

INVESTIGATING THE IMPACT OF CORPORATE DIGITAL COMMUNICATION ON BRAND REPUTATION AND CONSUMER ENGAGEMENT IN THE AIRLINE INDUSTRY IN MOROCCO: A CASE STUDY

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Abstract

In the current era, the rise of digital technologies and online platforms has caused major disruptions in the communication strategies deployed by organizations. As a result, effective digital corporate communication has become essential to establishing and maintaining a strong brand reputation and driving consumer engagement. This qualitative study addresses the impacts of digital corporate communication on brand reputation and consumer engagement in the airline industry sector in Morocco. Adopting a qualitative research methodology, the study conducts semi-structured interviews with communication professionals within the five case study companies, digital marketing specialists and managers responsible for implementing digital communication strategies within airlines based and operating in Morocco. By examining their experiences, the research aims to provide an in-depth understanding of the relationship between digital corporate communications, brand reputation and consumer engagement in this specific context. The findings have practical implications for Moroccan airlines seeking to optimize their digital communication strategies in order to improve their brand reputation and encourage consumer engagement. Furthermore, this research adds to the growing body of literature on digital corporate communication and sheds light on future trends and best practices in this area, particularly for the Moroccan airline industry. This study highlights the crucial importance of digital corporate communication in today's highly competitive business landscape and underscores the need for continued research and development in this area.

Keywords: Corporate Digital Communication, Brand Reputation, Consumer Engagement, Moroccan Airline Industry.

INTRODUCTION

The emergence of digital technologies and online platforms has significantly altered the way organizations communicate with their target audiences (Aboudou et al., 2020). Digital corporate communication is now crucial in building and maintaining a strong brand reputation and driving consumer engagement, particularly in competitive sectors such as the airline industry (Anna Oksiutycz & Sibongile Kunene, 2017). In Morocco, the airline industry has experienced tremendous growth in recent years, making effective digital communication strategies essential

for companies to thrive. This study investigates the impacts of digital corporate communication on brand reputation and consumer engagement within the Moroccan airline industry by examining the experiences of communication professionals, digital marketing specialists, and managers responsible for implementing digital communication strategies.

Significance of Corporate Digital Communication in the Airline Industry

The rapid growth of digital technologies and online platforms has profoundly impacted the way organizations communicate and interact with their target audiences. In the airline industry, corporate digital communication has become increasingly important, as it directly influences brand reputation, customer engagement, and market competitiveness (Anna Oksiutycz & Sibongile Kunene, 2017). Airlines are adopting various digital channels, such as social media, mobile applications, and websites, to provide personalized experiences, timely information, and efficient customer support (Karaağaoğlu & Çiçek, 2019; Sakas & Giannakopoulos, 2021). Consequently, understanding the implications of digital corporate communication is crucial for airlines to thrive in the highly competitive business landscape.

Moroccan Context and the Importance of Brand Reputation and Consumer Engagement

Morocco has experienced significant growth in its airline industry over recent years, driven by increasing tourism and trade activities (Omar Boubker, Khaled Naoui 2022).. As the sector becomes more competitive, the importance of brand reputation and consumer engagement has been amplified. Effective digital corporate communication is essential for Moroccan airlines to differentiate themselves, foster customer loyalty, and drive business success (Hattani & Khoumssi, 2020). By leveraging digital communication strategies, Moroccan airlines can enhance their brand reputation, create emotional connections with consumers, and encourage positive word-of-mouth, leading to increased customer engagement and retention (Omar Boubker, Khaled Naoui 2022).

Research Question and Objectives

Given the significance of digital corporate communication in the airline industry and the unique context of Morocco, this study aims to address the following research question:

How does digital corporate communication impact brand reputation and consumer engagement in the Moroccan airline industry?

To answer this research question, the study has the following objectives:

- To explore the current digital corporate communication strategies adopted by airlines operating in Morocco.
- To investigate the role of digital corporate communication in shaping brand reputation in the Moroccan airline industry.
- To examine the relationship between digital corporate communication and consumer engagement in the context of Moroccan airlines.
- To provide recommendations for Moroccan airlines to optimize their digital corporate communication strategies for improved brand reputation and consumer engagement.

