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Studying the behavior of Algerian Internet users towards brands

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Abstract. This paper examines the interest shown by Algerian Internet users to follow brands on Internet. The evolution of uses and the interactivity brought to Internet users with Web 2.0 have made it possible for information to spread rapidly in favor or against the company, which is why there is an increasing emphasis in marketing on the importance of e-reputation. This reality has forced companies today to be present on the Web through institutional, community or event web sites as well as through social Medias in order to ensure a wide marketing watch on Internet. Through a survey intended for a sample of 1000 Algerian Internet users, we studied the interest granted by Algerian consumers to opinions, comments and content related to their brands. We therefore concluded that even if the majority of Algerian Internet users very often use social Medias, there is only a minority who constantly follow of their brands. However, most of these Internet users tend to be influenced by opinions and news about companies and their products.

Keywords: Social Medias, e-Reputation, Internet, Algerian consumers.

Introduction:

The evolution of uses on the Internet, especially since the appearance of Web 2.0,

which has made the user more interactive and the information more available and transparent, has led the companies to attach particular importance to their presence on the Internet at the risk of harm their e-reputation. Marketing is becoming digitalized, and it is now inconceivable to implement a marketing strategy that does not take into consideration the Internet, Web search engines and social Medias.

Algeria is one of the countries where there is a significant number of Internet users (it increased from 50 thousand in 2000 to more than 15 million Internet users in 2016 according to Internet World Stats), and these users are very active on social networks (there would be 15 million Facebook users according to Internet World Stats).

The behavior of the digital consumer has been the subject of several studies. These researches were interested especially on the reasons that push the consumer to prefer internet (Masouras and Papademetriou, 2018). Our study, which is part of the same field, focuses on the importance given by Algerian Internet users to different Web content that has a relationship with companies or brands, by using a simple method that consists of a survey intended for a sample of 1085 people.

It should be noted, however, that this paper is only an introduction to a study that is in progress.

I. Theoretical frame:

I.1. What is brand?

For The American Marketing Association (AMA), a brand is defined as a "name, term, sign, symbol or design, or a combination of them intended to identify the goods and services of one seller or group of sellers and to differentiate them from those of other sellers" (Kotler & Keller, 2015, P 276).

According to De Baynast, Lendrevie & Levy (2017, P 787) in their book *MERCATOR*, a brand is "a name and a set of signs that indicate the origin of an offer, differentiate it from competitors, influence the perception and behavior of customers by a set of mental representations, and thus create value for the company"

The brand is a key element of business strategy. It adds dimensions to goods or services, and differentiates it from other offers that meet the same need. The differences can be functional and rational, that is to say related to the performance of the product, or symbolic and emotional, that is to say based on what the brand represents.

I.2. Definition of e-reputation:

E-reputation is a vast concept whose definitions are not yet stabilized. According to many authors (Guigouet *al*, 2012, P 11), it refers to the influence that the informations available on the internet in their various forms: opinions, comments, articles, photos, videos... have on people and on the organization and its products.

It therefore appears that e-reputation is an influence because a reputation or a feeling can pre-exist the discovery of information on the internet. Thus, e-reputation will not replace the reputation that existed but be

content to influence it positively or negatively.

The obligation for a brand to ensure its e-reputation stems from 3 factors:

- Internet users who no longer hesitate to express themselves on social media, opinion sites and e-commerce sites.
- Mobile publishing tools, accessible to all.
- Traditional media that now rely on information published by Internet users and that can amplify the message.

The e-reputation aims at creating the trust which itself mainly depends on the level of sociability of the company concerned. It therefore has every interest in disseminating content that interests its targets but also to encourage them to do the same by communicating their opinion through comments. E-reputation is used to generate brand awareness on the web and to optimize relationships with Internet users and the communities it represents (Truphème & Gastaud, 2017, P 133).

