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# The possible risks of using Facebook in corporate communication

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## THE POSSIBLE RISKS OF USING FACEBOOK IN CORPORATE COMMUNICATION

*GULCIN IPEK EMEKSIZ*

### **Abstract:**

Corporate reputation is the value that brands give the most importance as it forms the perception of their stakeholders towards the brands, enables the brands to be separated from their rivals and to be respected. Therefore, brands try to shape the perception of their stakeholders in a positive way with the messages that they send through the traditional media continually. However, with the common usage of social media today, brands have to manage their corporate reputation on the online platforms, as well. Nevertheless, the usage of social media platforms possess some possible risks because social media has given the control to the consumers who can easily create user generated content in these platforms. Discontent consumers can express their negative experiences to brands directly on online communities such as Facebook brand fan pages and can prepare a basis for the outburst of a crisis with the support that they gain from other consumers. Therefore, brands should be prepared in advance for crisis scenarios and should maintain an effective complaint management on their Facebook brand fan pages. This paper aims to discuss what makes consumers powerful on social media and the possible risks that brands can come across on social media. Moreover, it examines how complaint management should be handled on Facebook to prevent the emergence of an online crisis. This paper will contribute to the literature of crisis communication from the aspect of social media.

### **Keywords:**

Facebook, brands, online reputation management, risks, user-generated content, crises.

**JEL Classification:** Z00, M19, M31

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## 1. Introduction

Brands pay high attention to not to give a damage to their brands' reputation and due to this reason they make big investments for their marketing and public relation activities every year; however, brands' usage of Facebook have increased the risks of coming across with instant crises online (Nitins and Burgess, 2016, p.389). Thanks to the interactivity feature of social media, consumers can now create both positive and negative user generated content on the brand fan pages created in different social networking sites such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram, and this takes the control from the hands of brands and gives to the consumers.

Social media has given the opportunity to the consumers to digitally socialize with other consumers in different locations on brand communities such as the Facebook brand fan pages. Thanks to the Web 2.0 feature of social media, consumers can now communicate fast and synchronously with each other, and they can give instantaneous responses both to the brands and the other fans on these pages. The researches demonstrate that an average Facebook user follows 12 brands which they feel a connection to; however, they usually get an interaction with 6 of them at the most by liking their content and by writing comments (Brito et al., 2015, p.50)

Today, consumers can convey their likes and dislikes to brands very easily. All they need to do is to visit the Facebook brand page of the brands and create their message by pushing the send button. For instance, while some of the fans compliment to the brands on Facebook and show their identification with the brands psychologically, some of them criticize the brands and convey their complaints because of their negative experiences. Therefore, Facebook brand fan pages carry some possible risks which can give a damage to the corporate reputation of brands.

While the positive comments of consumers on Facebook can start electronic word of mouth among other consumers and contribute to the reputation of brands positively, a negative comment such as a complaint of a consumer can easily start an online crises with the intervention of other dissatisfied consumers to the incident. Therefore, reputation management on Facebook is a difficult process from the aspect of many brands today. Thus, whether the presence of brands on Facebook is an opportunity for brands or a threat is still an issue which is discussed (Taşkıran, 2017, p. 170). This paper aims to cover the possible risks of using Facebook in corporate communication and discusses the ways of handling them by presenting a literature review.

## 2. The Significance of Corporate Reputation for Brands

According to Çiftçioğlu (2009, p. 5) reputation management is the entire image that is created out of the evaluation of stakeholders about the activities that the brand has actualized in the past. The total actions of a brand have been assessed by the stakeholders so far and then corporate reputation is created by their impressions. Riel and Fombrun (2007, p.43) emphasize that corporate reputation is formed by a brand's success in meeting the expectations of its consumers, its consumers' desire to buy its products and services, and whether it makes its own employees content. Concisely, corporate reputation is formed from both the impressions of employees working in the business and the impressions of external stakeholders such as the consumers (Güçdemir, 2012, p. 98).

