



# Designing a Model for Enhancing the Reputation of Online Brands

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## Abstract

Online reputation or electronic reputation can be considered one of the most significant intangible assets of companies. The objective of this study is to design a model for enhancing the reputation of online brands. The present research is qualitative in terms of methodology and employs a descriptive-exploratory approach with a phenomenological method for data analysis. The research instrument used in this study is in-depth (semi-structured) interviews. The statistical population consists of 10 experts and specialists in the field of marketing for online brands. In this study, members of the expert panel were selected using a purposive sampling approach. Key codes were extracted through a thematic analysis approach and analyzed using MAXQDA software. The validity of the research findings was assessed and confirmed based on the criteria proposed by Creswell (2002). The results indicated that the categories and components of online brand reputation enhancement include 11 main categories: online brand reputation, cultural factors, customer experience management, website quality, website security, store social responsibility, social media marketing, content marketing, targeted and intelligent advertising, product and service quality, and customer satisfaction, along with 63 subcategories.

**Keywords:** *Online reputation, online brand, website quality*

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## 1. Introduction

With the widespread use of the Internet, mobile phones, personal computers, and tablets, consumers can share their thoughts, desires, and complaints about the products and services they use. An increasing number of people read, monitor, and share content that has the potential to damage companies' reputations. Therefore, to gain a competitive advantage, a company must establish an online presence, monitor shared content related to the company, and find responses and solutions to customers' questions and problems. It is essential for companies to recognize the importance of their reputation both in the virtual and real world, consider any opinions, complaints, and suggestions from customers as valuable, and strive to build and develop a strong reputation [1].

Customers share their opinions, thoughts, and complaints about the products and services they use. However, while such sharing occurs between a few people in an offline environment, in an online environment, it rapidly spreads from one person to thousands or even millions. Additionally, these shared experiences, complaints, and opinions are searchable on web search engines, and removing them is very difficult, if not impossible [2]. These online experiences may influence the decisions of other active or potential customers. Therefore, online reputation is a strategic element of corporate competitiveness [3]. Online reputation is defined as the general social evaluation of an entity based on the past behavior of companies, what companies post in cyberspace, and what third parties share about that entity on the Internet [4].

Social media platforms help companies reach their customers and manage their online reputation. With the increasing popularity of social media, the meaning of reputation management has shifted to online portals such as blogs, forums, review sites, and social networks [5]. In an online environment, positive results related to companies positively influence customers' perceptions, whereas any negative, incomplete, indifferent, or dull content negatively impacts reputation. Even the absence of relevant content about an organization on the Internet can harm its reputation by creating a negative mindset [6].

Consumers also rely on statements made by others when making purchasing decisions. These decisions are not limited to products but also include services, companies, political candidates, and more. Thus, having a tool that can automatically collect and analyze large volumes of data and opinions is highly beneficial [7]. As the volume of

information available on the Internet increases, there is an urgent need to find tools that assist in searching and managing resources [8]. An automated tool should exist that accurately identifies and categorizes statements using vast amounts of data. Such a tool enables organizations to detect feedback in the early stages of their projects, providing an opportunity to correct mistakes and offer better products and services to consumers. Users tend to spend more time in communities where they receive social and psychological feedback and have invested significant time [9].

In this regard, some researchers focus on sentiment analysis using sentences [10], while others analyze sentiment based on opinions related to specific features of a product or service [11]. Sentiment analysis is defined as the computational study of opinions, emotions, and sentiments expressed in text [12]. In review analysis, sentiment analysis refers to the process of exploring product reviews on the Internet to determine the overall opinion or sentiment about a product [13]. Beyond the textual content of product reviews, information such as usernames, hashtags, responses, and location can indicate user opinions. Tan et al. (2011) used social connections to create a social graph showing whom each individual follows [14]. They found that users who are highly "connected" tend to share similar opinions. This information, combined with textual features, can better predict an individual's sentiments. Users who follow similar people and those with stronger connections generally express similar opinions. This contextual information can be used to predict sentiments. Another researcher, aiming to understand "user biases," argues that while individuals may alter their expressions, their interests remain relatively unchanged. Recognizing this fact can help companies make better predictions about user statements [15].

