

Should Academia Care About Online Reputation Management and Monitoring?

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Abstract - Reputation management has always been important for individuals, companies and organizations. Emergence of new types of media, as is the social media, brought radical changes in the ways we manage and monitor personal, corporate and organizational reputation. The fundamental purpose of this study is to describe how social media influences corporate and organizational culture in respect of reputation management and monitoring. It is also discussed how Academia and their stakeholders should be part of these changes.

I. INTRODUCTION

The world of communication has considerably changed in the past 25 years. The main media used for information dissemination before the Internet were sources known as traditional media i.e. radio, television, film, newspapers and magazines. Traditional media had a large influence on the ways of information flow and thus formed communities who share the same or similar understanding of the world, but also influenced on someone or something's reputation. At the same time they have always been available for rent to buy some time and to possibly get even attention of certain community for certain product, event, idea or person.

Today, however, the number of media channels for information (as well as disinformation) sharing has increased. These new channels that became widely available and maybe what is even more important, widely acceptable, made the reputation management more important than ever. It seems as if suddenly all the social streams, both public and private ones, are becoming more transparent and everything is built on interaction and collaboration.

Social media as new communication and collaboration channels has profoundly influenced on all structures of society: individuals, experts, public figures, scientists, institutions and companies. They are truly participatory media which enable two way communication what certainly isn't a characteristic of a traditional media. These media create public or communities that are critical and rational at the same time. Communities become new communication channels for marketing and public relation activities as also reputation management and monitoring.

This paper aims to give a short historical overview of reputation management spanning the period of the invention of printing press up to the present time. Different perspectives, including corporate, political and educational, will be introduced and discussed in more details in the following sections. We will conclude with some observations concerning the future development of

reputation management and monitoring at the educational level.

II. REPUTATION MENAGEMENT - HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

Human beings have always been conscious of their own reputation. Reputable person is generally person who is respected in society. This is also applicable for any other object from the community. Reputatation explains how some object – institution or company – is perceived by outside or internal shareholders. However, long long time ago, the management of reputation was possible only through spoken word. When man started to use written words (or pictures), the reputation management depended on those able to use the written expressions.

Individuals, organizations and companies managed their reputation on different ways through history. Johannes Gutenberg's invention of printing press in 15th century enabled faster replication and distribution of any given content. This revolutionary invention at that time created new forms for reputatation management.

The 17th century introduced a new feature. The newspapers were introduced to the society and so the first newspapers started to be published in the USA (*Public Occurrences*) and than in the Great Britain (*London Gazette*). But still, they published mainly the news that was in favor of the governing elite, portraying them in a positive light to the public [4].

In the 18th century began mass-production of newspapers. For the first time news and information become more accessible to the wider population on a daily basis. However, reputation management is still depended on the ruling classes and texts about public figures were mostly positive.

The first half of the 20th century brought the popularization and commercialization of television as a media channel, first in black and white and then in color. At that time written word was not enough to build reputation, but also rhetoric, an appearance and nonverbal communication. Individuals became more exposed in media.

Later half of 20th century brought new networked media channel – Internet, as the result of a rapid growth of information - communication technologies. In his humble beginnings Internet was only a scientific and military communication and information sharing tool. As a media channel it started to be more accessible to wider audience when first web browsers were created.

Introduction of e-mails and instant messaging tools increased the number of Internet users. This increase was even larger when new media channels such as social media entered Internet.

Social media as special forms of networked media are sets of tools, applications and services that enable people to connect with one another online in order to share and exchange information (or knowledge) as well as to create their online communities. Social media are thus used as communication channels for its community members.

Wireless networks, mobile internet, GPS technologies, smart phones like Iphone or Blackberry, numerous desktop and network applications all contributed to the growth of Internet. In the last ten years it has become the mainstream with the number of its users constantly growing in number on a daily basis.

It is obvious to everyone by now that Internet has become an unavoidable part of our society. And suddenly, everything has changed: the way we communicate, send away or receive information, the way we promote, sell or buy, and also the way we manage and monitor our personal, corporate or institutional reputation.

