

THE ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN ONLINE REPUTATION MANAGEMENT: A CASE STUDY OF AUTOMOTIVE COMPANIES IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC


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Abstract: *This study examines how social media content strategies, including post frequency, content type, and sustainability-related topics, influence online engagement and perceived reputation for leading automotive companies in the Czech Republic such as Škoda, Hyundai, Audi, Kia, and BMW. By analyzing Facebook and Instagram posts from August to October 2023, the study explores how tailored content strategies shape audience trust, consumer perception and alignment with environmental values. The results show that Hyundai and BMW are leaders in the use of interactive and visually compelling content, while Kia has room for improvement. These findings highlight the critical role of social media management in enhancing online reputation through effective engagement strategies.*

Keywords: *automotive, Czech Republic, Instagram, reputation*

JEL Classification: M31, L86, D83

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1 Introduction

Reputation is seen as a key factor influencing the public's perception of a company. It consists of people's opinions and overall impressions. A positive corporate reputation is widely regarded as an asset that can bring significant benefits to a company and improve its performance. The importance of corporate reputation is undeniable, and this notion becomes even more relevant in the context of the digital environment. As the potential of the internet and digital technologies grows, companies are increasingly required to manage their reputation online. A company's online reputation is influenced by several factors with social media playing a particularly important role in shaping a company's digital reputation. This reality puts pressure on companies to actively engage in communication through social platforms.

Social media offers numerous opportunities for organizations to enhance their relationships with the public, allowing direct contact with stakeholders and bypassing traditional media gatekeepers (Etter, et al., 2019). As a result, the use of social media could encourage citizen engagement and co-production (Lovari & Valentini, 2020). Companies should focus on assessing the level of their online reputation. However, this is a challenge. Online reputation assessment is a complex issue and the available methods for measuring it are still limited and insufficient. Nevertheless, data collected from the most popular social media platforms provides valuable insights into a company's online reputation. Metrics such as the number of fans, followers or subscribers indicate a company's popularity in the digital space. These metrics are therefore useful for assessing a company's online reputation, as they allow companies to compare themselves with competitors or within the industry.

Reputation is a lengthy process that takes years to build and remains highly fragile, as just a few dissatisfied customers or employees can significantly damage it. At the same time, competition in the marketplace is fiercer than ever, which is why corporate responsibility is increasingly emphasized in business strategies and in the media. For these reasons, reputation has become a new measure of business success and a way to enhance competitive advantage. This paper focuses on the issue in the online environment, which has changed significantly since the pandemic and is now used by more people than ever before. Whereas service quality and customer satisfaction used to be evaluated through internal processes and guided by well-defined quality standards to

obtain certifications, a large part of today's customer evaluations are accessible online (Rodríguez, 2015, Paetsch et. al., 2017). In recent years, the internet has become a driving trend in the global automotive industry, with many internet companies entering the sector. According to authors Albu and Etter (2016) and Etter et al. (2019), the ability to easily modify, share and evaluate online content has a significant impact on a company's online reputation. In general, people search for information about cars online as an essential reference before making a purchase decision. As a high-value product, almost all consumers use search engines to check prices, reputation and other details about their preferred models before making a purchase. On the other hand, online reviews contain vast amounts of information about consumers' opinions on products and influence the purchase decisions of potential buyers. According to Jacobs and Wonneberger (2019), social media is generally perceived as a challenge by communication managers in the public sector.

The main goal of this article is to study how social media strategies, like post frequency and content types, affect online engagement and the reputation of top automotive companies in the Czech Republic.

2 Literature review

The role of social media in online reputation management is becoming increasingly important for automotive companies, especially in a dynamic market like the Czech Republic. Social media platforms serve as both a tool for engagement and a battleground for reputation, where customer interactions can significantly influence public perception. This synthesis of the literature highlights the multifaceted relationship between social media and ORM in the automotive sector. Firstly, social media engagement is crucial in shaping corporate reputation. Olaleye et al. highlight that stakeholder interactions on platforms such as Facebook can predict a firm's reputation score, demonstrating that both positive and negative engagement directly influence public perception (Olaleye et al., 2018, Saruc et al., 2013). This is further supported by Suryani, who discusses how impression management strategies on social media can improve a company's financial performance by aligning customer responses with corporate messaging (Suryani, 2023).