Given the importance of social connections in understanding opinions, some researchers have used individuals' locations to gain deeper insights into their sentiments. This group of researchers believes that users in different regions employ unique phrases and styles in their reviews, making location inclusion as a feature beneficial for improving classification accuracy [16]. Millions of users share their thoughts and considerations about various aspects and events through social media. Customer sentiment analysis refers to a classification problem where the primary focus is on automatically categorizing text into positive and negative sentiments to identify attitudes and opinions expressed in any form or language. Sentiment analysis toward brands provides organizations with a fast and

effective method for monitoring public sentiments about brands, businesses, executives, and more [1, 17].

Reputation is the overall evaluation of a company by stakeholders over time. This evaluation is based on stakeholders' direct experiences with the company, any other form of communication, or comparisons with the actions of leading competitors [18, 19]. According to Kietzmann et al. (2011), discussions about brands occur with or without the permission of the companies in question. It is now up to companies to decide whether they want to take social media seriously and participate in these discussions or continue ignoring them. Both choices have significant consequences [20]. Although many companies are willing to engage, they are often reluctant to develop strategies and allocate resources for effective social media participation. As a result, companies frequently overlook the opportunities and threats posed by creative consumers [21].

E-commerce is of particular importance from the perspective of customers due to the cost and time advantages of accessing electronic services. In this type of transaction, the website serves as a crucial communication channel [22]. A scientific examination of service-provider websites, considering customer perspectives and identifying critical indicators, can be a significant factor in enhancing customer satisfaction and loyalty and ensuring the success of this business [23]. With the significant increase in Internet usage in our country, it is essential for online stores to determine the online shopping behaviors of their target customers and adopt appropriate marketing and sales strategies accordingly. While precise data on the volume of online transactions in our country is not available, according to the Public Relations Department of the Islamic Republic of Iran Post Company, as of September 4, 2012, since the company's initial efforts in e-commerce (2007), more than seven million online purchase orders with a total value of nearly 900 billion Iranian rials have been processed [24]. This statistic alone indicates the growing popularity of such transactions among the people of our country. Online shopping, therefore, holds significant importance in our country and has become a common purchasing method for many consumers.

The literature review confirms the absence of a comprehensive model for online reputation both domestically and internationally. Among the most relevant studies, Fernández-Ackles et al. (2024) conducted research titled *Online Reputation of Agricultural and Food Companies and Its Determinants: An Empirical Review*, which found that online reputation depends on the

company's legal framework and website-related features, including website quality, corporate social responsibility information, secure connections, and organic product offerings [25]. Singh et al. (2023) explored online reputation management strategies in *Managing Online Reputation: Strategies for Building and Protecting Brand Image*, emphasizing the importance of reputation monitoring, content creation, engagement on social media platforms, and other essential practices in an environment where a brand's digital footprint is constantly scrutinized and prone to change [26]. Sirzad (2022) reviewed online reputation management and online credibility components, highlighting search engine optimization (SEO), social media activities, and user-generated content as key elements [6]. Dutot and Castellano (2015) designed a measurement scale for online reputation, demonstrating that online reputation should be assessed using 15 factors across four dimensions: brand attributes, website quality, service quality, and social media presence. Vadi'i Noqabi and Hushyar (2023) analyzed the impact of website quality on university reputation, considering value co-creation behavior and the image of Ferdowsi University of Mashhad, concluding that website design, valuable content, and ease of access play a significant role in enhancing an organization's reputation, particularly in academic settings [27]. Abbasi Gorji et al. (2018) examined the factors influencing the use of social media applications in gaining virtual reputation through the cultivation theory in media studies, finding that various aspects of social media platforms significantly contribute to virtual reputation, with social network functionalities having the most substantial effect [28]. Malek Akhlagh et al. (2015) studied brand reputation models and measurement methods, identifying key reputation-building factors, including managerial leadership, advertising and public relations, store design, product indicators, social responsibility, company characteristics, employee quality, social utility, financial indicators, and associated products [29]. These studies underscore the multifaceted nature of online reputation and its dependence on various strategic, technological, and social factors.

With the rapid growth of online brands and individuals' increasing inclination to purchase from them, examining the factors influencing online brand reputation appears necessary. Therefore, the present study seeks to address the following question: What is the appropriate model for enhancing the reputation of online brands?

