated, automatic or esoteric re-documentation of interpretations and knowledge produced online by individuals or organizations, which formulates an identity characteristic that serves as a standard mark framing previous forms of commitment in an asynchronous context, taking advantage of the facilities provided by the technical functions of websites.

According to Zacklad, electronic reputation is the redocumentation of traces and information produced by internet users, they are also documents that record knowledge about an entity and how it operates, this process of redocumentation (with a guiding purpose) therefore appears as a form of mediation of the document accomplished not by the professional but by the user himself^{xviii}(Liquete,2010) in order to produce relevant indicators, and to work on the three dimensions of the digital document:

- See the document (redraw the shape of the document) seen,
- Read the document (paraphrasing the meaning) read,
- Individualizing and customizing the document through identity attributes.

Based on this approach to electronic reputation, we can confirm that building and managing electronic reputation is a two-factor process: influence and activation from different sources in and through the digital space through the development of documentary mediation on the web, to play an effective role in this dialectical process, the contemporary institution must facilitate Internet users' access to digital documents that carry the knowledge about them and the values they wish to convey, by adapting their publication to their practices, this is done by the institution or organization producing these documents and customizing them in order to enable its audiences to re-document them in their own forms, this is done in a way that allows users to be directed to documents relevant to their questions, or by customizing socio-technical systems such as blogs or social networking sites to make them documentary spaces that are compatible with the needs of their audience and their own goals.

3. Building and creating electronic reputation:

Foundations and principles

The company's rhetoric is no longer alone in the arena, but rather integrated with the opinions of better-informed users whose credibility resonates beyond that of institutions, these expert users, these "consom'acteurs" as Rémy puts it^{xix}, represent at the same time a huge shift in corporate communications and a threat of serious distortion, therefore, the issue of the organization monitoring this unregulated communication to manage its virtual image and anticipate potential crises has become a necessary issue, the "on-line" dimension of this task includes the development of specialized tools.

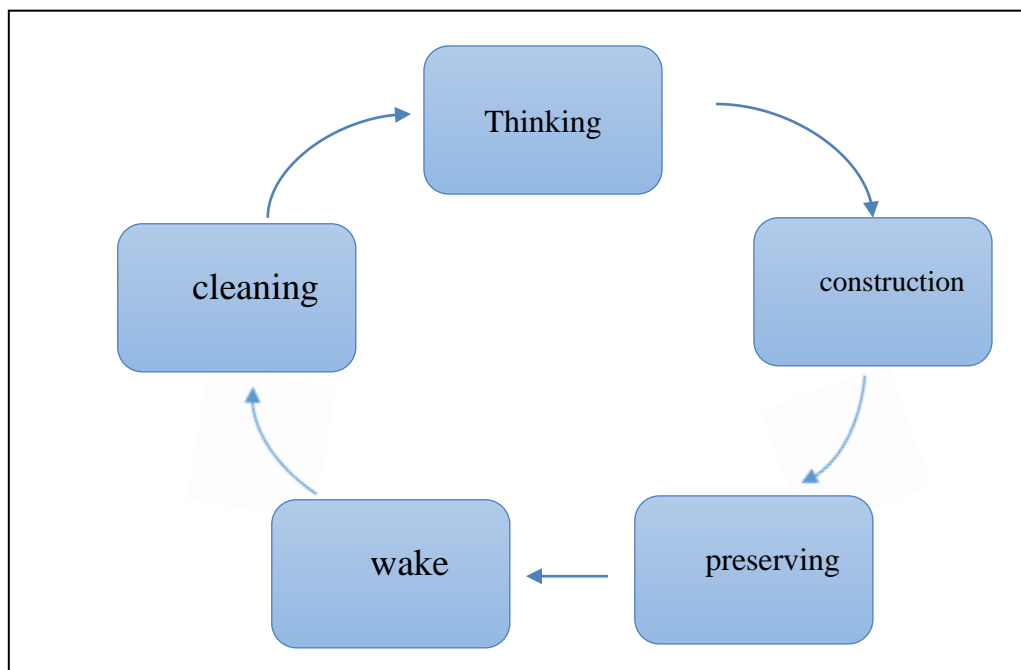
Brand owners often launch themselves on social networks because they want to be a part of it, even before they know if these networks align with their strategy or create their