Akim (2015, p.3) summarizes that in order for a brand to have a positive corporate reputation their product and service quality should be well, they should satisfy their customers and employees, they should prepare social responsibility campaigns and they should be good corporate citizens. Therefore, a brand which carries these elements has a sound corporate reputation and consumers are more willing to buy their products and services.

In our era, with the rise of social media, brands are also responsible from managing their reputation online since the number of people who use social media has been gradually increasing worldwide. According to the statistics of Hootsuite while 42% of the world's population has been using social media in the year 2018, 63% of the population in Turkey has been using social media in the year 2018 (We are Social, 2018). Therefore, with the increase of social media users, brands have also started to open Facebook brand fan pages to connect and create a bond with their consumers.

In these pages, brands start a communication by displaying their corporate identity and culture, and by putting forward their products and services with the informative and entertaining content that they share. Thanks to these online pages, consumers get the chance to interact with the brands and their other fans, which is a great opportunity for creating a brand community. According to Muniz and O'Guinn (2001, p.421) the common characteristics of brand communities are that they remind the history of the brand, they have rituals and traditions, they carry moral responsibilities, they help the spread of brand stories and they encourage the use of the brand.

On Facebook brand communities, which are known as Facebook brand fan pages, consumers review the products and mention their experience related with the products that they have used both to the brands and the other fans. In the meantime, consumers demonstrate their identification with the brands as they all get together under the roof an online brand community. This way, they not only meet with new people but also get a social status within the brand community thanks to their interactions. Also, the common characteristics which are shared in these online brand communities help to form brand loyalty in the consumers. Nevertheless, sometimes consumers who have had a negative experience can mention their negative experiences to the other fans in this community in order to draw the attention of the brand and to find a solution to their problem. If these people get support from other dissatisfied consumers, then an unexpected crisis can break out suddenly.

In social media, the damage of a brand's online reputation can be resulted from either their own failures or from the attacks of dissatisfied consumers. If a brand doesn't have a good performance in the market that it is in, consumers, who aren't content with the products that they use, will share their dissatisfaction with the other users on Facebook brand pages and will try to stir the brand for taking action. According to Karahasan (2012, p. 301) today's customers want their problems to be solved immediately, their aspirations are high, and they aren't afraid from expressing their thoughts. Therefore, social media experts of the brands should be in touch with the fans on the Facebook brand pages constantly.

In traditional media, public relation representatives of the brands have a longer time to respond to the consumers when they encounter a crisis situation; in other words, they could have a longer time to gather the information that the consumers' need (Suher, 2015, p. 133). However, this is

not the case on social media. Social media experts need to respond to the consumers quickly and they should be alert 7/24 because the crisis can spread fast due to the viral nature of social media.

### **3 The Thing Which Gives Consumers Control in Social Media: The User-Generated Content**

The thing which gives this comfort to the consumers on social media and makes them feel powerful against brands is the user-generated content feature of social media. Social media allows the users to produce user-generated content, and this way consumers can give a response back to the message of the brands. Thus, consumers can share their requests and complaints directly on the Facebook brand fan pages. The user generated content is defined as any content uploaded on the Internet by ordinary people rather than the professionals working in the media (Kapoor, Jayasimhsa and Sath, 2013, p. 45).

In the traditional media, the media professionals, who have had an education background in the media, create the content and broadcast it as a one-way information according the regulations of the media company that they work for. In other words, the content which is broadcasted has been shaped by the media professionals' perspectives. However, on social media, Facebook users, who are ordinary people, can broadcast any information without the process of control.

Therefore, from the side of the brands, preserving their reputation on social media is such a difficult process. Many brands which take place in social networking sites such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram have difficulties in managing their online reputation because user generated content has made customers more powerful against brands. While conveying their messages to their target audience with conventional media tools, brands have control over the messages; however, on social media platforms this control isn't totally in the hands of the brands (Özel and Sert, 2015, p. VIII). When using traditional media tools, brands decide how the message will be conveyed to the audience. However, on social media, consumers intervene in the message by showing their likes or dislikes.