## 2. Methodology

This applied research employs an interpretive phenomenological approach, which is classified as qualitative research. The statistical population consists of 10 experts and specialists in the field of online brand marketing. These individuals were selected to identify the factors influencing online brand reputation at the levels of dimensions, components, and indicators, as well as to validate these factors. A purposive sampling method was used to select the sample and experts, and in-depth

interviews were conducted with the most informed individual in each online brand who had extensive experience in brand reputation issues. In this study, theoretical saturation was reached after the eighth interview, as no new concepts emerged in practice; however, to ensure reliability, a total of ten interviews were conducted. The demographic information of the interviewees is presented in the following table:

**Table 1.** Demographic Information of Interviewees

No.	Education Level	Company/Online Brand	Gender	Age	Field of Study	Work Experience
1	Master's	Dolichi	Female	62	Marketing Management	26
2	PhD	Shixon	Female	55	Media Management	20
3	PhD	Lonato	Female	52	Marketing Management	23
4	Master's	Kimia Online	Female	45	Marketing Management	18
5	PhD	Sibook	Female	63	Marketing Management	24
6	PhD	Web Posh	Female	48	Marketing Management	17
7	PhD	Ruban	Female	39	Media Management	19
8	Master's	Zimano	Male	52	Media Management	22
9	PhD	Bamiloshop	Male	58	Marketing Management	18
10	PhD	Lipak	Male	60	Marketing Management	17

Data analysis in phenomenological research, like other qualitative research methods, follows a systematic pattern of repeated data collection and simultaneous analysis. This process typically continues in iterative cycles of data collection and analysis until data saturation is achieved. In this study, the Colaizzi interpretive phenomenological method was used for data analysis. Interpretive phenomenology is a scientific method that synthesizes social phenomena with a subjective approach. In this research method, two broad and general questions were asked during the interviews:

1. What experience do you have regarding the studied phenomenon?
2. What background or themes have influenced your experience of the studied phenomenon?

The Colaizzi descriptive phenomenological method used in this study consists of seven stages:

1. **Individual Protocol:** Examining the descriptions and statements provided by participants.
2. **Extracting Key Sentences:** Identifying sentences or phrases directly related to the studied phenomenon.
3. **Formulating Meanings:** Deriving specific concepts and meanings from key sentences.
4. **Clustering Themes:** Grouping related formulated meanings into thematic categories.

5. **Comprehensive Description:** Integrating the results of each theme into a unified description.
6. **Clear and Explicit Statement of the Essential Structure of the Phenomenon:** Formulating a comprehensive description of the phenomenon.
7. **Validation:** Verifying the findings by consulting participants or experts.

The data analysis method used for the in-depth interviews in this phenomenological research is similar to grounded theory methodology. Based on the three-stage coding process—open, axial, and selective coding—data were continuously reviewed and refined. Through an inductive process, similar data were grouped around a central category based on their similarities and thematic relevance. The initial concepts were organized into broader components, which were then merged into categories at a more abstract level based on constant comparative analysis. MAXQDA software was used to analyze the collected qualitative data. In the final validation process, the credibility, transferability, and confirmability of the data were examined and confirmed. Additionally, peer debriefing was conducted, and with a 62% agreement coefficient between two coders, reliability was established.

The issue of validation and generalizability of research findings is one of the most critical challenges in qualitative research methodology. Guba and Lincoln (1985) argue that trustworthiness consists of four interconnected criteria:

1. **Credibility:** Credibility is established through maintaining and enhancing engagement with participants to accurately understand what they truly know and how they act. To achieve this, the transcribed text of each interview was reanalyzed and returned to the participants for review and validation. Their feedback and experiences were incorporated into the final analysis.
2. **Dependability:** Dependability refers to the ability to identify the origins, collection process, and application of a study's data. In this research, member checking was employed. Two subject-matter experts familiar with the research topic reviewed the findings to assess their reliability.
3. **Confirmability:** Confirmability indicates the extent to which other researchers or reviewers can verify the research findings. To enhance confirmability, researchers in this study attempted to minimize their own biases and preconceptions to ensure the integrity of the collected data.

4. **Transferability:** Transferability refers to the extent to which the results of a qualitative study can be applied to different contexts and populations. In this research, transferability was addressed by clearly outlining the research conditions and ensuring diversity in participant characteristics.

