



## Understanding Social Media and E-Reputation: A Narrative Literature Review

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**Abstract:** This article presents a narrative literature review on social media and e-reputation, highlighting their increasing importance in the digital world. The objective is to examine current theoretical approaches to the concepts of social media and e-reputation. After defining the concepts of social media and e-reputation and explaining their evolution, the article explores key theories. For social media, it examines engagement theory, social network theory, and online identity theory. For e-reputation, it addresses reputation theory, online trust theory, and online responsibility theory. By synthesizing these approaches, we compare different theories to identify gaps in the current understanding of the concepts and propose future research directions to enhance understanding of social media and e-reputation concepts. In conclusion, we summarize the main conclusions of our literature review.

**Key Words:** e-reputation, online identity, online responsibility, social media, digital world

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The digital revolution has fundamentally transformed the way companies engage with consumers, with social media emerging as a pivotal arena for public discourse and brand interaction. Social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram have transcended their roles as communication channels to become influential arenas where e-reputations —the collective judgment about a company's or individual's reputation online, shaped by digital interactions and content (Fombrun, 1996) —are made and marred. This transformative impact on how businesses manage their public personas underscores a vital shift from traditional reputation management to dynamic, real-time e-reputation strategies in the digital sphere.

Social media has evolved from a simple communication tool to a complex ecosystem impacting every facet of corporate reputation management. It offers tremendous opportunities for enhancing brand visibility and customer engagement but also poses risks due to the volatile nature of online interactions (Youness & Valette-Florence, 2017). The rapid dissemination of information via social media can lead to swift changes in public perception, making the management of online reputations a dynamic and critical endeavor (Chun & Davies, 2001). Additionally, the empirical study by Alturas and Oliveira (2016) demonstrates how consumer behaviors on social media platforms can significantly impact the reputation of companies, highlighting the need for strategic management of these channels.

Despite the critical role of social media in shaping e-reputation, academic research exploring the theoretical underpinnings of these concepts remains sparse. This narrative literature review delves into the theoretical frameworks of social media and e-reputation to clarify and contrast prevailing approaches, identifying gaps and highlighting inconsistencies or overlaps in the literature. By providing a comprehensive analysis, the review proposes future research directions to deepen our understanding of how social media platforms impact e-reputation. This exploration is intended to offer both academic insights and practical implications for online reputation managers and social science researchers. It emphasizes the importance of robust theoretical approaches in navigating the complex dynamics of social media and e-reputation.

## 2. DEFINITION OF CONCEPTS

To understand the broader digital landscape, it is essential to clearly define social media and e-reputation.

Social media has become a cornerstone of modern communication, shaping how individuals and organizations interact and share information. Similarly, e-reputation has emerged as a critical element in online interactions, influencing perceptions and behaviors. This section will provide detailed definitions of social media and e-reputation.

Additionally, it will trace the historical development of social media to contextualize its growing importance in the digital age and examine the role of e-reputation in shaping online interactions.

### 2.1 Social Media and their evolution

#### Definitions of Social Media

Social media encompasses a wide range of online platforms and tools that facilitate the creation, sharing, and exchange of content and ideas among individuals and communities. It is broadly defined as "forms of electronic communication (such as websites for social networking and blogging) through which users create online communities to share information, ideas, personal messages, and other content (such as videos)" (Edosomwan et al., 2011). Social media platforms include social networking sites (e.g., Facebook, LinkedIn), microblogging services (e.g., Twitter), photo and video sharing sites (e.g., Instagram, YouTube), and collaborative projects (e.g., Wikipedia).

Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) further elaborate on social media as "a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content". This definition highlights the participatory nature of social media, where users are not just consumers of information but also active contributors. Boyd and Ellison (2007) define social networking sites specifically as "web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system". This definition underscores the relational aspect of social media, emphasizing the networks and connections formed between users.

Carr and Hayes (2015) provide a more nuanced definition, describing social media as "Internet-based, disentained, and persistent channels of masspersonal communication facilitating perceptions of interactions among users, deriving value primarily from user-generated content". This definition focuses on the inherent characteristics of social media that enable both mass communication and interpersonal interactions, distinguishing social media from other digital communication tools.

