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Media and Reputation: Terms of Contradiction or Symbiotic Brethren?

This article aims to present definitions of media and reputation and examine how the notions of media and reputation intersect and diverge. Media do not always play a helpful role in building good and sustainable reputations and they can also be harmful if used improperly. This chapter discusses how people in virtual and real life can utilize new approaches to successfully manage reputation. Although it is doubtful that a complete synergy between media and reputation is possible, a more theoretical and analytical approach to media and reputation suggests ways that they intersect and interconnect through an intermediary approach.

Introduction

Reputation

There is common belief that reputation is an image that pertains to someone's particular habits or something's characteristics in a social process. Although it has a major impact on a target image, reputation is clearly distinct from image.

Our appearance, attitudes, behavior, and character perhaps serve our reputation as a totality. If we assume that a human being is a container, reputation is like a tag or label on which is written what others generally think.

This tag/label may be widely acclaimed, appreciated,and admired - or not. It is in fact a social practice; it is the result of a social evaluation based on a set of criteria and for that reason it may be referred to as a social entity.

Reputation is recognized to be an omnipresent and instinctive mechanism of social control. As it has been the subject of study in several fields such as sociology, pschology, and management, there are also numerous definitions of the term:

> "It is a distributed, socially ascribed, and collective belief of a society towards the stand-point of a single person, group, or role. It is developed based on the general belief of society actors whether or not a given identity has fully satisfied the expectations of its roles. A high degree of reputation directly contributes to the development of stronger social status and influence. The formal definition of reputation structure is reliant on contextual features, societal values, and environmental goals of the target domain where reputation is being defined and deployed." (Bagheri et al. 2009, 410-411).

Simply put, it is a result of social evaluations of a set of criteria. It cannot be definitively ascribed to reputation as there is no precise definition of reputation, so we can not talk about an ultimate reputation as a whole. It has has several facets, and it may have different influences over people. It is a dynamic and an unstable feature which an organization cannot control. As it is a one step forward one step bacward movement for every aspect of things, an initial reputation may be detrimental to or improve the existing reputation of an organization through social and environmental interactions.

Reputation is a perception which is temporal in nature. In other words, it can be built up year by year but also lost very quickly, so the reputable being/saying/doing process needs to be sustainable.

According to Fox (2001, 34) "reputation is the estimation in which a person or thing is held, especially by the community or the public generally; repute: a man of good reputation; favourable repute; good name: to ruin one's reputation by misconduct; a favourable and publicly recognized name or standing for merit, achievement, etc. to build up a reputation; the estimation or name of being, having, having done, etc. "

Reputation is one of many signals providing information about the likely behavior of an individual. Furthermore, it not only has an impact on individuals but also acts in different degrees.

"At the supra-individual level, it concerns groups, communities, collectives and abstract social entities (such as firms, corporations, organizations, countries, cultures and even civilizations). It affects phenomena of different scales, from everyday life to relationships between nations" (Tennie et al. 2010, 482).

As a fundamental instrument of social order, we can say that reputation transmission is a communication of an evaluation.

"More precisely, reputation is a believed, social, meta-evaluation; it is built upon three distinct but interrelated objects:

(1) a cognitive representation, or more precisely a believed evaluation - this could be somebody's image, but is enough that this consist of a communicated evaluation;
(2) a population object, i.e., a propagating believed evaluation; and
(3) an objective emergent property at the agent level, i.e., what the agent is believed to be" (Tennie et al. 2010, 482).

Corporate reputation

Reputation receives a great deal of attention among organizations. Supra-individuals need differentation to survive in the competitive market. It reveals the need for an emotional response to the expectations of its stakeholders. This has produced an abstract concept which is defined as reputation management. Sub-aspects of reputation managements are corporate reputation competitiveness, corporate responsibility, cultural representations, risk management and measurement.

Bagheri and his colleagues (2009, 411) stated that "the current state of the art in reputation management systems can be categorized in two main classes:

(1) those which employ social networking features by accumulating all of the available feedback in the community in order to develop a robustness reputation estimation mechanism; and

(2) probabilistic methods that rely on probabilistic estimation techniques on a limited fraction of the available information in the communitiy."

As the reputation system naturally prepares, incubates, illumunates and distributes feedback about the behaviors of actors, "the dimensions of reputation which is an organization's culture and management, its products and services, success, corporate responsibility, public image, and its ability to change and develop" (Aula 2011, 29) should also be considered.

Corporate reputation reflects collective views about an organization or a synthesis and overall evaluation of an organizational stakeholder's joint opinions and attidues actualized about the organization over time. This evaluation is based on the stakeholder's direct and/or indirect experiences with the organization, all types of communications that provide information about the organizations's actions and discourse and/or a comparison with the actions of other matches. To put it another way, it reflects an accumulation of views held by multiple layers of stakeholders about an organization.