### 3. Findings and Results

In the third stage, the meanings were formulated, and the concepts of significant statements were explained. At this stage, the main categories and subcategories were identified. In the fourth stage, the formulated meanings were grouped into categories that formed distinct thematic clusters. In the fifth stage, to establish independent thematic structures, all extracted themes were presented in a comprehensive description, and the thematic clusters were integrated. This process led to the emergence of the overall structure of the studied phenomenon. Finally, the main and subcategories of the research, consisting of 11 main categories and 63 subcategories, are presented in the following table:

**Table 2.** Axial Coding of the Study

Main Category	Subcategory
Online Brand Reputation	1. Access to a wide range of customers
	2. Enjoying tax exemptions
	3. Automation of processes and operations
	4. Availability of services and products 24/7
	5. Increased revenue and profitability
	6. Direct interaction with customers
	7. Broad geographical coverage and cost reduction
Cultural Factors	8. Preference for in-person services after product examination
	9. Alignment of products and services with societal culture
	10. Respect for values and cultural norms of the target society
	11. Informing the target audience about the offered product
	12. Changing traditional views regarding product purchases
Customer Experience Management	13. Simplifying website usability for diverse users
	14. Providing new and up-to-date services and products
	15. Personalizing services for target customers
	16. Creating customer clubs to offer various discounts
	17. Facilitating the purchasing flow of products and services
	18. Encouraging customer participation
Website Quality	19. Mobile-friendly website design
	20. Enabling customers to track their purchases
	21. Allocating optimal speed for platform usability
	22. Optimizing search engine performance
	23. Creating a simple, secure, and satisfying environment for users
	24. Understanding different user characteristics and needs
	25. Providing fast and accurate online/offline customer support
Website Security	26. Protecting website user privacy
	27. Establishing useful links on the website
	28. Ensuring confidentiality in data transfer and processing
	29. Implementing blockchain technology to enhance cybersecurity
Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)	30. Obtaining international certificates or standards
	31. Participating in social and charitable events

Social Media Marketing	32. Sponsoring charity or sports campaigns
	33. Offering organic products in the store
	34. Addressing societal concerns
	35. Engaging in environmental sustainability campaigns
	36. Conducting extensive advertising campaigns
Content Marketing	37. Ensuring creativity in platform design, advertisements, etc.
	38. Email marketing strategies
	39. Integrating skills, knowledge, and creativity in marketing
	40. Maintaining continuous and organized social media presence
	41. Sending mass promotional SMS messages
Targeted and Smart Advertising	42. Optimizing textual content on the website using SEO
	43. Setting content creation goals and strategies
	44. Employing a specialized content production team
	45. Delivering engaging and professional content to users
	46. Considering the target audience in content production
Product and Service Quality	47. Advertising the brand on reputable and high-traffic social networks
	48. Utilizing Google Pay-Per-Click (PPC) ads or domestic platforms
	49. Publishing videos and podcasts on the website
	50. Conducting precise market competitor analysis
	51. Using sponsored content marketing
Customer Satisfaction	52. Organizing online contests and promotional campaigns
	53. Adhering to national and international standards
	54. Producing environmentally friendly products
	55. Employing a specialized service team
	56. Ensuring the product matches its online description
	57. Utilizing technological equipment
	58. Providing after-sales services
	59. Setting appropriate product pricing
	60. Creating customer value
	61. Ensuring customer security and trust

In the sixth stage, data reduction was conducted, where redundant, irrelevant, and exaggerated descriptions were eliminated from the entire dataset. The comprehensive description was refined into a core structure. Additionally, to clarify the relationships between thematic clusters and extracted themes, modifications were made, including removing ambiguous and contradictory elements that weakened the overall structure.

Finally, in the seventh stage, the validation of results was conducted, and findings were presented to the participants. They confirmed the accuracy and consistency of the results

with their own perspectives. In the final phase, results were returned to the participants, and they were asked further questions about the findings to enhance the credibility of the data.

According to Creswell, validity is related to the accuracy with which an idea is developed and supported. He questions: Does the general structural description provide an accurate representation of shared characteristics and structural relationships? He further states that to determine the validity of a phenomenological study, five possible questions may be posed to the researcher.

**Table 3.** Validity and Reliability Assessment in Phenomenology

No.	Validity and Reliability Assessment	Confirmed	Rejected
1	Has the interviewer influenced the content provided by the participants in a way that their descriptions do not reflect their actual experience?	✓	
2	Has the transcription of the interview content been performed correctly, and does it include the entire meaning of the interview?	✓	
3	In the analysis of the transcripts, are there any results other than those extracted and proposed by the researcher that can be traced and identified?	✓	
4	Is it possible to move from the general structural description back to the transcripts and derive specific content and general examples of the participants' experiences (reverse method)?	✓	
5	Is the structural description related to a specific situation, or does it refer to an experience in a different context?	✓	