Companies, agencies, non-profit organizations, educational institutions all have their communities in a real world. However, by using social media as a form of communication channel, they try to create and manage their online community thus opening new ways for managing and monitoring their online reputation as well. Reputation monitoring is manifested through measuring parameters such as the number of community members, community features, and what is being said inside the community about its entities using predefined sentiments or satisfaction scores.

Each community has a community leader. Once the leader earns communities trust, that community becomes a very effective media channel for administering information, mostly in the form of self-promotion. Many Universities (American, Croatian, French, England, German, Polish, Russian, Chinese, Japanese, etc.) have recognized the power of such usage and already have their groups on social networks where former, present and future students share information about the University. But also, University's administration gives information on University's life, basic information about the University itself and its mission encourages discussions on different topics, collects and displays information about them from other sources, etc.

The three models of online communities and their usages in different areas are discussed in the following three chapters.

III. BLOGS

Blogs, known as the form of an online journal, have appeared in 1994. It all started with the first world-known blogger Justin Hall, at the time a student at the Swarthmore University, who started writing a blog about computer games.

After the first platforms for managing blogs were created (LiveJournal and Blogger) at the end of the 20th

century, the number of blogs on the Internet has suddenly grown. Today, there are numerous platforms for blog managing (Wordpress, Movable Type, Blogger, HubSpot, TypePad) and not one of them requires any technical knowledge as a prerequisite.

Blog's content depends on the author or authors personal interests and the most popular topics [8] are politics, technology, entertainment today, business world, music, ecology, travels, science and computer games, in that order.

By the end of 2008, there were 186 millions of different blog genres world wide and the number of their readers was up to 346 million [11]. According to the data found on Croatia's blog service (<http://www.blog.hr/>), 822 167 blogs were started since 2004 in Croatia only.

Technorati, a specialized search engine for blogs, in its report from October, 2009 [8] states that about 75% of bloggers are highly educated people, two thirds are men, 60% are between ages 18 and 44. Journalists, company executives, public figures from the world of entertainment and politics, scientists, they all write blogs. Growing number of government officials are also using this media channel to communicate with citizens. Regardless of their personal profile and area of interest, they all want the same: to communicate their ideas and thoughts on a certain subject, and to enable their blog's readers, whether they are their clients, fans or citizens, to contribute to the subject with their own comments.

A. Corporate blogs

Corporate blogs are type of blogs through which their authors communicate with the rest of blogosphere. Companies use blogs to lead more informal and more personal communication with their audience, taking into consideration all the rules and guidelines for managing corporate blogs. As with all the other types of blogs, the main aim of corporate blog is to inspire the community or blogosphere on some action, mainly through discussion on published text.[10]

Albeit the great number of blogs on the Internet, only some of them are with the authority, meaning that they have a large community that keeps track, reads and comments its content. Some of them are blogs of the companies like Huffington Post, Engadget, Mashable, and blogs of Mike Arrington, Om Malik, Tim O'Reilly, Robert Scoble who are considered authorities on information-communication industry.

Examples of successful world wide companies in the sphere of corporate blogs are Google, Microsoft, Reuters, Oracle, Viacom, Nokia, Adobe, Wal-Mart, IBM, Direct2Dell, SouthWestAirlines, Coca-Cola, Benetton etc. Croatian companies are still not using the potentials of corporate blogs.

Sometimes, even the executives of a company write blogs that have a large community. Such are blogs of Bob Parsons (Go Daddy), Jonathan Shwartz (Sun Microsystems), Robert Scoble (Microsoft), Bob Lutz (GM), and many others including some Croatian executives like Ratko Mutavdžić, Luka Abrus and Tomislav Bronzin from Microsoft Hrvatska, Nenad Bakić from Moj-posao.net and Damir Sabol from Iskon.

This type of communication brings us much closer to those who were once considered to be inaccessible and out of our (communicational) reach.

In the contrast to the standard media news announcements, corporate blogs invite on bidirectional communication, enabling the clients to present their opinions, whether positive or negative ones. News is thus presented in a more informal and more transparent way causing the more genuine dialog between a corporation and its clients.

Today, there are even free tools that monitor opinions inside a blogosphere on certain brand, company or organization and they can be found at Technorati (<http://technorati.com>), BlogPulse (<http://www.blogpulse.com>) and Twingly (<http://www.twingly.com>) web sites [1].