There are direct and indirect sources of reputation as well. Direct observations of cooperative behavior and/or of the signals of such behavior are a major source for determining reputation. The "audience effect" suggests that the individual being judged automatically takes into account observers who are potential partners. Indirect sources of reputation, for instance provided by gossip, are particularly important in human societies. Hence, this tool of reputation management strongly depends on our ability to mentalize. (Tennie et al. 2010, 484).

Although input is subjectively created by the outside world, the outcome is an objective reality for an organization. In turn it determines the concept of organizational identity "that represents insiders' perceptions and beliefs about what distinguishes their organization from others. In a sociocultural context, when the role of public relations is set in the management of organizational social ecology, it conceptualizes organizational reputation through the property of cultural selection. Organizations operate as social collectives or as dynamic systems of organizational members who communicate purposefully with influential stakeholders to ultimately achieve organizational goals" (Johnston and Everett 2012, 14-15).

Media reputation

The concept of image effects reputation. Organizations make a conscious effort to be situated in media in space and time via targeted, deliberate, controlled, predictable and well framed images and texts to obtain positive feedback to contribute to and/or maintain reputation.

Therefore, organizations need media support to maintain their reputations as desired. On the other hand, the media does not always play a helpful role in building good and sustainable reputations for organizations. The media itself has difficulty within the context of the protection of its own reputation.

"And media reputation is a discrete phenomenon, a collective concept connecting the firm, media workers, stakeholders, sources of news about firms, and the readers of news that develops over time through a complex social process. This description captures such key feauters of reputation as instability, roots in multiple experiences, and the influences of environmental factors that an organization cannot control. It particularly reflects the nature of reputation as depicted in the media, which, means record/influence public knowledge and opinions about firms" (Murphy 2010, 211).

The press release is a commonly used form of communication in media. It needs to be strategically framed and shaped in the writing stage. The audio/visual phenomenon is gathered and the issue, idea or event is passed through a process which entails a selection, sorting, filtering, highlighting and writing process.

An organization's expectation from a press release is to maintain the organization's good reputation or build reputation, yet the media's expectation is to sell news and therefore journalists look for news which has release value. Therefore, the news release, which is itself a process, undergoes another process in the eyes of the media. In these circumstances, the media space can be transformed into dangerous territory. The selection-making process about what is right or wrong, good or bad changes according the organization and media.

To give an example, in a media ecosystem basic questions need to be answered. The world-renowned news value in media is called negativism; news writers seek out negativism in core of the news instead of success factors when searching for answers to questions.

Murphy (2010, 209) highlighted the important of new releases on periods of crisis through the use of "reputation management with a reasonable degree of control through strategy-driven campaigns involving techniques like news releases, interviews, and issues advertisements. Especially after a crisis or a major news event, reputation cannot effectively be controlled by an organization. Instead, reputation often takes on a life of its own, evolving in ways that defy attempts by organizations to channel it in directions of their own choosing." He defines the influence of news coverage on corporate reputations as follows (2010, 211-212):

"(1) The greater the amount of media coverage, the greater the public awareness
(2) Attributes emphasized in media coverage become attributes the public uses to define a firm.
(3) The valence of media coverage, positive or negative, is reflected in corresponding public perceptions about those attributes and
(4) The substantive and affective attributes associated with a firm in business news coverage prime public attitudes about that firm. Thus, media coverage helps to shape an entity's reputation by estasblishing called media reputation."

As Kempner puts it (2005, 4): "Well-executed communications in the earliest stages create a positive framework and generate goodwill to be leveraged throughout the process. Failure to create this communications infrastructure and control messaging and positioning from the outset can lead to a never-ending game of catch-up in which the tone of the news and perception of the transaction are continually set by others."

The tips above can be applied by an organization or with PR professionals: "The production of media reputation through the interaction of multi-perspectives such as public relations output, media news values, type of events. This concept of media reputation is apt to be more disorderly and diffuse than strategic and targeted, a collective concept connecting the firm, media workers, stakeholders, sources of news about firms, and the readers of news" (Murphy 2010, 212).

The organization may not need the media to create itself, and what is more important is that its quailty of production and services provide the market and the customers. On the other hand, the organization may need media to maintain its reputation especially during crisesbecause media spreads the news as well as records and influences public information and public opinions about an organization. Given the fact that reputation is dependent on the media, the flow of information must be delibrate, managed and planned so that the spreading of news to the social ecology is controlled.