The main reason why consumers make a complaint from Facebook is simple. They are basically unhappy with the product or service that they have used. A consumer makes a complaint from Facebook because the product most highly haven't met the expectations of the customer; in other words, the performance of the product which has been actualized is smaller than the expected performance (Bariş, 2015, p.59). In addition, consumers who create the negative user generated content on Facebook sometimes don't expect to gain a profit from this act, instead they want to become famous by expressing themselves on social media and to gain respect (Özel and Sert, 2015, p. 111).

Therefore, unhappy consumers, who want to draw attention of the other customers, share their negative experiences with the other fans on Facebook brand pages in order to create a negative perception about brands. Also, the consumers who make a complaint on these pages do the complaint because they don't want other people to encounter with the same problem in the future (Bariş, 2015, p. 83). Thus, if brands don't tell what kind of solutions they will come up with in order

to solve the problems of their displeased customers on Facebook, brands will see an increase in the amount of talks that will damage their online corporate reputation (Mavnacioğlu, 2015, p. 80).

Sernovitz (2012, p.19) mentions that consumers produce positive word of mouth concerning a brand as long as the brand have products which have good quality, and then consumers both do the advertisement of the brand for free and are willing to purchase the products of the brand. Moreover, consumers usually tend to rely on the user-generated content on Facebook pages more than the content designed by the brands. Therefore, if brands can encourage the spread of positive word-of-mouth on their Facebook pages and can decrease the spread of negative word of mouth, other consumers will find these pages more reliable and trustable (Rohm, Kaltcheva and Milne, 2013, p.305).

#### **4 Online Corporate Reputation Management in Social Media**

However, the only online environment that consumers talk about brands aren't limited with Facebook brand pages. Özel and Sert (2015, p. 5) underline that if brands want to manage their online reputation in a successful way, they should take note of their brand names passing in news sites, search engines, online dictionaries, blogs, forums, social networking sites and complaint sites. This way, brands will embrace a proactive approach, they will detect the situations that can damage their brands' reputation earlier and will take precautions towards them (Güçdemir, 2012, p. 96).

Online reputation management on social media targets to detect the negative content said by the consumers on the brands' social media pages and to get precautions towards them (Özel ve Sert, 2015, p.5). The size of the brands also make a difference in their way of tracking their brand names on social media. Generally, small sized companies which have a low budget ask their own employees to track their brand names on social media, on the other hand large sized companies get support from digital agencies (Bat and Yalçın, 2014, p. 277).

In any case, the social media team who are in charge of tracking the names of brands online should contact with the related departments when they come across with complaints in order to find solutions (Deneçli, 2015, p.107). If the problems are conveyed to the related departments immediately, then answers and solutions can be given to the consumers who are discontent and their anger can be soothed. Most of the consumers want their problems to be solved in a short amount of time. One of the things which consumers desire in complaint management is that they want a quick response (Bruhn, Papen and Zingg, 2015, p.202).

In other words, customers who follow brands on Facebook want to get a response to their requests or complaints in a short amount of time. To have an approach which doesn't care the requests or complaints of followers or to reply late to the comments written by customers give the impression that brands are unsuccessful in their corporate communication management. Furthermore, not giving a reply to the customers can lead to the growth of negative electronic word of mouth like a snowball and prepares an online crises. This situation not only damages the corporate reputation of the brand but also lead to a customer loss and economic loss at the same time (Pfeffer, Zorbach and Carley, 2014, p. 118). Therefore, it is important for companies knowing how to deal with complaints on Facebook.

Today, consumers are more powerful towards brands than they used to be. A dissatisfied customer can disturb a business with the complaint she or he makes on Facebook as the complaint will be visible on its page by other consumers. In other words, dissatisfied customers not only share their dissatisfaction directly to the brands, but also they share their dissatisfaction with other consumers on the Facebook brand fan page. In other words, it is not only the brand who receives the complaint on Facebook, in fact, many other consumers can read the complaint online before the brand realizes it since it is seen by everyone in the Facebook brand community (Bruhn, Papen and Zingg, 2015, p. 202). In short, consumers who share their dissatisfaction with other consumers start the spread of electronic word of mouth and since these negative comments become visible by other consumers following the brand fan page of the brand, this impacts the brands' reputation in a negative way.