The standard established by Creswell for assessing the quality of phenomenology is presented in the following table:

**Table 4.** Quality Assessment Standard for Phenomenology

No.	Quality Assessment Standard for Phenomenology	Confirmed	Rejected
1	Does the researcher have an understanding of the philosophical principles of phenomenology?	✓	
2	Does the researcher have a clear and explicit phenomenon for study—one that is precisely structured?	✓	
3	Has the researcher used a coherent and systematic approach in phenomenological data analysis?	✓	
4	Has the researcher identified the essence of the participants' experiences? Does this essence include a description of the experience and its content?	✓	
5	Has the researcher maintained a reflective stance throughout the study?	✓	

To calculate reliability using the intra-topic agreement method between two coders, one of the research colleagues

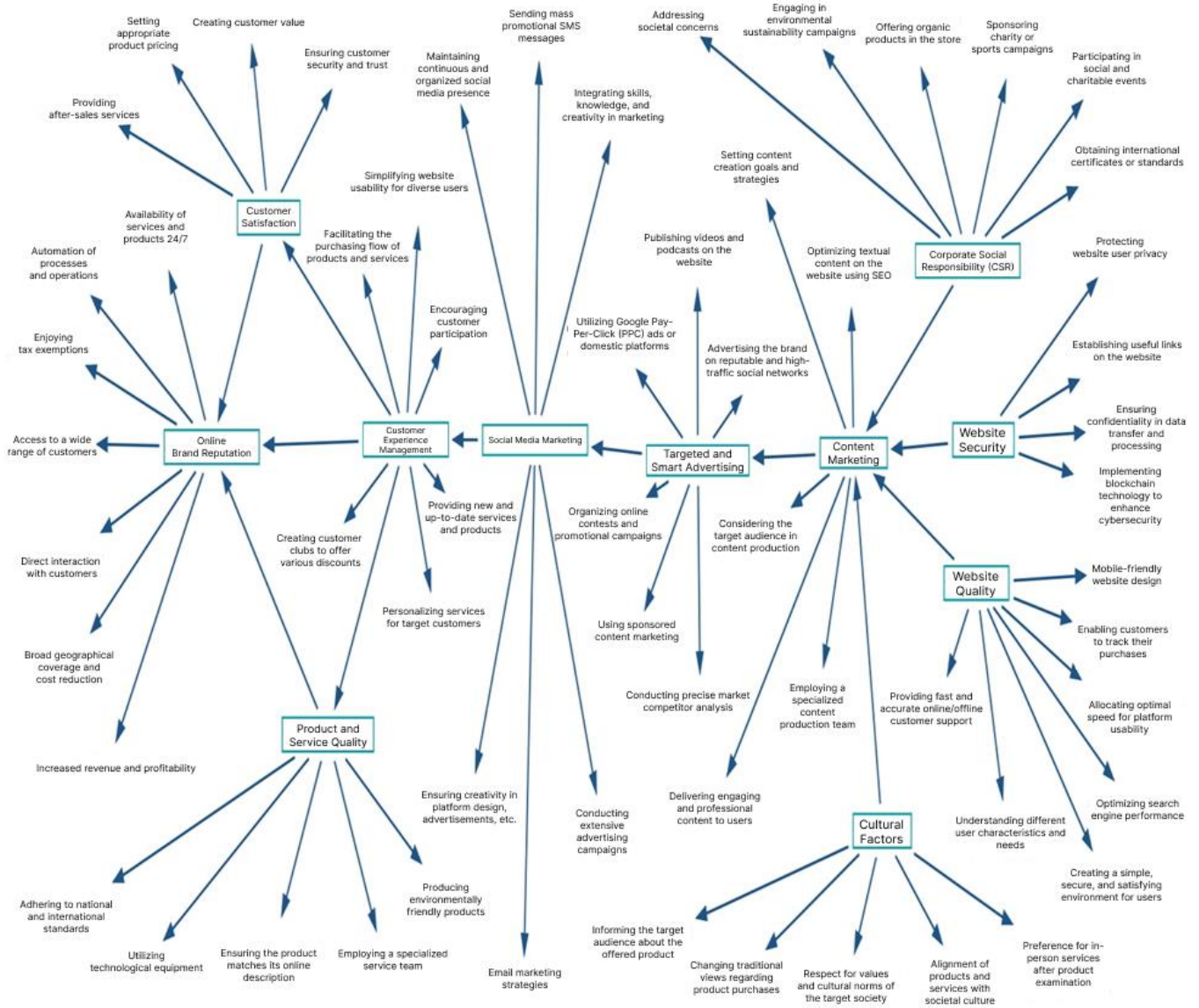
in the relevant field was invited to participate as a research collaborator.