The evolution and definitions of social media reflect its diverse functionalities and the different ways it has integrated into everyday life and business practices. Mangold and Faulds (2009) describe social media as a hybrid element of the promotion mix because it combines characteristics of both traditional and modern communication channels, providing a versatile platform for both personal and professional use.

#### Evolution of Social Media

The history and evolution of social media illustrate its transformation from early forms of electronic communication to complex, interactive platforms that shape contemporary digital interaction. The roots of social media can be traced back to the telegraph in 1792, which was one of the earliest forms of electronic communication (Edosomwan et al., 2011). This technological advancement laid the groundwork for subsequent developments in digital communication.

The 1960s marked a significant milestone with the introduction of email and ARPANET, an early network of time-sharing computers, which eventually led to the development of the internet. These innovations facilitated more sophisticated forms of online interaction and paved the way for the first social networking sites in the 1990s, such as Six Degrees, BlackPlanet, and Asian Avenue, which allowed users to create profiles and connect with others (Edosomwan et al., 2011).

The early 2000s saw a dramatic expansion in social media platforms, significantly influenced by the advent of Web 2.0. This new phase of the internet emphasized user-generated content, usability, and interoperability, leading to the launch of major sites like MySpace in 2003, Facebook in 2004, YouTube in 2005, and Twitter in 2006. These platforms revolutionized online interaction by providing new ways for users to share content, engage with communities, and build relationships. Facebook, which started as a network for Harvard students, expanded to include anyone over the age of 13, growing to over 500 million active users by 2010 (Edosomwan et al., 2011).

Further advancements in technology and the proliferation of mobile devices have continued to drive the evolution of social media. The integration of social media with smartphones and other mobile technologies has made it more accessible and pervasive, enabling real-time communication and the sharing of multimedia content. Platforms like Instagram and Snapchat have capitalized on these capabilities, emphasizing visual content and instant sharing (Huang & Benyoucef, 2013).

The impact of social media on business and communication has been profound. As noted by Alturas and Oliveira (2016), social media has transformed how businesses interact with their customers and manage their reputations. Companies must now monitor all that is written about them on social networks and carefully manage their online presence to maintain a positive reputation. The open nature of social media means that negative comments or reviews can spread quickly, potentially harming a company's reputation.

As social media continues to evolve, it remains a dynamic and influential force in shaping communication practices, business strategies, and social interactions. Understanding its historical development, especially the role of Web 2.0, provides valuable insights into its current functionalities and future directions.

## 2.2 Definition of e-reputation and its role in online interactions

E-reputation, often referred to as online reputation, is the perception that stakeholders form about an entity based on

the information available on the internet. This perception can be shaped by various online sources, including social media platforms, review websites, blogs, forums, and other user-generated content. The concept of e-reputation has become increasingly significant as more interactions and transactions occur in the digital space.

### Definition of E-reputation

Despite the limited research in this area, several definitions of e-reputation have been identified through our literature review. E-reputation is broadly defined as the "reputation built from the set of perceptions that stakeholders create from any element circulating on the Net" (Paquerot et al., 2011). It encompasses all digital interactions and content, reflecting the collective opinion formed by online users. Unlike traditional reputation, which is typically formed through consistent offline interactions and tends to be more stable over time, e-reputation is dynamic and can change rapidly based on new online information.

Dutot and Castellano (2015) highlight four critical dimensions of e-reputation: brand characteristics, website quality, service quality, and social media presence. They emphasize how these facets of an entity's online presence collectively contribute to its overall e-reputation. Additionally, Chun (2005) suggests that e-reputation comprises three main components: e-character (the perceived personality of the company), e-identity (the structure and aesthetics of the company's website), and e-experience (the consistency between online promises and offline experiences).