B. Government and blogs

Recently, blogs are being used as media channels for presidential and party elections. The best examples are American Presidential Elections in 2008 when presidential candidates started publishing video contents on their web pages about their upcoming actions in the presidential race.

Iranian President has a blog where he openly writes about the nuclear crises between Iran and USA, but also about his childhood, college days, etc.

Even the army is using these new communication channels for distribution and collection of information. So, for example, American Ministry of Defense is using STRATCOM (<http://www.stratcom.mil>) to enable safe communication in real time between all the members of American military forces, regardless their military rank. The system incorporates blogs as well, and soldiers are encouraged to create one. One of the more open system or directory of military blogs is Milblogging (<http://milblogging.com>) opened to soldiers from all over the world.

C. Educational blogs

Authors of educational blogs are mainly educators but also different specialists who wish to pass on their findings and knowledge. The number of educational blogs is growing by the hour, so, for example, in December 2006, there were 30 000 educational blogs hosted at edublogs.org alone. Today, there are over 425 000 of them (it is amazing how this number grew since the day we started this paper till the day we finished it).

Educational blogs can be used in numerous ways like posting classroom or additional materials and resources, getting your students to discuss certain topics, organizing activities, getting students' and their parents' feedback, sharing lesson plans with your colleagues (<http://edublogs.org>), but also for discussing certain problems, topics, ideas, applications or innovations in educational sector (<http://www.eduwonk.com>, <http://chronicle.com>, <http://educationnext.org/blog/>). Some universities use it to get to know their new students and to recruit the prospective ones [7].

Yahoo gives a very good listing of educational blogs with a short description of each at

http://dir.yahoo.com/Education/News_and_Media/Blogs while Jason Falls gives a list of top 50 education blogs on the web that focus on the early childhood education [3]. The list of American University Presidents who keep their blogs can be found at http://bobjohnsonconsulting.com/blog/2007/07/15_presidents_who_blog_saint_v.html.

IV. MICROBLOGS

Microblogs are new form of social media that represent certain organizational and functional shift in comparison to blogs. It enables, so called, asymmetric communication and community building model. Characteristics of microblogs are sending and commenting short posts or text messages in real time by using mobile phone or through certain microblogging platform. In 2006 group of scientists led by Jack Dorsey created the first service of this type - Twitter. As of May 2007, 111 microblogging platforms were available in a web market, but Twitter is by far the most popular example of this genre [11].

Twitter is the fastest growing social network and microblogging platform which number of unique users has increased 1400% from the launching date in 2006. Currently, it has 6 million registered users from all over the world.

Twitter as a communication channel enables message updates that contain only 140 characters which can be distributed to the group of users – followers and followings. Followers are users that follow certain profile but person behind that profile does not follow them back. Followings on the other hand are people that certain profile is following on Twitter to communicate with them in various ways. Communication on Twitter can be one to one, one to many, and many to many. Figure 1 gives an overview and comparison of communication patterns on Twitter in relation with other media channels such as blogs, email, SMS and instant messaging tools.

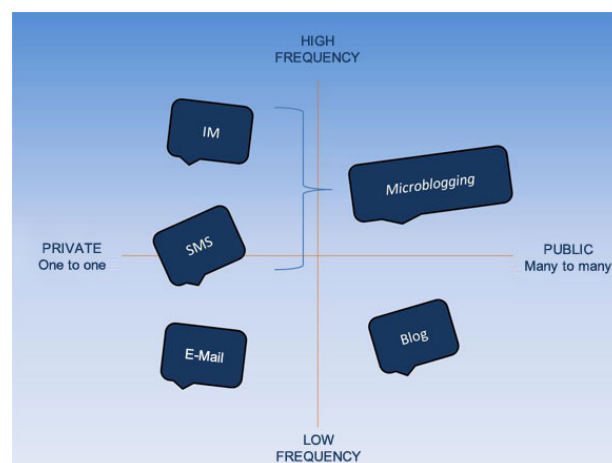


Figure 1 - Communication patterns in different media channels

The most frequent types of messages that are published on the Twitter are:

- a) status updates about what the user is currently doing,
- b) comments or responses to the updated statuses of another users and opinion sharing on certain topic,
- c) information sharing and
- d) (automatic) generation of the latest news from certain news sources with mostly promotional purpose.