I.3. The interest of e-reputation:

Most companies were initially destabilized by the development of blogs, forums and other social networks where Internet users talked about them out of their control. However, in 2012, the e-reputation barometer conducted by Digimind, a leader in Social Media Monitoring solutions, showed that companies spent an average of 7 hours per week monitoring their e-reputation. Today, companies are attaching

more and more importance to guide their communication strategy.

This is the case for Nestle, which, after the episode of the attack on Greenpeace in 2010, decided to revolutionize its approach in crisis communication in the face of reputation problems. In fact, Nestlé has set up a permanent monitoring system from the group's headquarters in Switzerland. This crisis cell constantly monitors conversations on the web about its brands. Thanks to its team of community manager, it can react almost immediately in case of negative signal. From now on, the reactions consist in engaging the conversation with the Internet users sending negative comments rather than threatening them by the legal answer (Eouzan, Dupuis and Michalon, 2015, P 500).

I.4. Being influential on the web:

We cannot control e-reputation but we can influence it. This is done through the media needed for dissemination. Therefore, care must be taken to choose the support to avoid dispersing efforts. Among the main supports of e-reputation, we cite the following (Guigouet *al*, 2012, P 37-38):

Corporate websites: It is rarely adapted to the conversation with stakeholders and has a very low or even no conversion rate but is the essential reference of the desired image.

The blog: It is the preferred destination for links that the company distributes on various social networks. It allows the latter to explain its philosophy, to comment on the news or to highlight its expertise in detail.

Facebook page: It will not take the same extent depending on whether the organization is conversational or not, or if its sector does not justify a particular discussion potential. It remains however a useful element of the e-reputation by giving a more playful and social facet. For example, it will allow to relay in a user-friendly way elements of the internal life of the company in the form of photos and videos less constrained than those of the site.

Twitter account: It can reach various audiences but is still relatively elitist in many countries. An account on this microblogging network is therefore particularly useful for reaching the different influencers that are: journalists, bloggers and politicians.

Presentations on Slideshare: It allows to relay PowerPoint presentations on the internet thus giving more visibility to the company by distributing its brand in the form of presentations or white papers.

Google + page: It does not seem that this social network has a great interest compared to others, but its main interest is to create a result well taken into account by Google in natural referencing.

Youtube channel: This is the essential and worldwide reference for videos.

Vimeo channel: Less well referenced by search engines than Youtube but still experiencing some success among video enthusiasts. These two great benefits are the ability to customize it and to host videos

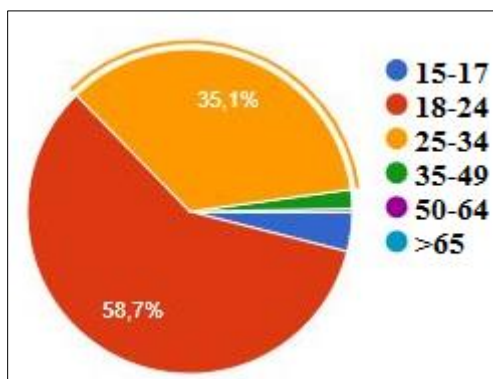
that would be removed from major sharing websites because of their rights.

II. The survey and its results:

II.1. The sample:

As shown in the graph below, our sample is made up of 1085 people, of which 58.7% are between 18 and 24 years old and 35.1% between 25 and 34 years old.