Furthermore, since many consumers reach to Facebook with their mobile phones, this makes it easy for them to share their complaints on social media. According to the statistics of Hootsuite 54% of the population in Turkey use social media from their mobile phones (We are Social, 2018). Thus, a dissatisfied customer can draw attention to the issue that bothers him or her and can gain the support of other consumers easily. Moreover, by gaining the support of other consumers, an online crisis can break out suddenly. According to Barış (2015, p.84), nowadays, consumers prefer to make the complaint online because it is much easier than reaching to the store, it doesn't take a lot of time since it is as easy as pushing the send button on Facebook, it is easier because one doesn't have to pay a price just as when they call with the mobile phone and one doesn't have to post it by mail, which takes days or weeks to reach to the brand's address. Therefore, making the complaint online is more convenient for today's consumers.

According to Nitins and Burgess (2016, p. 390), consumers can even give responses to globally large sized companies on Facebook and make them feel disrupt. Barış (2015, p.86) underlines that a consumer makes a complaint for a few reasons: First of all, she or he has probably paid a lot of money for a product or service and it is something she or he really needs. Secondly, she or he thinks that the brand cares for its consumers and gives importance to customer satisfaction. Thirdly, she or he thinks that she or he will get a pleasing result.

While dealing with the complaint, the approach of the brand to the issue matters as well. According to Bruhn, Papen and Zingg (2015, p. 204) brands can answer in two ways to the complaints of their consumers on Facebook: While one of them is a favourable choice, the second one is an unfavourable choice.

**Table 1:** Two sides of complaint handling in social media

	<b>Favourable response</b>	<b>Unfavourable response</b>
<b>The time span that the brand responses:</b>	Concerning your Facebook message an hour ago.	Concerning your Facebook message a week ago.

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<b>Whether the brand is kind towards the consumer in its response:</b>	Please accept our apologies for the inconvenience. We will deal with the issue and provide a solution as soon as possible.	There is a problem in our system right now. We cannot answer to the questions at the moment.
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<b>The motivation of the brand to find a solution:</b>	Could you please send us your mobile phone number? We will get in touch with you right away.	There is nothing we can do about it right now. Please try again later.
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**Source:** Bruhn, Papen and Zingg, 2015, p. 204

If brands provide unfavourable answers to the consumers who have made the complaint, they will hinder the problems from themselves temporarily. Therefore, brands should be a participant of the conversations on Facebook, they should be honest to the consumers. Also, the brands should be prepared for crisis scenarios in advance and practice how to respond in each scenario. In the worst scenarios, brands should respond calmly to people who try to decrease the value of the brand by writing negative comments in the frame of respect rules (Mestçi, 2013, p. 38). When coming across with complaints, brands should try to change the flow of the conversations in a positive way (Ryan, 2016, p. 204). How the brand treats to the consumer, in other words, whether the brand will approach to the consumer with kindness and whether it will make empathy with the consumer are important elements in complaint management (Bruhn, Papen and Zingg, 2015, p. 202).

In other words, brands not only need to respond to their customers' positive comments, but also should say thank you for their customers' support and they should advocate the business in a good way against the negative views of their dissatisfied customers (Mestçi, 2013, p.11). Also, in circumstances when the brand is right, the brand needs to break its silence against the negative comments and it should put forth their good sides. If a brand chooses to keep quiet, gossips can arouse and people can start stories which don't have a base (Koçyiğit, 2017, p. 43).

