

Negative Word-of-Mouth, Threat and Opportunity
 Posted At : February 1, 2018 11:04 AM | Posted By : Dr. Maria Petrescu
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Consumers' negative word-of-mouth is a process of problem-solving when they experience a service failure or feelings of injustice towards a company. Negative word-of-mouth usually presents information about an unsatisfactory service, a product complaint and is more dominant among WOM behaviors. Due to the viral capacities of social media communications, it is very easy for negative word-of-mouth to become viral and have a significant impact on a company.

For example, negative perceptions of United Airlines' corporate reputation increased 500 percent after the event regarding the forcible removal of a ticketed passenger on April 9th, 2017, a video that became viral and traveled the world first-class through social media (The Harris Poll 2017). United Airlines' public problems did not stop there, and only a couple of weeks later Simon, the estimated future record-breaking rabbit as the biggest bunny in the world, died in the same airline's custody. These incidents and the way they were handled publicly have placed the company and other organizations in a cloudy situation.

In a research study, we found that consumers' online discussions in this viral negative campaign focused on people and customer service, but also on the company's reaction after the incident. Any negative incident or failure in customer service represents a threat to a company's image, due to the diffusion potential of any negative messages and especially images from consumers on social media. However, this also represents an opportunity for businesses to show their care for consumers and provide a solution to deal with the crisis.

It is essential to consider the importance of an organization's brand equity, its customer lifetime value and retention. A better focus on the online brand community can provide an opportunity for an organization to be proactive and manage in a positive manner a negative viral campaign situation.

Reference

The Harris Poll (2017). Equitrend rankings for the airlines industry, <http://www.theharrispoll.com/equitrend-rankings/2017> accessed on June 15th 2017.