Gotsi and Wilson (2001) define corporate reputation, including e-reputation, as "a stakeholder's overall evaluation of a company over time" which is formed based on the company's direct experiences and any other form of communication and symbolism that provides information about the firm's actions and its comparison with the main rivals. Similarly, Jones et al. (2009) describe e-reputation as "the perception of an organization by its key stakeholders, made through the lens of digital media and interactions," emphasizing the role of digital media in shaping perceptions. Barnett et al. (2006) propose that e-reputation is "the collective representation of a firm's past actions and results that describes the firm's ability to deliver valued outcomes to multiple stakeholders." This perspective considers e-reputation as a cumulative outcome of an entity's online behavior and performance. Fombrun (1996) states that e-reputation is part of the broader concept of corporate reputation, which he defines as "a perceptual representation of a company's past actions and future prospects that describes the firm's overall appeal to all of its key constituents when compared with other leading rivals."

Due to the limited research on e-reputation, these definitions provide a foundational understanding of the concept, highlighting its multi-faceted nature and the importance of various online interactions and content in shaping stakeholder perceptions.

Given these varied definitions and the multifaceted nature of e-reputation, it is crucial to distinguish it from traditional

reputation to fully understand its unique characteristics and dynamics.

### **Difference between traditional reputation and e-reputation**

The distinction between traditional reputation and e-reputation lies primarily in the mediums through which they are formed and the speed at which they can change. Traditional reputation is built through long-term, consistent behavior and performance, often through face-to-face interactions and word-of-mouth. In contrast, e-reputation can be influenced almost instantaneously by online reviews, social media posts, and other forms of digital content.

Traditional reputation tends to be more stable and enduring, evolving over a longer period. E-reputation, however, is much more volatile and susceptible to rapid changes due to the immediacy and wide reach of the internet. For instance, a single viral post or negative review can significantly impact an entity's e-reputation within a short time frame (Gillette, 2002).

According to Castellano and Dutot (2013), the major difference between traditional reputation and e-reputation lies in the accessibility and permanence of information online. Traditional reputation is often localized and influenced by direct, personal interactions, whereas e-reputation is global and can be shaped by anyone with internet access, leading to a broader and more immediate impact. The authors also highlight that e-reputation is often perceived as a cumulative result of numerous digital interactions and user-generated content, which can be both positive and negative, making its management more complex.

In their study, Dutot and Castellano (2015) further emphasize that while traditional reputation relies heavily on controlled narratives and media representations, e-reputation is largely driven by user interactions and content shared on social media platforms. This shift from a controlled to a more democratized form of reputation management requires businesses to be more proactive and responsive in their online engagements.

### **The role of E-reputation in social interactions**

E-reputation plays a pivotal role in shaping online interactions, influencing how individuals and organizations are perceived and how they engage with their audiences. In the digital age, e-reputation affects various aspects of online behavior, including customer trust, engagement, and loyalty, as well as business partnerships and market positioning. A positive e-reputation enhances customer trust and loyalty, leading to increased engagement and repeat business. Seigneur (2013) notes that e-reputation is crucial for building trust in electronic commerce, as it provides potential customers with assurance about the quality and reliability of a company's products or services. A strong e-reputation can differentiate a brand in a competitive market, making it more attractive to consumers who rely heavily on online reviews and ratings.

A proactive approach to managing e-reputation involves actively engaging with customers on social media platforms, responding to reviews and feedback, and participating in online discussions. According to the study by Paquerot et al. (2011), organizations that effectively manage their e-reputation can foster a more positive and interactive online environment, leading to stronger relationships with their audiences. In times of crisis, an established positive e-reputation can act as a buffer during negative events, helping to mitigate the impact of bad publicity. Castellano and Dutot (2015) highlight that timely and transparent communication during a crisis is essential to maintaining trust and credibility, emphasizing the need for continuous monitoring of online sentiment and quick, effective responses to emerging issues.

E-reputation extends beyond customer interactions to influence business partnerships and overall market perception. Organizations with a strong e-reputation are more likely to attract and retain business partners, investors, and collaborators. Dutot and Castellano (2015) argue that e-reputation is a key factor in strategic business decisions, reflecting an organization's reliability and integrity in the digital marketplace. Social media platforms are central to shaping e-reputation, given their role in facilitating the rapid dissemination of information and opinions. Rindova et al. (2005) suggest that social media amplifies both positive and negative perceptions, requiring organizations to be vigilant and responsive in their online engagements. Effective use of social media can enhance e-reputation by showcasing positive customer experiences, sharing valuable content, and building a community around the brand.