The automotive industry, which is characterized by high levels of consumer engagement, particularly benefits from this dynamic, as firms can actively

manage their image through targeted social media strategies. Moreover, the quality of social media activity is strongly correlated with corporate reputation. Żywiołek's research confirms that effective social media management can improve a company's public image, which is inherently difficult to control but crucial for ORM (Żywiołek, 2021). This is consistent with the findings of Oğuz, who notes that participation in social media has a positive impact on a company's reputation, especially among non-customers, thereby extending the reach and impact of ORM efforts (Oğuz, 2023). Such findings are particularly relevant for automotive companies in the Czech Republic, where brand loyalty and reputation are paramount in a competitive market. The importance of proactive ORM strategies is highlighted by Rahmani et al. They argue that companies must actively monitor and respond to negative online word-of-mouth to mitigate reputational damage (Rahmani et al., 2021). This proactive approach is essential in the automotive sector, where consumer feedback can spread rapidly through social media and influence the perceptions of potential buyers. Furthermore, Firat highlights the mediating role of brand trust in the relationship between social media communication and corporate reputation, suggesting that trust can enhance the effectiveness of ORM strategies (Firat, 2023). This is particularly relevant for automotive brands, which rely on consumer trust to drive sales and loyalty. Furthermore, the integration of social media into a broader communication strategy is essential to increase brand awareness and loyalty.

According to Bosco et al. (2018), effective integration of social media with other communication channels can significantly improve brand reputation and consumer loyalty. This is crucial for automotive companies in the Czech Republic, where maintaining a strong brand presence is essential for competitive advantage. Furthermore, Becker and Lee emphasize that organizations must strategically utilize social media for ORM to navigate the complexities of public perception in the digital age (Becker & Lee, 2019). As consumers increasingly value environmental sustainability, advancing electromobility has become essential for the reputation of automotive brands. Vojtasová and Solej (2023) and Straková et al., (2021) explain that differences in electric vehicle adoption across Europe could make it harder for brands to stay competitive and build a reputation for eco-friendly innovation. In conclusion, social media plays a transformative role in online reputation management for automotive companies in the Czech Republic. By leveraging social media engagement, implementing impression management strategies, and fostering brand trust,

these companies can effectively address the challenges of ORM. The literature emphasizes the need for a proactive and integrated approach to social media, which is essential for maintaining a positive corporate reputation in today's digital landscape.

3 Methodology and data

The main objective of this article is to analyze how social media content strategies, including post frequency and content types, influence online engagement and perceived reputation of leading automotive companies operating in the Czech Republic. Specifically, the research aims to examine the role of sustainability-focused content in shaping audience interactions on Facebook and Instagram and explore its potential impact on building trust, consumer perception, and brand alignment with environmental values. By linking engagement metrics (e.g. likes, shares, comments) with content strategies, the study aims to provide insights into the effectiveness of social media management in enhancing online reputation. A company's reputation on social media is critical as it directly influences its image and credibility in the eyes of potential and existing customers. Social networks act as a two-way conversation between a brand and its audience, which needs to be engaged in a meaningful and authentic way. Companies can build a positive digital reputation by being active on social media and maintaining constructive communication.

The study uses data from the companies' official websites to provide contextual background, the primary data sources are the companies' Facebook and Instagram profiles, which are tailored specifically for the Czech Republic. These platforms were selected due to their significant user bases and their key role in shaping online reputation. The analysis covers the period from 1 August to 31 October 2023 and focuses on the number of posts, followers, accounts followed, types of content shared and user interactions. Tools such as Social Blade Statistics and SimilarWeb are used to provide detailed insights into activity and engagement levels on these platforms. These tools are widely recognized for their reliability in analyzing social media performance metrics such as post frequency, audience growth and engagement rates.

