

The logo for RADemics, featuring the text "RADemics" in white on a blue arrow-shaped background. The arrow points to the right and is part of a larger blue graphic element on the left side of the page.

RADemics

Social Media Listening and Brand Reputation Management in Higher Education

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Social Media Listening and Brand Reputation Management in Higher Education

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Abstract

In the digital era, social media has emerged as a powerful tool for managing brand reputation in higher education institutions. Social media listening, a process of monitoring and analyzing online conversations, enables universities to capture real-time insights into public perceptions, identify emerging trends, and proactively address reputational challenges. This chapter explores the strategic integration of social media listening into brand reputation management frameworks, with a focus on its role in institutional governance. It highlights key tools, techniques, and technologies used in social media analytics, while addressing the limitations and biases inherent in current platforms. It examines regional variations in social media engagement and their impact on reputation management strategies across diverse global contexts. By integrating institutional theory with digital practices, this chapter presents a comprehensive view of how universities can effectively institutionalize social listening within their strategic governance structures. The findings underscore the critical importance of adapting listening practices to local cultural, political, and regulatory environments. Ultimately, this chapter offers a robust framework for higher education institutions seeking to enhance their reputation through data-driven, culturally sensitive social media strategies.

Keywords: Social Media Listening, Brand Reputation Management, Higher Education, Institutional Theory, Social Media Analytics, Regional Differences.

Introduction

In the contemporary landscape of higher education, social media has become an essential tool for managing institutional reputation [1]. The increasing reliance on digital platforms for communication, networking, and engagement has amplified the need for universities to develop strategies that address their online presence [2]. Social media listening—defined as the process of monitoring, analyzing, and interpreting online conversations—has emerged as a pivotal method for institutions to capture real-time feedback from stakeholders, including students, faculty, alumni, and prospective students [3]. By analyzing this data, universities can understand public perceptions, identify emerging issues, and respond proactively to potential reputational threats [4]. In the highly competitive and interconnected global environment of higher education, the ability to manage brand reputation through social media listening is not merely a reactive necessity but an integral part of strategic institutional governance [5].

As digital technologies continue to evolve, so too must the strategies employed by higher education institutions to monitor and influence their brand perception [6]. Reputation management was driven by more conventional methods such as media relations, public relations campaigns, and alumni engagement initiatives [7]. With the rise of social media, institutions now face a dynamic and multifaceted landscape where the voices of diverse stakeholders are expressed in real-time across multiple platforms [8]. This shift has necessitated the integration of social media listening into the fabric of institutional strategy, enabling universities to stay ahead of trends and identify areas of concern before they escalate into larger crises [9]. Social media listening thus offers a more direct, agile, and data-driven approach to reputation management than traditional methods [10].

The integration of social media listening into institutional governance requires a strategic framework that aligns with the university's broader objectives [11]. Rather than treating social media listening as a standalone activity within the communications department, institutions are increasingly recognizing its value across all areas of university operations [12]. From marketing and student recruitment to crisis communication and alumni relations, social media listening can provide critical insights that inform decision-making at the highest levels of university leadership [13]. For example, analyzing online conversations can help universities fine-tune their messaging, adjust their engagement strategies, and even shape their academic offerings based on feedback from potential students or alumni [14]. This broader integration ensures that social media listening becomes a central tool in driving institutional growth and maintaining a positive public image [15].

The process of social media listening is not without challenges [16]. Current tools and technologies used for analyzing social media data often suffer from limitations, such as biases in sentiment analysis, difficulties in managing vast amounts of unstructured data [17], and challenges in addressing the nuances of cultural and regional differences in communication styles [18]. These challenges can result in inaccurate or incomplete insights, which, if not carefully addressed, can mislead institutional strategies and negatively impact reputation management efforts [19]. Social media listening tools must be continuously updated to keep pace with the rapidly evolving digital landscape, requiring institutions to invest in both the technology and expertise necessary to extract meaningful insights from social media data [20].