Reputation management is not an easy task for brands in today's digital era simply because brands cannot control the content created by their customers. According to a research conducted by DiStaso, McCorkindale and Wright (2011, p. 326) with 12 social media experts, the biggest handicap from the aspect of the brands on social media is the lack of control because of not determining what the customers will say or do. Consumers are basically unpredictable on social media. Dissatisfied customers are a problem for brands because they play a role in shaping the impression regarding the business in a negative way. The negative word of mouth created by dissatisfied Facebook customers also negatively affects the impression of other customers



concerning the business. According to a research conducted by Haigh and Wigley (2013, p. 71), the corporate reputation of a business, which comes across with many negative comments of customers on its Facebook page, is usually low.

Furthermore, the negative comments or complaints written on the Facebook page of a brand prepare a base for the outburst of a crisis. In the past, customers couldn't reach to brands that easily. They used to write letters or call the brands to convey their complaints (Einwiller and Steilen, 2015, p. 196). However, it will take time for the brands to respond to the customers. On the other hand, with social media customers can easily reach to the brands. The only thing that they need to do is to visit the Facebook page of the brand and send their message.

Before the social media has come into existence, brands used to develop a relationship with their customers with the techniques of public relations and direct marketing, and brands have the control to shape this relationship in the way that they want (Jahn and Kunz, 2012, p.344). Now, brands share this control with their customers who express their positive or negative thoughts regarding the brands on social networking sites such as the Facebook brand fan pages.

The research that Einwiller and Steilen (2015, p. 201) conducted on the Facebook page of 24 large sized American companies showed that brands mostly encountered with customer service complaints regarding products and services and most customers find the brands responsible from their problems. While creating a strong reputation requires many efforts, the reputation of a business can be damaged with a serious complaint, which is the dangerous situation that can happen. Therefore, brands should assign a social media expert who monitors the Facebook page of the brand and cares about the worries of unhappy customers by paying attention to their needs. On social networks, messages which contain complaints towards a brand circulates fast and these are called online firestorms (Pfeffer, Zorbach ve Carley, 2014, p.118). Therefore, the brands' social media expert should intervene in the negative conversations among the consumers on the Facebook page of the brand and take some precautions in advance.

Negative electronic word of mouth not only damages the image of the brand, but also affects the incomes of the brand in a negative way (Lis and Nebler, 2013, p. 64). Customers don't generally prefer the products of the brands which have a negative reputation. Therefore, brands whose reputation is strong can stay in the sector long years and they become brands which are trusted and preferred. However, while corporate reputation is a process which requires many endeavours, it can be damaged with the chain of negative messages on Facebook easily. Therefore, Facebook pages of the brands should be managed well by the social media experts successfully. Businesses should be sincere on Facebook and should reflect their own values to their customers.

## **5 How to Approach the Consumers in Crises Situations**

Sometimes the chain of negative comments on Facebook brand fan pages can lead to an unexpected crisis. Uğurlu (2017, p.110) emphasizes that in order to cope with well with a crisis situation, brands should anticipate the crisis in advance, should get prepared for the possible crisis scenarios beforehand, should analyze the characteristics of their customers priorly, and should plan which department will give a response to the negative comments of their customers.

According to Varnalı (2013, p. 117) there are three things that brands need to do in crises situations and these are to inform the customers that they are aware of the situation, to apologize and to take action. Alikılıç (2011, p.190) mentions that after taking the required action, brands should inform each followers who made a comment on the issue that the problem has been solved. Also, Suher (2015, p.142) mentions that in crisis situations, brands shouldn't get into a discussion with their customers, they shouldn't delete what their customers' have written and they shouldn't close their Facebook brand pages.

Instead, brands should take the requests of customers into consideration each time, they should demonstrate that they listen to their customers and give value to them. This is a significant point because followers who realize that the business which they follow on Facebook constantly ignore them can change their attention towards rival companies after a while. Kerpen (2015, p. 18) draws attention that customers tend to move towards rival businesses who listen to them and who give responses to their actual needs and this situation in fact damages the reputation of brands.