The section, furthermore, explores the link between social media activity and reputation management by analyzing post frequency, content types

and engagement metrics on the Facebook and Instagram profiles of leading automotive companies. Engagement metrics, including likes, comments and shares, were analyzed as indicators of audience interaction, providing insights into how social media strategies influence consumer perception and trust. By comparing platform-specific data, the methodology highlights how tailored content strategies on Facebook and Instagram contribute to improving online reputation. Content analysis is used to evaluate the posts and user reactions on Facebook and Instagram. Posts are categorized into six types: User interaction, videos, collaboration, environment, product presentation (services) and contests. Quantitative methods, including averages and summaries, are used to assess the frequency and type of content shared by each company. All data is processed in MS Excel, where graphs and tables are created to visualize the results. These visualizations are fully described to ensure clarity. Posts are manually categorized to ensure accuracy and consistency in the analysis.

Facebook and Instagram were chosen as the primary platforms for this research due to their widespread use by automotive companies and consumers in the Czech Republic. Although other platforms such as YouTube and Twitter are occasionally used by these companies, they were excluded from this study due to their lower activity levels and limited relevance to the research objectives. This methodology provides a structured approach to understanding how automotive companies in the Czech market use social media to manage their online reputation. By analyzing content type, frequency and engagement levels, the research provides actionable insights into effective digital reputation strategies.

4 Results

Websites serve as a company's primary presence on the Internet. Users search for automotive companies through organic searches, such as keywords and direct website queries. For data collection and analysis, the analytics tool Similarweb was used to evaluate the website traffic of selected automotive companies in the Czech market over a three-month period from August 2023 to October 2023.

Table 1: Website Traffic Evaluation (August 2023 to October 2023)

Automotive Company	Total Visits	August	September	October	Average Visit Duration (minutes)
Škoda	2,107,067	710,186	684,560	712,321	3:07
Hyundai	388,595	128,461	155,519	104,615	2:39
Audi	249,972	79,741	87,474	82,757	2:31
Kia	13,090	7,247	2,107	3,736	0:09
BMW	387,472	169,333	101,893	116,246	3:13

Source: own elaboration

The table 1 highlights that Škoda dominates website traffic with a total of 2,107,067 visits and consistently high monthly numbers, reflecting a strong digital presence and customer engagement. BMW stands out with the longest average visit duration (3:13 minutes), suggesting highly engaging content or a well-designed website, while Kia is the weakest performer with the lowest total visits (13,090) and a very short average visit duration of just 9 seconds, indicating minimal user engagement. Hyundai and Audi show a moderate performance with 388,595 and 249,972 total visits respectively, although Hyundai experienced a peak in September while Audi maintained stable traffic over the months. Interestingly, Škoda's consistent traffic contrasts with Hyundai and Audi's fluctuations, while Kia struggles for stability, particularly in September.

Table 2: Demographic Structure of Website Visitors
(August 2023 - October 2023)

Automotive Company	Gender (%)		Age Distribution (%)					
	Men	Women	18-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65+
Škoda	62.52	37.48	15.75	25.63	20.08	15.80	13.27	9.46
Hyundai	63.90	36.10	18.12	25.54	18.75	15.13	14.06	10.69
Audi	59.72	40.28	19.87	28.72	20.63	14.41	9.89	6.48
Kia	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
BMW	59.78	40.22	14.15	30.41	20.18	15.53	11.75	7.98

Source: own elaboration

The results concerning the demographic structure of visitors to the official websites of individual car manufacturers are interesting. From the available data, most visitors are men aged 25-34. The lowest number of visitors is recorded among those aged 65 and over. Unfortunately, Kia did not have enough visitors and therefore no data was available for this company.

