Monitoring digital social networks as an organizational strategy

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Abstract

This article, which refers to the organizational image crisis and digital social networks, is methodologically articulated by means of an exploratory research that focuses on understanding the strategic performance of Public Relations professional in anticipation of possible organizational image crisis by monitoring digital social networks and mutual interaction with users. Thus, after an appropriation of bibliography about concepts that based this topic, we concluded that image crisis can be avoided through the monitoring process and the identification of signals that show the imminence of the crisis. In this environment, the study provides a guide to monitoring digital social networks, which can be adapted to all types of organization and thus aid in identification of these warning signs preceding the crisis.

Keywords: Image. Crisis. Monitoring. Organization. Networks.

Introductin

This article talks about the organizational image of crisis and is triggered by two issues that currently haunt the daily lives of organizations seeking excellence through strategic Communication actions, they are: 1) the crisis can be avoided through the strategic use of digital social networks? and 2) what is the role of monitoring online social networks in the process of identifying and preventing potential crises? Pursuing this issue implies in a methodological observation with the use of exploratory research, as Gil (2002) asserts. This

method provides greater familiarity with the problem as it makes more explicit and favors the enhancement of ideas.

The theoretical density associated with observation of actual cases involving image management in digital social networks allows identifying and testing resources for monitoring organizations in the digital environment. Facing this situation, the study aims to understand how crises are formed, how they reach the organizational image and how crisis situations are enhanced by digital social networks. Also seeks to understand what is the best way to carry out a social networks monitoring and indicate solutions to reverse possible crises identified by the monitoring system.

Following this framework, it is observed that contemporary society is at a point where the Communication presence made strategically and directed arises in a steady appreciation space with organizations, whether they are small, medium or large. The certainty of an organization governed by ethics, commitment and transparency is key to consumers in such competitive times as the present. But what are organizations seeking when they invest in Communication? How Public Relations, through Communication mechanisms, can aid in optimal organizational image consolidation? These questions are guided by the logic of visibility, control and production of content which circulate in environments often little known by the Communication managers in organizations.

Participation in the digital and virtual space as a strategic action does not guarantee positive results to the organization's image. Interactive features triggered by interacting public in these areas can lead to a disaster if the organization does not have control mechanisms. This is because organizations are not finished and immutable units, but a body susceptible to changes and adjustments as is society itself. Being the organization an open system it is permanently changing material, energy and information with the environment, affecting it with its decisions and being affected. In this way it is possible to understand the evolution of Communication in organizations and their adaptation to the social, political and economic contexts it belongs to.

The organizational Communication had its beginnings in the 19th century through changes in labor relations and also in the rehabilitation of production and commercialization system originated in the Industrial Revolution. With industrialization, the companies felt the need to seek new ways of communicating with its stakeholders, both internal and external, in order to beat the competition and ensure their market space. But at this time Communication was only informative and happened in an instrumental way.

The practice of Communication as a strategic process came after the Technological Revolution and globalization. This was a scenario marked by competition and required from

organizations not only Marketing and selling actions, but the relationship and trust between organization and public, in other words, a process of planned and strategic Communication.

Currently, organizational Communication needs to be planned, since planning is a key factor in actions involving Communication and Public Relations. Joining a particular network is not enough when its goals, content and frequency are not stablished for example. This is a complex understanding about what the organization expects of the network and that the network and its stakeholders expect from its organization in the network.

For Forni (2013), if an organization is not inserted in the digital environment is like it is incomplete, or any organization outside of social networks can be considered external to the current world. However, organizations have a much larger role in digital social networks than just creating a fanpage / or profile. We need to be aware that social networks are so called for their need for interaction, relationships and creating bonds.

Crisis and network Communication

Considering the importance of consolidating a positive image and also a good reputation in the current competitive environment, being aware about the vulnerabilities which the organization are exposed to is determinative, since critical events involving the organization name can put at stake the credibility of an institution. Plane crashes, contaminated food, natural and environmental disasters and irregular labor exploitation are some things that happen frequently, exposing the organization and leaving a shaky image with its public. In 1982, extra strong Tylenol capsules, manufactured by Johnson & Johnson, were contaminated with cyanide, killing seven people in the United States; in 1998, a allotment of Microvlar contraceptive containing flour, manufactured by Schering do Brasil, was sold by mistake; the occurrence of plane crashes, as the TAM flight 3054 in 2007, with 199 deaths, and the Air France flight 447 in 2009, accounting for 228 deaths; the oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico, due to the explosion of a British Petroleum platform in 2010; in 2011, allotments of Toddynho chocolate milk, manufactured by PepsiCo, were sold with remnants of cleaning products; the typhoon that hit Philippines in 2013 and left about 10.000 dead and 2.000 missing are just a few of the situations of many types, which often occur, bringing concern and apprehension to the institutions involved. These episodes, which occur suddenly and cause great damage, are called Organizational Crisis.