own business plan , its unplanned adoption on social networks often leads to situations that show brands not having control over their presence on the web , such as the absence of interaction with the group and failure to respond to attacks, censoring electronic content such as comments and opinions, and removing annoying comments, threats, temporary closure of the fan page...etc , which could hurt the company's image and cause a crisis on the internet , unofficial pages can take priority over official Facebook pages of organizations and brands , consequently, many annoying posts for the brand appear on these pages, which may affect its image .

3.1 Electronic reputation life cycle:

In general, whether the organization was the first to lay the foundation for the electronic reputation of its brand and products through the production and publication of the first content, or whether this was done despite it by Internet users, Pellerin proposes an electronic reputation cycle that represents the steps necessary to build the latter, summarized in the following figure :

Figure 1: The electronic reputation life cycle



Source: Clément PELLERIN and others (2011) Master your brand image 2.0 – E-reputation and social networks, YOUR... the Junior-Enterprise of ISC Paris, p 12

A. Thinking:

Similar to the foundations of a house, “thinking” is the basis for building an online reputation , a clear vision of an organization's online presence is what allows it to define an effective and strong strategy , therefore, it is necessary to ask simple yet effective questions: what? from? to where? when? how ? why?

Being present on the Internet is not enough, but strategic goals must be set for this presence, such as maintaining customer loyalty and other things , in this regard, it is necessary to create value that will serve as a competitive advantage not for the institution or the brand, but rather an advantage for the electronic presence of the institution and the brand, this stage of thinking and contemplation is also necessary to anticipate the risks that the organization may face, whether the risks are at the level of activity, communication, or any other field, given the complex dimensions that crises on the Internet can take , by identifying these risks, organizations are able to determine possible strategies and action plans to manage these crises, we may find this stage under other names, such as the analysis or diagnosis stage.

B.Construction process:

The process of building a digital identity must be well thought out , since each social media has its own goals it is necessary to choose the means according to the established goals that are consistent with the organization’s strategy, while emphasizing that the process of building an effective and solid electronic reputation takes place over time within the framework of ensuring continuity of presence in the digital space, we will detail this part in the next section.

C.Conservation or maintenance:

Maintaining a presence on the Internet is linked to the organization’s production of quality content, disseminating information, and promoting new content and news, considering the organization as the primary source and reference for it , maintain relationships with users , every account opened by the organization on social media must be updated permanently , therefore, it is necessary to appoint a person or group of people from the organization whose task will be to “maintain” the presence on the Internet through constant updating, otherwise all measures taken in the “construction” phase will be in vain .^{xx}

D.Wake:

To measure a brand's online reputation and evaluate its presence on social networks, it is necessary to prepare vigilance for conversations, although the evaluation takes place at a specific time, vigilance requires the institution and the electronic reputation team to remain in

a state of alert, which leads to the continuous and permanent collection and processing of data^{xxi}(Adary , 2015) , this enables the organization to discover everything that is said about it on the internet: about its brand, products or services, employees, advertisements, etc., and without it, the organization will not be aware of its electronic reputation and will not be able to control it, vigilance or wake system has become a real action that is becoming increasingly important in the strategy of maintaining electronic reputation , so that N. Chazaud linked strategic vigilance and the development of electronic reputation by studying the actual contribution of information vigilance in controlling and monitoring the electronic reputation of a company .^{xxii}

E.Cleaning:

There are several ways to deal with content or opinions that are not in the interests of the organization or brand on the Internet, such as communicating with the author, responding to attacks, legal follow-ups, etc., cleaning means deleting inappropriate comments and questions on institutions' blogs and social sites, and constant reminders of the ethics of dealing on electronic platforms, while emphasizing the importance of answering users' questions as much as possible and providing a statement, argument, and proof in the event of attacks and spreading rumors, in order to avoid the institution falling into crises , here the institution has two options: either leave ample space and space for users to talk about it, or participate in this conversation and influence and direct opinions.