Table 3: Number of Posts on Facebook and Instagram
(August 1 - October 31, 2023)

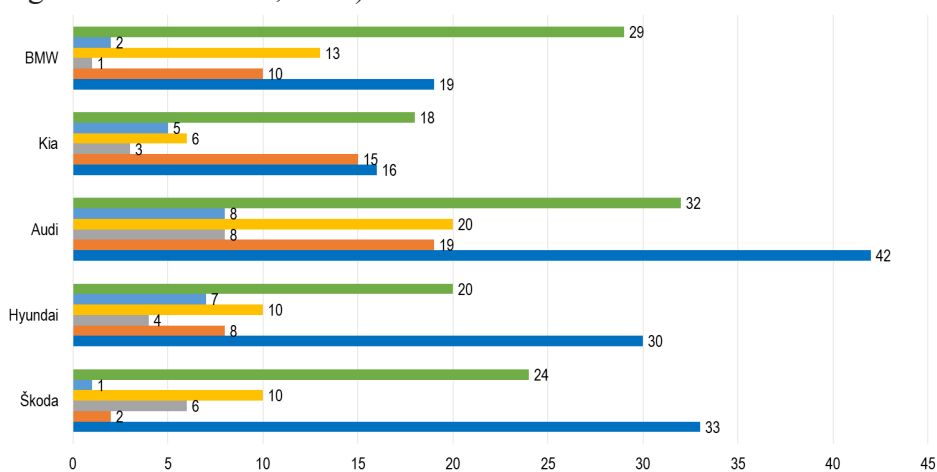
Automotive Company	Number of posts	
	Facebook	Instagram
Škoda	76	74
Hyundai	79	98
Audi	129	87
Kia	63	56
BMW	74	80
Total	421	395

Source: own elaboration

In Table 3, a comparison has been made based on the content analysis of the Facebook and Instagram profiles of Škoda, Hyundai, Audi, Kia and BMW

targeted at the Czech Republic. The table separates the two analyzed social networks and the respective companies. The table shows that Škoda, Audi and Kia mainly enriched their Facebook profiles with posts, while Hyundai and BMW more often added posts to their Instagram profiles. The company with the most posts in the period from 1 August to 31 October 2023 was Audi, with a total of 129 posts. The most active company on Instagram was Hyundai, with 98 posts. The company with the fewest posts and total content was Kia, with 63 posts on Facebook and 56 posts on Instagram.

Figure 1: Comparison of Facebook profiles by typology of posts (August 1 - October 31, 2023)

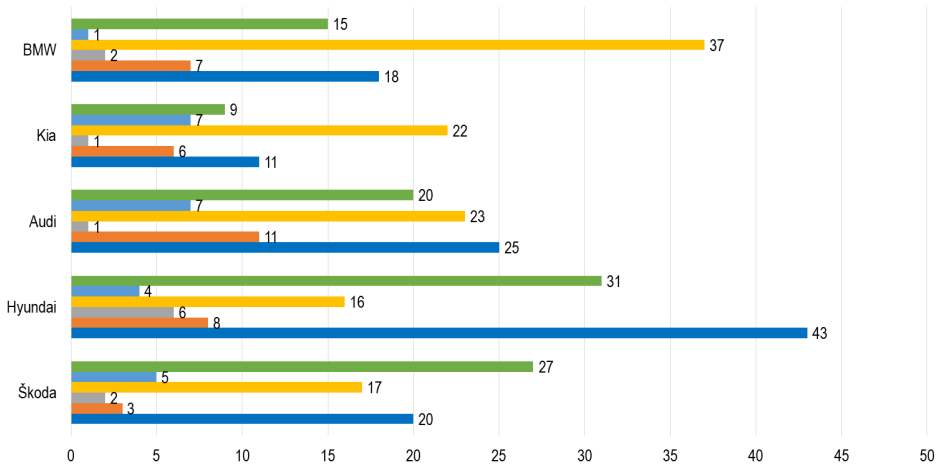


Source: own elaboration.