## **3. THEORIES OF SOCIAL MEDIA**

### **3.1 Engagement theory: How individuals interact with social media**

Engagement theory in the context of social media emphasizes the critical role of user interaction and participation in creating value. The traditional business model, where value is derived from the one-way delivery of products or services, has evolved with the advent of social media. The new paradigm shifts focus towards intangible value created through user engagement and user-generated content (Di Gangi & Wasko, 2016).

Engagement theory posits that user experiences are shaped by both social interactions among users and the technical features of the social media platform. Social interactions, including personalization, transparency, access to social resources, and the presence of a critical mass of social acquaintances, significantly influence user engagement (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004; Di Gangi & Wasko, 2016). Personalization refers to the tailored, individualized attention that users perceive, which enhances satisfaction and relevance, leading to higher engagement (Kettinger & Lee, 1994; Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004). Social accessibility, or the ease of accessing social resources and a critical mass of acquaintances, further facilitates

meaningful user interactions, fostering deeper involvement (boyd, 2007; Hsu & Lin, 2008).

Technical features such as completeness, flexibility, evolvability, and integration also play a vital role in shaping user experiences and engagement. Completeness refers to a user's perception of having comprehensive access to information, while flexibility allows users to adapt functionalities to meet their specific needs (Wixom & Todd, 2005; Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004). Evolvability is the platform's ability to evolve with users' needs, ensuring continued engagement as users become more proficient with the platform (Di Gangi & Wasko, 2016). Integration involves combining content from various sources, enhancing the ease with which users can access and interact with information (Wixom & Todd, 2005; Lessig, 2008).

User engagement, defined as a user's state of heightened involvement resulting in personally meaningful benefits, is divided into individual involvement and personal meaning. Individual involvement indicates the intensity of a user's perceived role within the social media platform, increasing motivation to participate (Barki & Hartwick, 1994; Ray et al., 2014). Personal meaning encompasses the fulfillment of personal needs and interests through the social media experience (Battista & Almond, 1973; Debats, 1998).

Empirical research supports the notion that higher user engagement leads to increased social media usage. Di Gangi and Wasko (2016) found that user engagement positively impacts the frequency of content contribution, retrieval, and exploration within social media platforms. This co-created value benefits both users, who derive personal satisfaction from interactions, and organizations, which gain market insights and enhanced brand awareness.

In summary, Engagement Theory elucidates the multifaceted dynamics of user interaction with social media, highlighting the importance of both social and technical factors in fostering meaningful engagement and sustained platform usage.

### 3.2 Social Network theory: Influence of social relationships on online behavior

Social network theory provides a framework for understanding how relationships and interactions within social networks influence individual behavior, particularly in online environments. This theory is built on key concepts such as centrality, cohesion, and structural equivalence, which help to explain the flow of information and influence within a network (Liu et al., 2017).

**Centrality** refers to the importance of a node within a network, which can be measured through degree, closeness, and betweenness centrality (Freeman, 1979). Individuals with high degree centrality have numerous direct connections, those with high closeness centrality can quickly interact with all other nodes, and those with high betweenness centrality act as bridges between different parts of the network (Freeman, 1979). These positions allow individuals to significantly influence the flow of information and behavior within the network.

**Cohesion** measures the degree of interconnections among a group of nodes, indicating how closely knit a network is. High cohesion often leads to stronger interpersonal influence, as demonstrated in Friedkin's (1993) study, which found that personal influence is more potent in cohesive networks. Cohesive networks facilitate quicker and more uniform dissemination of information, reinforcing similar behaviors among members.

**Structural equivalence** describes nodes that occupy similar positions within a network, receiving similar information and social influence. Burt (1987) found that innovations are more likely to spread through structurally equivalent nodes than through direct ties, suggesting that structural equivalence can be a stronger predictor of behavioral adoption than mere cohesion.