**Table 5.** Inter-Coder Reliability Percentage

Interview	Total Codes	Agreement Count	Disagreement Count	Inter-Coder Reliability Percentage
Interview 2	86	22	7	52%
Interview 5	55	15	3	54%
Interview 10	39	17	10	87%
Total	180	55	20	62%

Based on the results of the above table, given that the inter-coder reliability percentage exceeds 60%, the test reliability is deemed acceptable.

The research model is presented in the following figure:



**Figure 1.** Research Model

#### 4. Discussion and Conclusion

The present study, through the analysis and categorization of descriptive codes derived from interview transcripts, identified 61 subcategories. Based on their semantic similarities and conceptual proximity, these were grouped into 11 main categories, including online brand reputation, cultural factors, customer experience management, website quality, website security, corporate social responsibility, social media marketing, content marketing, targeted and intelligent advertising, product and service quality, and customer satisfaction.

A positive brand reputation enhances customer trust and loyalty, ultimately leading to profitability and long-term success. Brand reputation is an intangible asset that must be

prioritized through a strong brand positioning strategy and the delivery of high-quality and consistent experiences. When launching a website and attracting new customers in a target market, it is essential to remain focused on addressing customer needs. Losing customers is significantly easier than acquiring them. Conducting customer surveys can help determine which products are preferred and which are not, leading to an increase in customer numbers. Ultimately, the success of a business can be evaluated using standard business metrics, including sales volume, market share, profit and loss, and other key performance indicators. Additionally, leveraging customer feedback and data to design and implement better business strategies can help businesses expand by entering new markets. Any website that effectively employs these factors is more likely to rank



among the top ten search results on Google, making it more visible to potential customers.

It is important to emphasize that while numerous strategies exist for website optimization (SEO), none are as influential in long-term success as content marketing. Google's search engine constantly seeks high-quality content that is highly relevant to user searches, enabling users to quickly find what they are looking for. Therefore, if website owners fail to produce valuable content or do not optimize their content according to SEO criteria, they have no chance of ranking among the top results or attracting an audience. In this regard, website quality and security [25, 27, 30, 31] and content marketing [6, 26, 32] have been identified as crucial factors influencing brand reputation.

To increase website traffic, the general belief is that advertising costs, no matter how high, cannot influence customers unless the advertised product or service is of high quality and reasonably priced. The best form of advertising is quality itself, which ultimately leads to brand reputation [27, 29, 33, 34]. However, it is crucial that high quality and competitive pricing are effectively communicated to potential customers; otherwise, even an excellent product at a fair price may be overshadowed by low-quality, heavily marketed competitors. Researchers have confirmed the role of advertising [29, 35] and social media marketing (Singh et al., 2023; Sirzad, 2022; Fayaz et al., 2019; Dutot & Castellano, 2015) in enhancing brand reputation.

Furthermore, traditional marketing strategies focused solely on the marketing mix have shifted toward relationship marketing and effective customer relationship management. Over the past two decades, many organizations have realized that retaining existing customers is significantly more cost-effective than acquiring new ones. The role of customer satisfaction in brand reputation has also been confirmed by researchers [17, 33, 36]. Additionally, a positive customer experience is another critical factor influencing brand reputation, as highlighted in this study and in prior research [34, 37].

Moreover, organizations are expected to respect societal values, norms, and ethical considerations, just as any responsible community member would. This means that businesses should operate as responsible corporate citizens. According to researchers [17, 19, 25], brands with high corporate social responsibility (CSR) are more reputable and popular among customers.

Online brands should also consider cultural factors, which significantly influence customer perceptions and

brand reputation. Cultural factors play a crucial role in shaping brand image [17, 37].

In conclusion, online brands can achieve brand reputation by investing in and focusing on key factors such as cultural considerations, customer experience management, website quality, website security, corporate social responsibility, social media marketing, content marketing, targeted and intelligent advertising, product and service quality, and customer satisfaction.

### Authors' Contributions

Authors equally contributed to this article.

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### Declaration of Interest

The authors report no conflict of interest.

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### Ethical Considerations

All procedures performed in this study were under the ethical standards.

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