There are four actions or interactions that are recognized by the platform:

- a) *response*: @username {content},
- b) *retweet*: RT @username {content},
- c) *mention*: {content} @username {content},
- d) *attribution*: {content} via @username.

All actions can be used as parameters in metrics for measuring and monitoring influence, popularity and reputation of persons, companies or institutions on Twitter.

Individuals or companies that are authorities for certain niche have many followers and followings on Twitter. Those who are hubs on Twitter have many followers but less followings. These variables can also be used for reputation monitoring of any given entity on Twitter. Some examples of authorities on Twitter are Ashton Kutcher (@apulsk), Barack Obama (@BarackObama), Robert Scoble (@Scobleizer), etc.

There are many commercial and open-source tools for reputation monitoring, as tools for opinion or sentiment mining of messages on Twitter. Twitter is an ideal application for the opinion mining or sentiment analysis for several reasons:

- a) short discourse,
- b) recognizable indicators (adjectives and verbs) of positive and negative opinion,
- c) real time message updates,
- d) huge amount of information and
- e) access to an API.

Examples of such tools are among others, Twendz, Tweetfeel, Tweetoscop, Twitterstats, etc.[5].

A. Twitter and business users

The shoe retailer Zappos (@zappos) uses Twitter as channel for customer service support. Its Twitter account has at this moment 1,637,255 followers which show that they have gained the trust of their customers. Zappos Company also has its corporative blog in which all employees are engaged (<http://blogs.zappos.com/blogs>). Croatian companies that use Twitter as a tool for customer service support are Allianz Direct (@AllianzDirect) and Croatia Osiguranje (@crosig).

Ford Motor Company uses Twitter as a channel for promotion of its latest car model - Ford Fiesta (@fordfiesta). It currently has 6,006 followers on Twitter and it actively participates in the dialogue with its potential customers.

Louis Vuitton Company uses Twitter specifically and exclusively as a tool for the promotion and is not opened for any communication with the customers (@LouisVuitton_US).

Croatian companies are just starting to recognize Twitter as a channel for promotional purposes and communication with potential customers. Most of Croatian news outlets like Jutranji list (@jutarnji),

Večernji list (@vecernji_list), Novi list (@novilisthr) and Magazin Globus (@Magazin_Globus) have their official Twitter profiles. Companies like B.net (@bnethr) and T-com (@mraktarifa) use Twitter to promote new services and products.

B. Twitter and politics

Twitter was also used during the last U.S. presidential elections as the main media channel for tracking the latest news related to the presidential campaign. It was also used for sentiment analysis of user comments on the elections. It was the sentiment analysis users comments on Twitter that has indicated an increase in the popularity of presidential candidate Barack Obama who had opened his official Twitter account during the elections (@barackobama). Current.TV owned by Al Gore (@algore) had a live broadcast on Twitter updates or tweets during the presidential debates between American presidential candidates John McCain and Barack Obama. Thus, Twitter became a platform for monitoring political activities in real time, as well as for collecting and analyzing user's opinions about political issues.

A list of American politicians that use Twitter can be found on web site Tweet Congress (<http://tweetcongress.org/>). Another web site, Tweetminster (<http://tweetminster.co.uk/>), contains information on British politicians that use this microblogging platform. Croatian politicians with opened official Twitter accounts are: Ivo Josipović (@ivojosipovic), Andrija Hebrang (@hebrangandrija), Miroslav Tuđman (@MiroslavTudjman), Josip Kregar (@josipkregar), Milan Bandić (@bandicmilan), Vesna Pusić (@vpusic), Nadan Vidošević (@NadanVidosevic), Vesna Škare Ožbolt (@skare_ozbolt) and Vojko Obersnel (@Obi_Rijecki).

Openness and transparency that have brought computer and social media evolution has its positive as well as negative characteristics. Twitter, according to reports by American analysts, can just as well be used as a tool for coordinated terrorist attacks. So *Wired* [9] announced that there is a report that gives possible scenarios for using social media and mobile technologies as tools for terrorist attacks. This presentation was created by 304th Military Intelligence Battalion and can be found at the Federation of the American Scientists website (@FAScientists)[6].