The two-step flow of communication hypothesis posits that information first reaches a few key individuals (opinion leaders) who then disseminate it to their social contacts (Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955). This model highlights the role of opinion leaders in shaping public opinion and behavior by acting as intermediaries between mass media and the broader population.

In online communities, the interplay between social influence and selection significantly shapes user behavior. Crandall et al. (2008) emphasize that people are influenced by their current friends and tend to form new links with those who are similar to them, a process known as homophily or selection. This dual influence leads to increased similarity among connected individuals and can result in both uniformity and fragmentation within the network.

The **feedback effects** between similarity and social influence suggest that rising similarity between two individuals can predict future interactions, which in turn continue to increase similarity over time (Crandall et al., 2008). This dynamic highlights the importance of understanding both the structural properties of social networks and the content of interactions to predict online behavior.

In summary, social network theory provides a comprehensive lens to analyze how social relationships influence online behavior. By examining centrality, cohesion, and structural equivalence, along with the mechanisms of social influence and selection, we can better understand the complex interplay that drives user behavior in online environments. This understanding is crucial for developing strategies to effectively engage users and leverage the power of social networks in digital marketing and online reputation management.

### 3.3 Online Identity theory: construction of identity through social media

The construction of identity in digital environments is a multifaceted process, influenced by the unique characteristics of online interactions. Social media platforms, which offer diverse ways for users to present

themselves and interact with others, play a significant role in this process.

One fundamental aspect of online identity construction is **selective self-presentation**. This concept, rooted in Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical perspective, suggests that individuals perform different roles in various contexts to create specific impressions. Online, users have the advantage of editing and curating their self-presentation, which can lead to a more controlled and idealized version of themselves (Walther, 1996; Toma et al., 2008). This selective self-presentation is further facilitated by the asynchronous nature of many online interactions, allowing users to carefully craft their messages and choose which aspects of their identity to reveal (Walther, 1996).

Social media platforms enable users to create **avatars** or digital representations, which serve as proxies for their identity. Research has shown that avatars can reflect both the actual and idealized self, with users often portraying themselves in a more favorable light online (Yee & Bailenson, 2007). For instance, in virtual environments like Second Life, users often create avatars that are more attractive and outgoing than their real-life selves (Messinger et al., 2008).

Another crucial aspect of online identity construction is the **hyperpersonal model of communication**, which posits that online interactions can become hyperpersonal, meaning they can exceed the intimacy and closeness of face-to-face interactions (Walther, 1996). This occurs because users can optimize their self-presentation and selectively disclose personal information, fostering deeper connections. The anonymity and reduced cues in online environments can lead to over-attribution, where individuals perceive others more positively than they might in face-to-face settings (Walther, 1996; Hancock & Dunham, 2001).

In the context of social media, identity is not static but rather a **work-in-progress** that evolves with ongoing interactions. According to Buckingham (2008), identity in digital environments is a fluid and continuously negotiated concept. This is evident in the creation of online profiles and the publication of content, which allow individuals to build and manage their reputations over time (Aresta et al., 2013).

Social media also enables users to engage in **identity play**, experimenting with different aspects of their personalities and exploring alternative selves. This can be particularly pronounced in environments that allow for significant customization and creativity, such as gaming platforms and virtual worlds (Turkle, 1995).

Moreover, the **expectation of future interaction** influences how individuals construct their online identities. When users anticipate future face-to-face meetings, they tend to present themselves more authentically online to avoid discrepancies between their online and offline personas (Gibbs et al., 2006). Conversely, in purely online interactions, users may feel freer to experiment with their identities and present a more idealized self (Yee et al., 2009).

Overall, the construction of online identity through social media is a dynamic process shaped by selective self-

presentation, the use of avatars, the hyperpersonal model of communication, and the continuous evolution of self-representation. These factors collectively influence how individuals present themselves, interact with others, and build their reputations in the digital world.

#### 4. E-REPUTATION THEORIES

##### 4.1 Online Reputation theory: how online reputation is formed and perceived

Online reputation, also known as e-reputation, is formed through a complex interplay of various factors that encompass the perceptions, experiences, and interactions of stakeholders within the digital environment. According to Castellano and Dutot (2017), e-reputation is derived from the perceptions that stakeholders develop based on their interactions with a company's digital presence, including its website, social media activities, and overall online behavior. This encompasses the quality of the company's online services, the user experience on its website, and the nature of its social media interactions.