4.Strategies for building and managing electronic reputation:

In addition to active listening and analysis, online reputation management includes choosing an effective content and communication strategy, as well as implementing actions aimed at making the most of the web presence and co-creating a discourse with Internet users in line with the marketing and branding objectives of the company , as part of its commitment to the existing relationship with Internet users in order to prove credibility and avoid rumours , therefore, the institution must:

4.1 Appointing the team responsible for electronic reputation management:

To monitor its image, a company must engage in dialogue with its audience, participate in online conversations and hire a new kind of bodyguards who specialize in online reputation management , relationships are formed and discussions take place between the brand and Internet users in groups controlled by the brand , this also applies to spaces

where it is mentioned without the latter monitoring it, such as opinion sites, forums, and blogs, therefore, it is necessary for organizations to provide the necessary human resources to activate these groups, follow up on what is said about their brand, prepare appropriate answers and arguments, create various contents, anticipating and promoting the brand, as well as interaction with internet users, in this context, we can talk about a group of functions related to electronic reputation management, such as:^{xxiii}

- Social Networker: brand activator on the community web (social platforms for exchanging information and content)
- (Cleaner): monitors links and enforces respect for rights with web providers
- A lawyer in digital identity
- Personal Brander: providing advice/support in defining and activating the brand identity on the web.
- Digital Identity Trainer: empowering employees and transferring techniques and methods to them, focusing on two basic functions that are at the heart of electronic reputation management, namely:
 - Group Manager
 - The coordinator, processor, guardian, or curator

A. Community or group manager:

Or what is known in Adary's words as "the ambassador to the outside world", the virtual group manager addresses user feedback, he is responsible for proactively or responsively intervening on social media to enhance and defend the brand's reputation, the Community Manager is indispensable in a company's web marketing communication team, the group manager is the person who develops sustainable relationships with consumers and manages virtual links in the reference strategy, managing virtual groups is not a connection, it is a relationship, the virtual groups manager is also the guardian of the electronic reputation and is the one who monitors and detects the positive and negative signals that are broadcast on the web about the company, brand or product.

Since its appearance in 2005, the director of the virtual group has been assigned several tasks, including:

- Monitor and note events and what is circulated on blogs,
- Develop a strategy for the virtual group
- Completing case studies
- Managing social tools (Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, blogs, etc.)

- Dialogue on social sites,
- Ensuring respect for the rules of using social platforms,
- Producing strategic and appropriate content for the virtual group according to the specificity of the networks,
- Managing platform members and generating interest and dialogue,
- Organizing live demonstrations and meetings with virtual opinion leaders and platform members

Therefore, the virtual group manager is the main element in electronic reputation management , he is the attentive activator and responsible for public relations in social networks, he is considered a group mover ^{xxiv} as the person who energizes, fuels conversation, creates events, answers questions, and values group contributions , thus, his speech must be free, with the aim of embodying his closeness and credibility with other members of the virtual group, as he is the spokesman for the company .

B.Coordinator, processor, guardian, or curator:

Some time ago, a new term appeared in the field of electronic reputation management: the coordinator or guardian, as he is responsible for monitoring and filtering news in order to highlight it in virtual groups , in the English language, the term refers to a museum curator, which is the precise meaning intended in the field of electronic reputation management. The curator, guardian, or curator not only stores (the paintings in the museum and the information and contents in the electronic reputation) but also displays them and explains them to the public , the need for this function arose as a result of the explosion of content on the Internet and the development of social networks.^{xxv}

4.2 Finding appropriate keywords:

The keyword selection stage is necessary before any content creation , the organization must find the best keywords related to its sector of activity so that Internet users can easily find it , these keywords will be used on the organization's website and in the various contents that the organization will produce on the web , in this context, it is very useful to use the following tools to identify the most important keywords in a specific field:

A. Google searchtrends:

This tool is very effective because it allows you to compare the search rate between several keywords , it also shows the evolution of searches using temporal, geographic, and linguistic criteria .