C. Twitter and education

David Perry (@academicdave), an American teacher, uses Twitter as a helping tool for his classroom activities. His students were assigned homework that included publishing of ten messages related to new social media during the weekends. This kind of methodology in teaching and learning process has enabled students' further discussion on given topic outside the classroom area.

Twitter in education area has also served as a channel for student's opinion sharing, awareness and branding, promotion and marketing [7].

The Centre for Learning & Performance Technologies maintains online directory that contains a list of over 1200 teachers who have created Twitter accounts. Edmodo is, on the other hand, a closed microblogging platform designed specially for teaching process that has additional features related to the privacy protection of teachers and students.

V. SOCIAL NETWORKS

Social networks are a new genre of social media. In the past few years it has recorded a large increase in use. Online dating sites are considered to be their predecessors [2]. Uniqueness of this genre lies in the following properties:

- a) creation of public or semipublic user profiles within the system;
- b) creation of personal groups of contacts (one to one, one to many or many to many) with whom the user to some extent shares the same views;
- c) browsing the profiles of others within the group or within the system.

This category merges features of all the other genres of social media such as media sharing services, microblogging, instant messaging and forums. Its most representative examples are Facebook (2004), MySpace (2003) and LinkedIn (2003).

Most of social networks enable creating groups and personal pages on which company, institution or individual can promote and communicate with their consumers. Number of group members or the number of fans for created page indicates popularity and acceptance within the community that these services bring together. At the same time the value of social networks is measured by the size of their social graph.

Facebook message updates on the particular company or brand can be monitored through application Facebook Lexicon, while more segmented and detailed analysis is only possible through Facebook advertising platform system. Opened social networks provide access to the APIs that enable easier tracking and monitoring of message updates about a particular brand or company.

Different universities all over the world had opened their Facebook profiles [7]. Today, there are more than 400 of them although not all are official University profiles. Some are opened by the University fans or former student but still they all share the same purposes and that is communication with/among their current students and teachers, reaching out to alumni and recruiting.

VI. CONCLUSION

Internet as networked media has forever changed communication patterns and the ways our society collaborates in relation to the technology progress. Another shift in communication and information is brought by appearance of new media – social media. In the sphere of social media everything started with forums where the emphasis was on the thematic discussion, followed by blogs with a focus on more personal communication. The next big change was the

expansion of social networks whose main purpose was to connect people. The latest changes led us to Twitter which puts emphasis on a more asymmetric connecting.

Social media as new communication and collaboration channel has profoundly influenced all structures of society: individuals, experts, public figures, scientists, institutions and companies. They are truly participatory media which enable two way communications that certainly was not a characteristic of traditional media. These new media create public or communities that are critical and rational at the same time. Communities become new communication channels for marketing and public relation activities and also for reputation management and monitoring.

Reputable person is generally any person respected in his/her society. This is also applicable for any other object from the community. Reputation explains how some object – institution or company – is perceived by outer world or by internal shareholders.

Online reputation management and monitoring become an important factor in a networked, opened and transparent society in which we live. Reputation can be managed and monitored through various media channels, including blogs, microblogs and social networks. They invite users to the collaboration, but also require constantly monitoring and management of entities' actions, as also the opinions and comments that were received about these entities.

Certain indicators show that social media growth will further continue. This will only increase and accelerate the growth in usage of social media as channels for promotion, marketing and communication.

Looking back to the beginnings of time we see that the world we live had to change many times and in many ways to become more opened and more transparent as it is today. During this time, the reputation management had always found the way to adjust itself to these changes, now maybe more than ever.

But this is just a beginning, a preparation for the future that will surely bring some new media channels. And people will again find the ways to use this new channel for management of reputation. And as it is the case with every other technological innovation, it will have its positive and negative sides that we as its users must be aware of but not afraid of. Thus, it is our final thought that Academia should care about reputation management and monitoring via new media channels, and in this way show that it is not afraid of changes and that it is ready to embrace the future ones, as well.

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