It particularly reflects the nature of reputation as depicted in the media. According to Deephouse (2010, 1094-1098), "media reputation is a discrete phenomenon, a collective concept connecting the firm, media workers, stakeholders, sources of news about firms, and the readers of news that develops over time through a complex social process."

Deephouse (2000, 1099) also argued that "media themselves act not only as vehicles for advertising and mirrors of reality reflecting firms actions, but also as active agents shaping information through editorials and feature articles."
However, there is a clear path to controlling dangerous situations and safeguarding reputation, and increasing the chances for a positive transaction outcome.

"The first step is making a planning and implementation process. It involves communications professionals in the earliest stages of decision making and a comprehensive campaign. The communications experts understand the dynamics of key stakeholders. They know the identities of the stakeholder groups and how to reach them with clear messages. The second step is tailoring a multi-platform external communication strategy with a defined set of goals and messages. The key element to a successful communications program is a detailed media plan. As the universal channel for all stakeholder groups, the media could be a organizations's best friend or worst enemy - a force for equalizing the message to all constituents or alternatively heaping fuel on the fire of negative

speculation. Understanding how the media functions is vital to crafting a strategy because the media operate as a pack" (Kempner 2005, 1-2).

In fact, we should not overlook the fact that the protection of the reputation of media itself also requires reputation management.

As regards media and reputation, Gentzkow and Shapiro (2005, 2) noted:"The survey evidence revealing rising polarization and falling trust in the news media has prompted concerns about the market's ability to deliver credible information to the public. A media firms wants to build a reputation as a provider of accurate information. Media tend to distort information to make it conform with consumers' prior beliefs. Media firms try to build a reputation for truthful reporting, and consumers' assessments of the quality of news sources depend on prior beliefs. Media firms' desire to maintain a reputation for accuarcy in reporting."

Conclusion

There is no exact determination for the ultimate reputation, neither for individuals nor for organizations. It is common knowledge that people need to know what is happening in the environment. The desire to be aware of this environment ranges from the local to the global. Individuals need information to make decisions and act to make an evaluation of something or somebody.

An overabundance of information rests with media, and this is then disseminated as news which is significant because it purports to be an essential reflection of the fact. The ideology of the media, the type of the media, the perceptions of reporters, and the norms of journalism are an integral part of the issues at hand.

Therefore it would be very optimistic to say that the news is a kind of insular information. This information can be transformed into a powerful piece of news, thereby losing its innocence. Via this re-created form of information, media have an impact on public and private opinions.

As the labor-intensive elements of corporate reputation can suddenly collapse, organizations attempt to resort to this risky media environment to rebuild their reputations. Media can be a mechanism both to re-build and to destroy, as one paragraph of negative news about an organization can spread around the world via media.

In other words, organizations need the media - which possesses a potentially devastating power of credibility - to maintain and rebuild their credibility. In particular, organizations need the media during periods of crisis. However, the relationship with media during this time may in fact exacerbate the crisis at hand. That is why the relationship with media needs to be deliberate, sensitively thought out and pre-planned. There are some ways, however, to protect or minimize the negative effects that media can have on an organization's reputation:

(1) Keep your brand strong. (Your product or service should be reliable)
(2) Monitor media coverage. (What are they saying about the organization?)
(3) Media coverage helps shape an entity's reputation by establishing media reputation but the amount of media coverage is important. Public awareness is not created by large amounts of media coverages but rather by quality and well-framed content.
(4) Plan your communications. (To whom you are writing, in which media can you reach them.) Attract the media by attractive news values. (Media feeds itself with new and interesting things.)
(5) Misinformation and disinformation puts the organization more at risk in the media world. Write your press bulletin according to the news writing style. (It should answer the questions of 5W1H: Why, Where, What, When, Who and How.)
(6) Beware that media will re-shape the information through the editorial process. (The piece of writing for the media must be written in an inverted pyramid news writing style; in other words the most important things should be written at first).
(7) Set up a agenda by organizing exclusive events for media such as press launching or press conferences. (Tell about the organization.)
(8) Arrange an open and honest interview with the CEO. (An absence of communication may lead to speculation and more questions. If you are a part of negative story, it is more likely that you you may be perceived negatively.)
(9) Solve negativism with a positivism. (Your rhetoric should not take an aggressive tone. A proactive can approach creates a positive atmosphere and positive news in media.)

(10) Admit you did wrong and do not hesitate to apologize and then produce a solution to the problem. Show your abilitiy to change and develop straightaway.

Lastly, the terms of media and reputation cannot easily be mentioned in one phrase, unless there is a controlled communication environment. Otherwise, media has the potential to destroy the reputation of an organization rather than protect or re-build it.

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