One significant aspect of online reputation formation is electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM), which includes online reviews, ratings, and user-generated content. eWOM is particularly influential as it provides potential customers with firsthand insights into other consumers' experiences. This form of feedback is perceived as more reliable and trustworthy than traditional advertising because it is based on the opinions of fellow consumers (Chalençon et al., 2017). As a result, positive eWOM can enhance a company's e-reputation, while negative eWOM can significantly damage it (Paquerot et al., 2011).

The formation of online reputation is also influenced by the immediacy and speed of information dissemination in the digital space. Social media platforms, for instance, enable rapid sharing and amplification of user opinions and experiences. This real-time communication can quickly shape public perception, making it essential for companies to monitor and manage their online presence actively (Dutot & Castellano, 2015).

Perception of online reputation is largely based on the quality of interactions and the content shared by the company and its stakeholders. Users tend to form opinions about a company based on the consistency and reliability of its online communications, the quality of its customer service, and the overall user experience provided through its digital channels (Khelladi & Boutinot, 2017). Effective online reputation management involves addressing customer feedback promptly, engaging with users on social media, and ensuring that the company's online presence accurately reflects its brand values and commitments (Seigneur, 2013).

Furthermore, e-reputation is not only influenced by direct interactions with the company but also by the broader online discourse surrounding it. This includes news articles, blog posts, and discussions in online communities, all of which contribute to shaping the public's perception (Chebli & Valette-Florence, 2017). Companies with a strong, positive e-reputation often benefit from increased customer trust and loyalty, improved market positioning,

and enhanced business partnerships (Frochot & Molinaro, 2008).

Ultimately, the formation and perception of online reputation are dynamic processes influenced by a multitude of factors, including user-generated content, eWOM, social media interactions, and the overall quality of a company's online presence. Effective management of these elements is crucial for maintaining a favorable e-reputation and leveraging it to achieve competitive advantage in the digital marketplace. Trust is fundamental to the formation and perception of online reputation. In the context of e-reputation, trust acts as a key determinant influencing both consumer behavior and the overall success of businesses online. The intricate relationship between trust and e-reputation is highlighted in several studies, illustrating how trust can shape the online interactions and perceptions of consumers.

#### **4.2 Online Trust Theory: the role of trust in e-reputation formation**

One of the primary ways in which online reputation is formed is through the establishment of trust. Trust in an online environment is often built through consistent and positive interactions between a business and its customers. For example, Walsh et al. (2009) demonstrated that trust is a significant antecedent of corporate reputation, particularly in an offline context, which is likely to translate into the online sphere as well. Trustworthy behavior by a company, such as fulfilling promises and ensuring reliable service, contributes significantly to building a strong online reputation.

Moreover, Gupta et al. (2017) emphasize that trust and reputation together act as crucial differentiators for the success of online businesses. Their study identifies various factors that contribute to online reputation, such as the reliability of information, security of transactions, and the perceived quality of products and services. These factors collectively enhance the trust consumers place in a company, thereby strengthening its online reputation.

The formation of trust online is also closely linked to the transparency and authenticity of the business. According to Valette-Florence and Chebli (2017), the perception of a company's online reputation is heavily influenced by how transparent and honest it is in its communications. Transparent practices, such as clear and honest marketing messages and prompt responses to customer inquiries, help in building a trustworthy image, which in turn enhances the company's e-reputation.

Trust also plays a vital role during crises. As highlighted by Castellano and Dutot (2015), a well-established positive e-reputation can act as a buffer in times of negative events. Companies that have built a strong foundation of trust with their customers are better equipped to manage and recover from crises. The ability to communicate transparently and effectively during such times is crucial for maintaining trust and mitigating damage to the company's e-reputation.