The word *Crisis* comes from the Greek *Krisis* and the Latin *crisis* and means “turning point”. The term is a concept used in many areas as Sociology, Politics, Economics, Management and Medicine. To define an organizational crisis, Ulmer et al (2007, p.7,

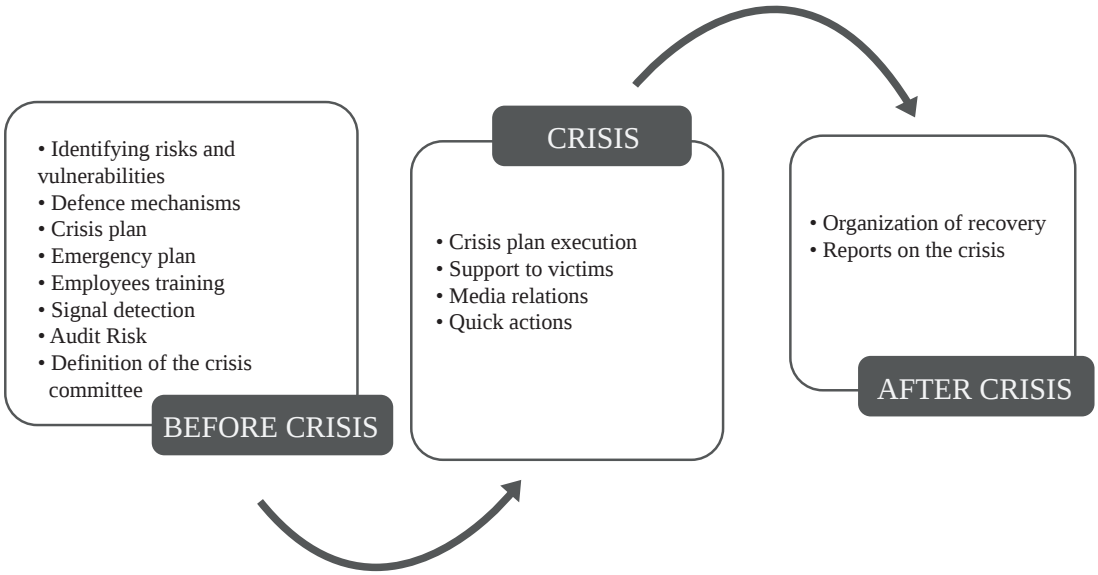
our translation) says it is "a specific, unexpected and unprecedented event or series of events that creates high levels of uncertainty and threatens or are perceived as threats to the organization's goals". Argenti (2006, p. 259, *our translation*) talks about the tangible and intangible damage of the crisis through a very simple definition:

> the crisis is a serious disaster that can occur naturally or as a result of human error, intervention or even criminal intent. May include tangible devastation, the destruction of lives or assets, or intangible devastation, as the loss of credibility of the organization or other reputation damages. The latter results may be a consequence of the management response to the tangible devastation or results of human error.

An organizational crisis is any and all generally unexpected occurrence, that when not managed properly can achieve great proportions, escape the control of managers and gain visibility in the Media, compromising the organizational image. Ulmer et al (2007) says that there are three unique factors that differentiate a crisis from any other event: the surprise, the threat and the short response time. These studies indicate that what differentiates the event and configures it as a crisis are its unexpected way to happen, requiring accurate and concrete actions, the threat that causes to the organization through tangible and intangible aspects and the requirement for a short time for answers and explanations of those involved. The crises, despite being configured by the same general characteristics, occur for distinct reasons, and have different sources and are triggered in various situations. These particular features of each crisis allow them to be classified according to their type, taking into account that not all crises have the same nature, the same gravity or generate the same impact among those involved.

For Ferrer (2000), the classification of crises is made based on their possibilities of anticipation, consequences and the way of evolution. Thus, it is possible to understand that the crisis has a before, a during and an after, which can also be classified according to Mendes et al (2006) as Pre-Crisis, Crisis and Post-Crisis.