By conducting a case study with semi-structured interviews among communication professionals, digital marketing specialists, and managers within Moroccan airlines, this research seeks to provide an in-depth understanding of the relationship between digital corporate communication, brand reputation, and consumer engagement within airline industry context in Morocco.

1. BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

History of the Airline Industry in Morocco

The Moroccan airline industry has its roots in the early 20th century, with the establishment of the national carrier, Royal Air Maroc, in 1957 (Omar Boubker, Khaled Naoui 2022). Over the years, the industry has witnessed significant growth and transformation, driven by factors such as the liberalization of air transport in the 1990s, the Open Skies Agreement with the European Union in 2006, and the increasing influx of low-cost carriers in the market (Omar Boubker, Khaled Naoui 2022). These developments have led to increased competition, expanded route networks, and improved accessibility to air travel for the Moroccan population and international tourists.

However, the Moroccan airline industry has also faced numerous challenges, such as the volatility of fuel prices, global economic downturns, and most recently, the COVID-19 pandemic, which has significantly affected passenger demand and financial performance (Omar Boubker, Khaled Naoui 2022). Amid these challenges, digital communication has emerged as a vital tool for Moroccan airlines to navigate the evolving landscape and remain competitive.

Role of Digital Communication in the Growth and Expansion of the Industry

Digital communication has played a pivotal role in the growth and expansion of the airline industry. The adoption of digital channels, such as social media, mobile applications, and websites, has enabled airlines to enhance their customer outreach, improve service delivery, and foster customer loyalty (Karaağaoğlu & Çiçek, 2019; Sakas & Giannakopoulos, 2021). For instance, social media platforms have allowed airlines to engage with customers in real-time, address their concerns, and gather valuable feedback for service improvement (Chen, 2017; Seo & Park, 2018).

Furthermore, digital communication has facilitated the introduction of innovative services, such as online booking, check-in, and baggage tracking, which have improved operational efficiency and customer satisfaction (Huerta-Alvarez et al., 2020). In this context, digital communication has become a critical component of airline industry's growth strategy, which has been the case for airlines in Morocco, as it enables companies to differentiate themselves and compete effectively in the global market.

Changing Landscape of Consumer Expectations and the Role of Digital Platforms

The rapid advancement of digital technologies and the widespread adoption of online platforms have significantly transformed consumer expectations in the airline industry (Karaağaoğlu & Çiçek, 2019). Today's travelers demand seamless, personalized, and convenient experiences,

with instant access to information and services through their preferred digital channels (Sakas & Giannakopoulos, 2021).

Digital platforms have played a key role in shaping these expectations, as they provide customers with a wealth of options, transparency in pricing, and the ability to compare and customize their travel experiences (Anna Oksiutycz & Sibongile Kunene, 2017; Huerta-Álvarez et al., 2020). Moreover, the rise of user-generated content on social media and review websites has amplified the importance of brand reputation and customer feedback, as consumers increasingly rely on the experiences of their peers to inform their travel decisions (Chen, 2017; Seo & Park, 2018).

In this context, airlines in Morocco must embrace digital communication and leverage its potential to meet the evolving expectations of their customers, enhance their brand reputation, and drive consumer engagement. Understanding the dynamics of digital corporate communication and its impact on consumer behavior.

2. CORPORATE DIGITAL COMMUNICATION

Definition and Key Components

Corporate digital communication refers to the use of digital technologies and online platforms by organizations to communicate and interact with their stakeholders, including customers, employees, shareholders, and the general public (Aboudou et al., 2020). Key components of corporate digital communication include social media (e.g., Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn), mobile applications, websites, and email marketing, among others (Karaağaoğlu & Çiçek, 2019). By leveraging these digital channels, organizations can effectively deliver tailored messages, engage with their audiences, and respond to their needs in real-time, ultimately enhancing their brand reputation and customer satisfaction.