Furthermore, the relationship between trust and online reputation extends to the influence of social proof and peer reviews. Online reviews and ratings are pivotal in shaping consumer trust. Studies by Gupta et al. (2017) and Paquerot

et al. (2011) suggest that positive reviews and high ratings significantly enhance consumer trust, which in turn bolsters the company's online reputation. Consumers are more likely to trust and engage with businesses that have a high volume of positive feedback from other users.

Overall, trust is a cornerstone in the formation and perception of e-reputation. It influences consumer behavior, business success, and the ability to navigate crises. By fostering transparent, reliable, and honest interactions, businesses can build and maintain strong trust, thereby enhancing their online reputation. This, as demonstrated through various studies, highlights the integral role trust plays in the digital marketplace, impacting everything from customer loyalty to overall market perception.

#### **4.3 Online Responsibility Theory: impact of online actions on reputation**

The concept of online responsibility theory examines the profound impact of an individual's or organization's online actions on their e-reputation. Given the pervasive reach of social media and digital platforms, every online action, whether intentional or accidental, contributes significantly to shaping public perception and trust.

Online actions, including posts, comments, and interactions, leave a digital footprint that can influence e-reputation. For instance, Alturas and Oliveira (2016) argue that social media has become a critical channel through which companies can either enhance or damage their reputation based on their responsiveness and the nature of their engagements with consumers. These interactions are visible to a broad audience, meaning that positive engagements can bolster a company's reputation, while negative interactions can have the opposite effect.

A significant aspect of online responsibility theory is the accountability that comes with digital presence. Bensebaa (2004) highlights that in e-commerce, strategic actions such as timely responses to customer queries, transparency in business practices, and the management of online reviews are crucial in building and maintaining a positive reputation. This accountability extends to how companies handle crises online. Quick, transparent, and effective communication during crises can mitigate damage and even enhance trust and loyalty.

Moreover, consumers play a pivotal role in shaping online reputation. They generate content, share experiences, and influence the perceptions of others through e-word-of-mouth (eWOM). The study by Paquerot et al. (2011) emphasizes that consumer feedback, particularly on social media platforms, can significantly impact an organization's e-reputation. Positive reviews and endorsements can enhance reputation, while negative feedback can lead to reputational harm if not managed properly.

The literature also points out that online responsibility is not just about managing crises but also involves proactive strategies to build a positive reputation. Dutot and Castellano (2015) suggest that companies should engage in continuous monitoring of online sentiment and actively participate in discussions relevant to their industry to build a robust and favorable e-reputation.

In the digital age, where information spreads rapidly and widely, the impact of online actions on e-reputation cannot be overstated. The theory underscores the importance of responsible online behavior and strategic management of digital interactions to build and sustain a positive e-reputation. This evolving field, though still developing, offers critical insights into the dynamics of reputation management in the context of the internet and social media, emphasizing the need for ongoing research to fully understand and harness the power of online actions in reputation.

## 5. SYNTHESIS AND DISCUSSIONS

### 5.1 Comparison of different Theoretical Approaches

The theoretical approaches to social media and e-reputation each offer unique insights into how these phenomena are understood and managed. Engagement Theory, Social Network Theory, and Online Identity Theory provide a multifaceted view of social media, while Online Reputation Theory, Online Trust Theory, and Online Responsibility Theory focus on the dynamics of e-reputation.

**Engagement Theory** emphasizes user interaction and participation as central to creating value on social media platforms. It highlights how both social interactions and technical features shape user engagement and overall platform success (Di Gangi & Wasko, 2016). This theory underscores the active role users play in generating content and the mutual benefits derived from such engagement.

**Social Network Theory** focuses on the influence of relationships within social networks on user behavior. It examines how concepts like centrality, cohesion, and structural equivalence affect information flow and behavioral adoption in online communities (Liu et al., 2017). This theory provides a framework for understanding the relational dynamics that drive social media interactions.

**Online Identity Theory** explores the construction of identity through digital platforms. It considers how individuals use selective self-presentation and the creation of digital avatars to navigate and negotiate their identities online (Zhao et al., 2008). This theory highlights the fluid and dynamic nature of identity in digital environments.