Graph1:Age groups of the sample



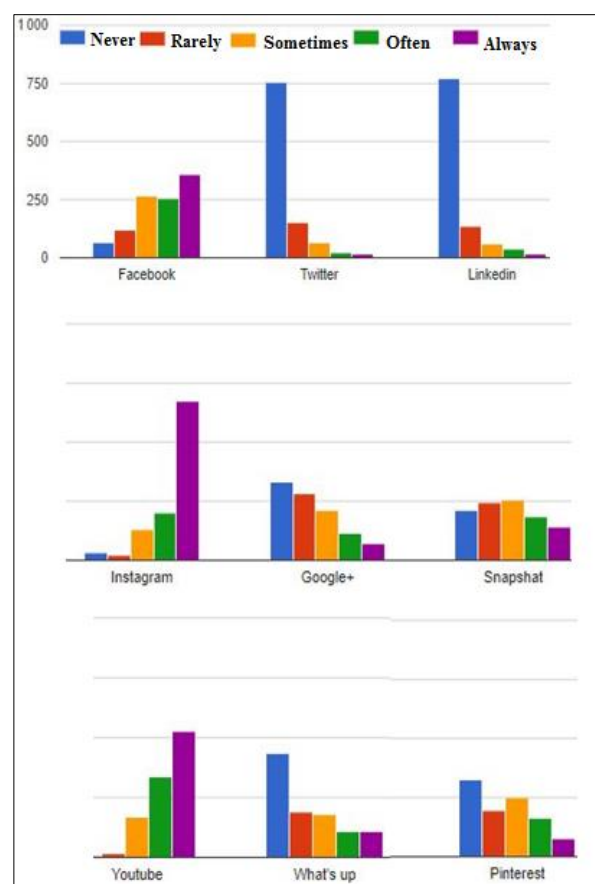
The sample is composed mainly of young people because they are more connected on the internet compared to the older ones

In addition, the majority are students (64.7%) or employees (21.3%).

II.2 Frequency of use of social networks:

First, we asked the respondents to specify the frequency of their use of the main social medias on a scale of 5 levels: Never, Rarely, Sometimes, Often and Always. The results gave rise to the following graph:

Graph2:Frequency of use of Social Medias



According to the results, of the 1085 people who answered, the majority use the most popular platforms such as Facebook, Instagram with a percentage (63.58%) and YouTube (50.19%).

For other social networks that are less used, we take the example of LinkedIn, Pinterest (32.24%), WhatsApp (42.37%), Snapshat (24.58%) and Google+ (32.73%).

Finally, Viadeo and twitter are the platforms that are almost never used with a very high percentage: 75.98% and 71.09%.

Companies in Algeria have an interest in concentrating their communication and presence efforts much more on Facebook, Youtube and Instagram.

II.3 Interest of Internet users in the brands and comments that concern them:

The majority of Internet users surveyed (82%) said they are used to follow their favorite brands on the internet.

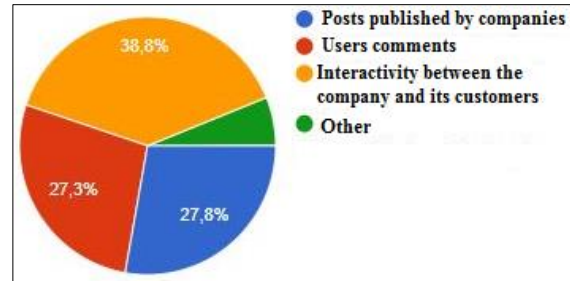
For those who responded with "YES", there are multiple reasons to follow brands. The most significant ones are:

- Receive information about the brand.
- Share my opinion of the brand.
- Belong to the community of the brand.

Regarding the opinions expressed on the Internet, 56% of Internet users think they are so important that they are able to influence their decision to purchase, while the remaining 44% consider the opinions on the internet as being "little or not important".

In order to determine the factors influencing the e-reputation of enterprises, we asked users what is most interesting to them by following a company on the internet:

Graph 3: Frequency of use of Social Medias



38.8% of consumers find that the interaction between companies and Internet users is the best means of reinforcing a company's image and reputation, 27.8% of Internet users opt for corporate publications while 27.3% think that the comments of Internet users is what influences the most the e-reputation of the company.

Conclusion:

The results of our survey showed that the majority of Algerian Internet users are connected to social networks and are aware of news and opinions that concern companies. They are also giving more and more importance to the interaction with the company on the net and to its reactivity: things that influence the reputation of businesses.

Even if the findings of this paper are modest, they will serve as a basis for further study that is underway and that will allow us to study the influence of the Internet on the e-reputation of the cases of some businesses.

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