Table1: Followers of the five airlines on social media as of April 27th, 2023

	LINKEDIN	FACEBOOK	INSTAGRAM	TWITTER	YOUTUBE	TOTAL FOLLOWERS
EMIRATESAIRLINE	3 000 000	11 000 000	6 700 000	1 600 000	909 000	23 209 000
ETIHAD AIRWAYS	2 000 000	4 700 000	1 900 000	815 200	232 000	9 647 200
QATAR AIRWAYS	2 000 000	29 000 000	5 000 000	1 900 000	1 490 000	39 390 000
ROYAL AIR MAROC	119 000	810 000	14 0000	232 600	41 200	1 342 800
AIR ARABIA	340 000	1 600 000	282 000	922 000	28 600	3 172 600

Source: Pages on social media

Role of Digital Communication in Building and Maintaining Brand Reputation

Digital communication plays a critical role in building and maintaining a strong brand reputation in today's highly competitive business landscape (Anna Oksiutycz & Sibongile Kunene, 2017). By using various digital channels, organizations can effectively manage their online presence, create positive associations with their brands, and influence consumer perceptions (Dijkmans et al., 2015). For instance, social media allows companies to showcase their values, offerings, and accomplishments, fostering trust and credibility among their

audiences (Cheukhei Danny Chung et al., 2020). Similarly, mobile applications and websites enable organizations to provide personalized and seamless user experiences, further strengthening their brand reputation (Chen, 2017; Dirsehan & Kurtuluş, 2018). Moreover, digital communication facilitates two-way interactions between organizations and their stakeholders, allowing companies to address customer concerns, gather feedback, and demonstrate their commitment to customer satisfaction (McLean & Griffiths, 2015). By actively engaging with their audiences and maintaining a strong online presence, organizations can effectively manage their brand reputation and mitigate potential reputational risks (Dijkmans et al., 2015; Tümer et al., 2019).

Impact of Digital Communication Strategies on Consumer Engagement and Loyalty

Effective digital communication strategies have a significant impact on consumer engagement and loyalty, by leveraging digital channels, organizations can create tailored and engaging content, fostering emotional connections with their audiences and driving consumer involvement (Chen, 2017; (Huerta-Álvarez et al., 2020). For example, social media enables companies to share compelling stories, visuals, and experiences, encouraging consumers to interact with their brands, provide feedback, and spread positive word-of-mouth (Seo & Park, 2018). In addition, digital communication strategies, such as personalized email marketing campaigns and mobile app notifications, allow organizations to maintain regular contact with their customers, reinforcing brand loyalty and encouraging repeat business (Khairani & Fachira, 2021). By continuously engaging with their audiences and delivering value through digital channels, organizations can effectively foster long-term customer relationships, driving consumer loyalty and business success (Mateus Ferreira & Felipe Zambaldi, 2019). Overall, corporate digital communication plays a crucial role in shaping brand reputation and driving consumer engagement and loyalty. By adopting effective digital communication strategies, organizations can better respond to the needs of their audiences, differentiate themselves from competitors, and achieve lasting success in the digital age.

3. BRAND REPUTATION AND CONSUMER ENGAGEMENT

Definition

Brand reputation refers to the perception and overall image of a company or its products and services in the minds of its target audience (Chen, 2017). A strong brand reputation is built on factors such as trustworthiness, credibility, and customer satisfaction, which contribute to the overall attractiveness of the brand in the market (Anna Oksiutycz & Sibongile Kunene, 2017). In a highly competitive industry like the airline sector, an organization's brand reputation can significantly influence its market share, customer loyalty, and profitability (Seo & Park, 2018). Consumer engagement, on the other hand, refers to the emotional and psychological attachment of customers to a brand, resulting from their interactions and experiences with the company (Seo & Park, 2018). Engaged consumers are more likely to participate in brand-related activities, share positive experiences, and maintain long-term relationships with the organization (Bakır et al., 2022). As such, fostering consumer engagement is essential for driving customer loyalty and business success.

Relationship between Digital Communication, Brand Reputation, and Consumer Engagement in the Airline Industry

Digital communication plays a vital role in shaping brand reputation and driving consumer engagement in the airline industry (Sigurdsson et al., 2020). By leveraging digital platforms, airlines can effectively communicate their values, offerings, and achievements, fostering positive associations and building trust with their audiences (Dijkmans et al., 2015). Furthermore, digital channels allow airlines to provide real-time information, offer personalized experiences, and address customer concerns, enhancing overall satisfaction and brand reputation (Karaağaoğlu & Çiçek, 2019; Hawazen & Majed Alharthi 2021).