In terms of e-reputation, **Online Reputation Theory** examines how reputations are formed and perceived through digital interactions. It emphasizes the role of eWOM and the rapid dissemination of information in shaping public perceptions (Castellano & Dutot, 2017). This theory highlights the importance of maintaining a positive digital presence through strategic communication and responsiveness.

**Online Trust Theory** underscores the significance of trust in building and sustaining e-reputation. Trust is established through consistent, transparent, and reliable online behavior, which in turn influences customer loyalty and business success (Gupta et al., 2017). This theory emphasizes the need for businesses to engage in trustworthy practices to foster a positive e-reputation.

**Online Responsibility Theory** focuses on the impact of online actions on reputation. It stresses the accountability that comes with digital presence and the necessity of managing online interactions responsibly to build and maintain a positive reputation (Bensebaa, 2004). This theory highlights the proactive strategies needed to manage e-reputation effectively.

### 5.2 Identification of gaps in current understanding of the concepts

Despite the valuable insights provided by these theories, there are notable gaps in the current understanding of social media and e-reputation. One significant gap is the limited research on the long-term effects of online engagement and identity construction. While short-term impacts are well-documented, more longitudinal studies are needed to understand how prolonged social media use influences identity and behavior over time.

Additionally, there is a lack of comprehensive models integrating the various aspects of social media and e-reputation. Most studies focus on individual components, such as engagement or trust, without considering the interplay between these elements. A more holistic approach that considers the interconnectedness of these factors would provide a deeper understanding of the digital landscape.

Another gap is the limited exploration of the impact of cultural differences on e-reputation. Most studies are based on Western contexts, with little attention given to how cultural variations influence online behavior and reputation management. Cross-cultural studies would offer valuable insights into the global applicability of these theories.

### 5.3 Proposal of Future Research Directions to Enhance Understanding of Social Media and E-Reputation

To address these gaps, future research should adopt a more integrative approach, considering the interplay between engagement, trust, identity, and responsibility in the formation and management of e-reputation. Longitudinal studies are essential to understand the long-term effects of social media use on identity and behavior.

Researchers should also explore the impact of cultural differences on social media interactions and e-reputation. Cross-cultural studies would provide a more comprehensive understanding of how different cultural contexts influence digital behavior and reputation management strategies.

Moreover, the development of comprehensive models that integrate the various theoretical approaches to social media and e-reputation would enhance the understanding of these complex phenomena. Such models should consider the dynamic and interconnected nature of digital interactions, providing a holistic view of how e-reputation is formed and maintained.

Finally, future research should investigate the role of emerging technologies, such as artificial intelligence and blockchain, in shaping social media and e-reputation. These technologies have the potential to significantly impact digital interactions and reputation management, warranting further exploration.

## 6. CONCLUSION

This narrative literature review has provided a comprehensive examination of the theoretical approaches to understanding social media and e-reputation, highlighting their intricate dynamics and interdependencies. Theories such as Engagement Theory, Social Network Theory, and Online Identity Theory offer valuable insights into how individuals interact with and construct their identities through social media. Similarly, Online Reputation Theory, Online Trust Theory, and Online Responsibility Theory elucidate the mechanisms through which e-reputation is formed, perceived, and managed in the digital landscape.

The importance of these theoretical frameworks lies in their ability to explain the multifaceted nature of digital interactions. By integrating concepts of engagement, trust, identity, and responsibility, these theories help to create a more holistic understanding of the factors influencing social media behavior and e-reputation. This integrated perspective is crucial for both researchers and practitioners, as it provides a robust foundation for exploring the complexities of online environments.

Practical implications for online reputation managers and social science researchers are significant. For reputation managers, understanding these theoretical approaches enables the development of more effective strategies for managing and enhancing e-reputation. It highlights the need for transparency, consistent engagement, and proactive crisis management to build and sustain trust. For

social science researchers, these theories offer a rich framework for further investigation, encouraging studies that integrate multiple dimensions of social media and e-reputation to uncover deeper insights.

In sum, the theoretical approaches discussed in this review are essential for understanding the evolving dynamics of social media and e-reputation. They provide critical insights that inform both practical applications and future research directions, emphasizing the need for continuous adaptation and strategic management in the ever-changing digital landscape.

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