B.GoogleAdwords:

It is a keyword generator , by entering a keyword or website address along with geographic and linguistic criteria, google generates a list of keywords associated with a search, and the result of the automated generation of these keywords details the competition for a keyword as well as the volume of monthly searches for it , this allows us to know the competitive status of keywords, i.e. whether they are widely used or not , the more competition there is for certain keywords, the more difficult it will be to position the organization with that keyword , this is why it is necessary to think of special words that have a distinct reference to the institution and the brand.

4.3Maximize reference:

In an e-reputation strategy, it is necessary to improve the organization's presence with its brand name in order to control the contents that appear first when a user searches for its brand , therefore, it is the duty of the company's Internet marketers to know the techniques for preparing references that will ensure the placement of the contents they want on the first pages of search results on the Internet, such as^{xxvi}:

- Linking a marketing blog to the company's website,
- Opening subdomains or complementary sites for important areas or areas,
- Writing an article on Wikipedia,
- Use social networks such as Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn,
- Participate in dialogue and conversations about the organization within virtual forums and groups,
- Adopting a networking strategy by obtaining articles that promote the organization from different sites, and placing the link to the organization's website,
- Writing press releases for publication on specialized websites,
- Registering the institution's website in the institutions directory
- Submit the organization's best articles to the most popular DiggLike (DiggLike are community sites where users can vote for submitted articles)

4.4 Taking advantages of social networks and content platforms:

This is done technically through:

A- Identification reservation:

It is necessary for the brand to specify the account names they wish to reserve (brand name, product names, and character names) before they are opened by users distant from the brand .

B- Brand blogs:

Blogs are distinguished from traditional websites by three basic features: they are easy to use and allow for easy publishing , it creates (generates) conversations, and it allows reaching a wide audience , creating an official blog is essential for companies, whether it is to improve communication with Internet surfers or to monitor their positioning in search engines , a brand blog also allows for communication that is less formal, freer and more interactive than a traditional website .

C- Forums:

They are places or spaces for exchange between internet users who share common interests , many studies have shown that Internet users rely more on the opinions left by other users on forums than on the rhetoric of companies and brands , the organization can intervene in forums by providing appropriate information that answers forum members' questions by disclosing its identity , it is not recommended at all to pretend to be a user by posting a comment in a forum.

4.5 Measuring the *return on investment* (ROI) of the Social Network:

Both of online reputation and social network have a specific purpose:establishing a connection with the community , thus, it is difficult to determine the return on investment because the profit is not instantaneous, however, specialists in the field of measuring electronic reputation suggest some indicators that allow measuring the return on investment from the social network^{xxvii} :

- Evolution of the brand's online presence
- Development of the level of fame thanks to monitoring the development of the number of times the brand is mentioned on the web
- The development of the brand's community on the web (number of fans, friends, contacts, followers...) and the number of their contributions (comments, votes...)
- Development in the number of reviews of published content
- Development of the number of visits to the brand's website
- Track which links led to sales (tracking is possible from Twitter, as well as blogs)

Conclusion :

Digital has not transformed the way we communicate; but also approaches that allow evaluating that communication and measuring its effects on the perception of internet users (Adary, 2015), web 2.0 websites are no longer just spaces for information, but have also become spaces for meeting, that is, points of presence centered around users who have become active through the various information they produce and which have become feeding those sites, especially in the economic and commercial sphere, in the midst of these transformations, a company's reputation on the Internet determines the volume of its transactions and its costs.

The strategy of building and managing electronic reputation through social listening, monitoring consumer conversations, and sentiment analysis, It recontextualizes the basics of vigilance, and each step on this path raises a number of obstacles, by overcoming which the functional potential of electronic reputation becomes clear.

Footnotes:

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