Digital communication also enables airlines to actively engage with their customers, encouraging participation and fostering emotional connections (Seo & Park, 2018). Through social media, mobile applications, and email marketing, airlines can create tailored and compelling content that resonates with their audiences, driving consumer engagement and loyalty (Chen, 2017).

Factors Influencing the Effectiveness of Digital Communication Strategies for Reputation Management and Consumer Engagement

Several factors influence the effectiveness of digital communication strategies for reputation management and consumer engagement in the airline industry:

- **Content quality and relevance:** High-quality, relevant, and engaging content is essential for capturing the attention of the target audience and fostering positive brand associations (Seo & Park, 2018).
- **Responsiveness and personalization:** Timely and personalized responses to customer inquiries and concerns are crucial for demonstrating a company's commitment to customer satisfaction and maintaining a strong brand reputation (McLean & Griffiths, 2015).
- **Channel selection and integration:** The choice and integration of digital channels should align with the preferences and expectations of the target audience to maximize reach and engagement (Karaağaoğlu & Çiçek, 2019).
- **Consistency and coherence:** Consistent and coherent messaging across all digital platforms is essential for reinforcing brand identity and building trust with the target audience (Dijkmans et al., 2015).
- **Monitoring and analytics:** Regularly monitoring and analyzing digital communication performance enables organizations to adapt their strategies, optimize their efforts, and better respond to the evolving needs of their audiences (Khairani & Fachira, 2021).

By considering these factors, airlines can develop and implement effective digital communication strategies that enhance brand reputation and drive consumer engagement, ultimately contributing to their long-term success in the competitive market.

4. CASE STUDY METHODOLOGY

Case Study Approach, Data Collection Methods, and Sample Selection

The case study approach is a qualitative research method that allows for an in-depth exploration of complex phenomena within real-life contexts (Yin, 2014). In this study, the case study approach was employed to investigate the impact of corporate digital communication on brand reputation and consumer engagement within airline industry in Morocco.

Data collection methods involved conducting semi-structured interviews with communication professionals, digital marketing specialists, and managers responsible for implementing digital communication strategies within the five airlines. This method was chosen as it allows for the collection of rich and detailed information, providing insights into the participants' experiences, perspectives, and practices (Creswell & Creswell, 2017).

A purposive sampling technique was used to select participants from different airlines operating in Morocco, ensuring a diverse representation of experiences and perspectives. In total, 5 participants were interviewed, with each interview lasting approximately 40 minutes.

Analytical Techniques

To explore the impact of corporate digital communication on brand reputation and consumer engagement, the collected data was analyzed using thematic analysis, a widely used qualitative data analysis technique (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis involves identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns or themes within the data, allowing researchers to make sense of complex and diverse datasets (Guest et al., 2012).

5. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

All five companies employ comprehensive multi-channel digital communication approaches. These strategies encompass various channels such as social media, mobile apps, websites, and email marketing campaigns, aiming to reach their customers and foster strong relationships effectively. A big gap in numbers of followers has been identified among the five companies. Also in term of online campaigns, Emirates and Qatar Airways are more likely present and active, followed by Etihad.

Digital communication plays a crucial role in shaping brand reputation and fostering consumer engagement across all organizations. This is highlighted by Emirates and Qatar Airways use of social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and YouTube to project their brand image and strengthen their online presence.

Factors influencing the effectiveness of digital communication strategies include content quality and relevance, personalization, timeliness of communication, and addressing customer needs and concerns. Ensuring that communication is well-targeted and tailored to individual customers is vital in fostering a strong connection with the audience and enhancing the overall brand image.

The airline industry has seen a significant shift towards digital communication strategies to stay competitive and adapt to changing consumer expectations. As customers become increasingly tech-savvy, airlines must invest in digital channels to meet these evolving demands and remain at the forefront of the industry.

Challenges faced by the organizations include staying up-to-date with the rapidly evolving digital landscape, creating engaging and relevant content, and maintaining a consistent brand voice across different channels. This requires continuous learning and adaptation, as well as the ability to balance resources and prioritize investments in digital communication strategies.

Opportunities in digital communication within the airline industry include improving mobile app and website functionality, leveraging social media for customer engagement and support, and utilizing platforms such as YouTube to showcase brand values and enhance public awareness. Also the use of artificial intelligence to ensure an instant engagement with the customer via chatbots. By investing in these areas, organizations can enhance their digital presence, cater to consumer preferences, and ultimately drive increased customer loyalty and satisfaction.