Figure 1, which focuses on the comparison of Facebook profiles and posts, shows all the automotive companies analyzed and the shares of their posts by typology. The post categories were divided into user interaction (green), collaboration (light blue), videos (yellow), competitions (grey), environment (orange) and product presentation (dark blue). Audi, Hyundai and Škoda had the highest number of posts focusing on product presentation (dark blue), mainly showing photographed cars in a representative (promotional) format. For Kia and BMW, the leading category was User Interaction (green), where the companies encouraged users to comment and share their posts to increase engagement and reach. Posts often included curious questions that encouraged users to respond in the comments, tag other followers or share with friends, giving the impression that the company valued their opinions. Another popular tool was videos (yellow), which users tend to enjoy and share, further

increasing the company's visibility and reach. Kia had the lowest total number of posts and does not yet have as large a follower base as the other companies.

Figure 2: Comparison of Instagram profiles by typology of posts (August 1 - October 31, 2023)



Source: own elaboration.

Figure 2 compares profiles by post typology on the Instagram platform. The post categories were divided into user interaction (green), collaboration (light blue), videos (yellow), competitions (grey), environment (orange) and product presentation (dark blue). Hyundai dominated with the highest number of posts focused on product presentation, highlighting its emphasis on showcasing products. BMW stood out with the highest number of uploaded videos (37) on this social network. However, BMW had the fewest posts in the collaboration category and only 2 posts related to competitions. Environment related posts did not appear in large numbers on any of the company profiles.

5 Discussion

An analysis of each company's official accounts on Facebook and Instagram between 1 August and 31 October 2023 revealed diverse content strategies across platforms. Škoda posted 76 times on Facebook, focusing mainly on product presentation (33 posts) and user interaction (24 posts), while on Instagram, with 74 posts, it emphasized user interaction (27 posts) and videos (17 posts). Hyundai was more active on Instagram, posting 98 times compared to 79 times on Facebook, with Product Presentation dominating both platforms

(43 and 30 posts respectively) and a strong emphasis on User Interaction (31 posts on Instagram and 20 on Facebook). Audi led the way with the highest number of Facebook posts (129), focusing on Product Presentation (42 posts), User Interaction (32 posts) and Environment (19 posts), while its 87 Instagram posts followed a similar trend, with 25 posts dedicated to Product Presentation and 20 to User Interaction. Kia was the least active, with 63 Facebook posts, largely focused on Product Presentation (16 posts) and User Interaction (18 posts), while it posted 56 times on Instagram, with similar priorities but lower engagement. BMW posted 74 times on Facebook, prioritizing user interaction (29 posts) and product presentation (19 posts), and on Instagram, its 80 posts were dominated by videos (37 posts) and product presentation (18 posts). The data shows that most companies rely heavily on Product Presentation as their primary content type, with Audi excelling in overall Facebook activity and Hyundai leading on Instagram, while Kia struggles with lower engagement and output on both platforms.

6 Conclusion

Social networks have become an integral part of our daily lives, changing the way we communicate and interact with others. These platforms have many uses, often positive and beneficial, but they can also have a negative impact on users. For businesses, social networks increase visibility, serve as a tool for sharing news, information and events and are highly responsive, allowing them to reach a wider audience while maintaining direct contact with customers. The main objective of this article was to analyze how social media content strategies, including post frequency and content types, influence online engagement and perceived reputation of leading automotive companies operating in the Czech Republic. The findings revealed that companies primarily use Facebook and Instagram, with most posts focusing on product presentation and user interaction. Hyundai showed the most activity on Instagram, while Audi excelled on Facebook, with both platforms serving as essential tools for increasing customer engagement. However, the study also highlighted the limited use of platforms such as YouTube and Twitter, and the limited emphasis on environmental content. While these findings provide valuable strategies for companies in the Czech market, the study did have some limitations. The focus on two platforms, five companies and a short, three-month period may not fully capture broader social media trends. Future research could include additional platforms such as TikTok and LinkedIn,

analyze other industries or explore seasonal and long-term patterns. Overall, this research provides actionable recommendations for using social media to improve online reputation management and highlights the growing importance of strategic content creation in today's digital landscape.

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