Therefore, brands need to respond to the comments of their customers in time. Furthermore, brands which get less complaints on their Facebook pages have such a misunderstanding. If they take less complaints this doesn't mean that their customers are totally content from them because maybe their customers don't want to deal with the uneasiness of making a complaint and move towards the rival brands instead (Hansen, Wilke and Zaichkowsky, 2010, p. 10). Therefore, brands should see the complaints that they take as an opportunity to get rid of their own deficiencies.

To reply the customer complaints in time and bringing the complaints into a conclusion is important from the perspective of brands. Deleting the negative comments of the customers on Facebook can damage the reputation of brands because brands can give the impression that they don't trust themselves or their services. However, according to the researchers conducted most of the brands tend to delete the negative comments on Facebook brand pages. For instance, Dekay (2012, p. 292) made a research on the Facebook pages of 25 large sized companies on the Fortune list and found out that 12 brands (48%) completely deleted the negative comments.

Another research conducted on Fortune 500 companies showed that only 28 of (9.4%) the 309 companies communicate with their stakeholders in a crisis situation (Ki and Nekmat, 2014, p. 144). According to Einwiller and Steilen (2015: 196) instead of deleting the negative comments, if brands have a successful complaint management they will not only gain the people who made the complaint but also positively influence the several followers who witness the situation on the Facebook brand page. By giving a response to the complaints fast, brands will create the image that it listens to its own customers and solve their problems (Kerpen, 2015, p. 83). The important thing is to win the customers back by solving their problems.

According to Einwiller and Steilen (2015) in order to perform a successful complaint management, brands first need to listen to the person who have made the complaint, they need to reply to the complaint fast, they need to apologize if they have the fault and they should compensate the loss (Einwiller and Steilen, 2015, p. 197). Hansen, Wilke and Zaichkowsky (2010, p.10) mentions that the reason why the person has made the complaint results from the fact that she or he have had

a financial loss and therefore by giving the promise of replacing the old products or giving future discounts, brands should compensate.

Furthermore, during online crisis situations, the people who will help the company to get out of the crisis is the people who love the brands; in other words, the fans. Since the brand ambassadors are the people who generate positive content for the brand, they are the ones who will give emergency help and advocate the brand in crisis situations (Varnalı, 2013, p.118). The task of brand ambassadors is to start positive word of mouth about the brand, to empower the ties of other customers with the brand and to lead the other customers to purchase the brand's products (Deneçli, 2015, p. 55). In crisis situations brand ambassadors will emphasize the successful sides of the brand and will help the brand to get out of the crisis.

## 6 Conclusion

Opening a Facebook page is both an opportunity and a threat for brands. But avoiding to open a Facebook page is not a permanent solution for brands either. According to a social media expert, Sevinç (2012, p.39) some brands don't open a Facebook page because of the fear of not handling negative comments, however since people talk in other social media platforms by opening a Facebook page, the brand will hinder the spread of this talk in other platforms and can create a space in which they can intervene into the talks. This way, brands can shape the direction of the talks. Therefore, the tasks of social media experts has a vital importance in complaint management.

Online reputation management on Facebook is a delicate issue for brands, which needs to be taken care for with attention. Brands who have social media experts monitoring their brand names in social media 7/24 and engaging in dialogues with the discontent customers by solving their problems fast will make a successful complaint management and will protect their brand's corporate reputation.

Having a strong corporate reputation is one of the most valuable strength of brands therefore it should also be protected online by taking precautions. Many brands still have difficulties in preserving their corporate reputation online due to the unexpected attacks of discontent consumers; however, brands who will pay attention to the solution - oriented elements mentioned in this paper will have a successful complaint management.

A complaint management expert Barış (2015, p. 93) mentions that if brands solve the problems of their consumers' complaints, they will keep their current customers, they will encourage their customers' to buy more, they will hinder their customers preferring their rivals, they will pull new customers and they will have quality control. Most importantly, they will gain the trust of their customers by solving their problems. Therefore, it is important for brands to take care of their customers' problems in time. Brands which build a strong relationship with their consumers on the Facebook brand communities will create a mutual trust with their consumers.

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