Discussion

The case studies of the five airlines, provide valuable insights into the role of digital communication strategies in shaping brand reputation and fostering consumer engagement in the global airline industry. The findings underscore the importance of a multi-channel digital communication approach and staying agile in the rapidly changing digital landscape.

The results show that all five organizations have made significant efforts to adapt to changing consumer expectations and capitalize on opportunities in the digital space. The challenges faced by the organizations emphasize the need for continuous learning and adaptation in the evolving digital environment. By investing in digital communication strategies and remaining flexible, these airlines can ensure that they maintain a strong brand reputation and meet the ever-changing needs of their customers.

Overall, the discussion highlights the importance of digital communication in the global airline industry and the need for organizations to stay competitive and adapt to the changing landscape by embracing innovation and focusing on personalization, automation, and data

6. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

This case study, like any research endeavor, has its limitations that need to be acknowledged. First, potential biases may arise due to the selection of participants and the subjectivity of their responses. The study relies on the perspectives and experiences of a limited number of individuals, which may not accurately represent the entire airline industry in Morocco. Additionally, the case study approach may not allow for broad generalizations of the findings to other industries or regions.

Data constraints are another limitation of this study, as the availability and accessibility of relevant information might have affected the depth and breadth of the analysis. Furthermore,

the rapidly changing landscape of digital communication makes it challenging to capture the most recent and relevant trends and strategies in the industry.

To address these limitations, future research can explore the following directions:

- **Comparative studies:** Conducting comparative research across different airlines within Morocco or across different countries can provide valuable insights into the effectiveness of various digital communication strategies and best practices. Comparing the experiences of companies with different sizes, target markets, and business models can help identify the key factors that contribute to successful brand reputation and consumer engagement.
- **Longitudinal analysis:** A longitudinal study can help assess the long-term impact of corporate digital communication strategies on brand reputation and consumer engagement. By tracking the evolution of these strategies over time, researchers can identify trends, patterns, and causal relationships that may not be evident in a cross-sectional study.
- **Broader industry examinations:** Expanding the scope of research to other industries, such as hospitality or tourism, can help determine the transferability of findings from the airline sector to other contexts. This can contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the role of corporate digital communication in shaping brand reputation and consumer engagement across different business environments.
- **Investigating the impact of emerging technologies:** Future research can examine the influence of new and emerging technologies, such as artificial intelligence, virtual reality, and blockchain, on corporate digital communication strategies. This can help organizations stay ahead of the curve and adapt their communication efforts to the constantly evolving digital landscape.

CONCLUSION

In summary, the case study analysis of Etihad Airways, Air Arabia Maroc, Emirates Airline, Royal Air Maroc, and Qatar Airways reveals the significance of corporate digital communication strategies in the Moroccan airline industry. The key findings and their implications are as follows:

All five airlines employ comprehensive multi-channel digital communication approaches, including social media, mobile apps, websites, and email marketing campaigns, to effectively reach their customers and foster strong relationships.

Digital communication plays a vital role in shaping brand reputation and fostering consumer engagement across the Moroccan airline industry. The airlines under analysis have successfully utilized platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and YouTube to project their brand image and strengthen their online presence.

The factors influencing the effectiveness of digital communication strategies include content quality and relevance, personalization, timeliness of communication, and addressing customer

needs and concerns. Ensuring that communication is well-targeted and tailored to individual customers is essential for fostering a strong connection with the audience and enhancing the overall brand image.

The importance of effective corporate digital communication strategies cannot be overstated, as they directly impact brand reputation and consumer engagement. As the airline industry continues to evolve and adapt to the ever-changing digital landscape, organizations must prioritize investing in their digital communication channels to remain competitive and meet the changing demands of increasingly tech-savvy customers.

Ongoing research and development in this area are essential for ensuring continued growth and success in the industry. Future studies should focus on comparative analyses, longitudinal analysis, and broader industry examinations to provide a more comprehensive understanding of digital communication strategies and their impact on the airline sector. By staying abreast of the latest trends and best practices, Moroccan airlines can effectively leverage digital communication to enhance their brand reputation, engage with consumers, and secure a leading position in the competitive global market.

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