Figure 1: Stages of a crisis



Source: Prepared by the authors

Regarding the phases of the crisis, Coombs and Holladay (2010) state that when an organization exceeds the basic phases of a crisis, it begins again to enter a pre-crisis period, better prepared and able to manage with much more effectiveness in the next crisis, if it occurs. For this study will be kept the focus on the Pre-Crisis phase, in order to understand the signals in digital social networks before the crises happen to prevent further damage.

Predictability of Crises: detecting signals in networks

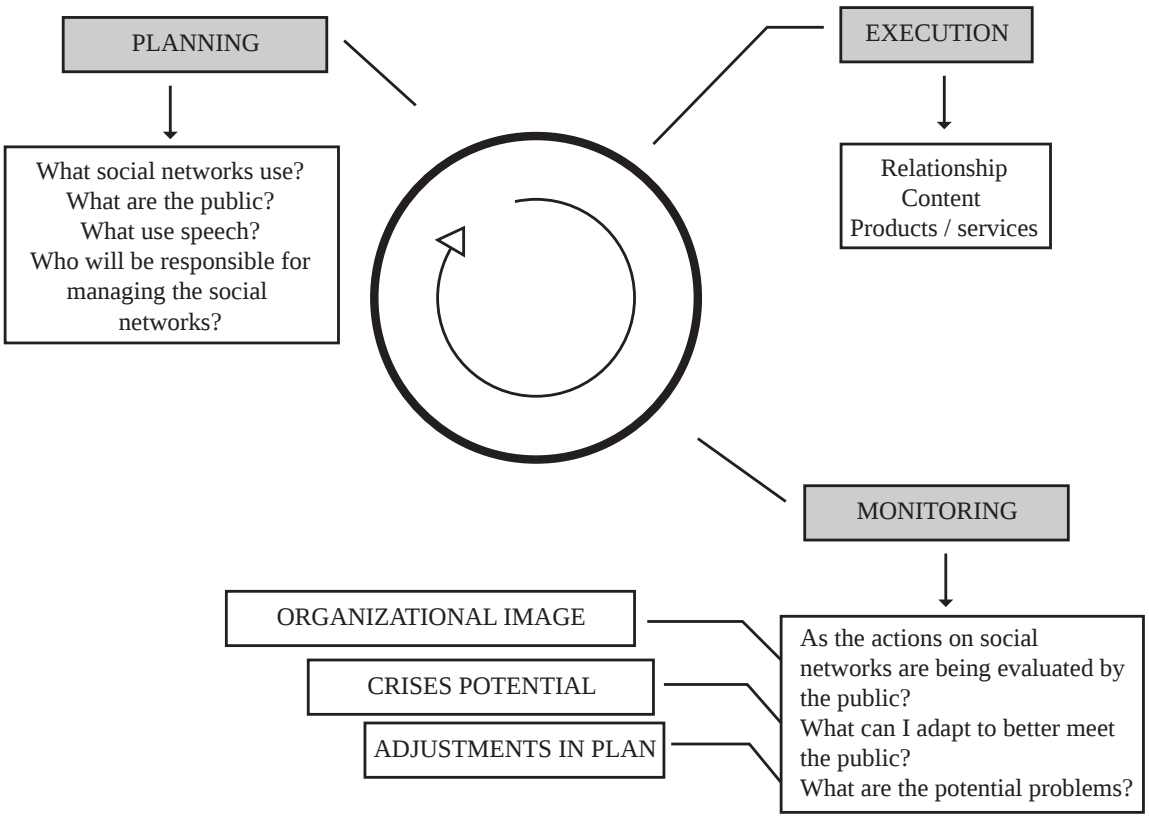
To say that all organizations are susceptible to crises, we understand that they are prepared to face such situation, and on the lookout for signs that can detect possible crises in order to avoid them. Unfortunately, it is not what happens in most large organizations. They think that the organization is exempt because of its success and reputation. The truth is that most crises send the organization warning signs before they happen. So it is up to the institution to identify them and act on prevention. Otherwise, the accumulation of unresolved situations may trigger and generate major crises. For Forni (2013) crises cannot be confused with the daily problems of the organization, but when these problems are not solved, they may start crises.

Long before actually occurring, almost all crises send repeated "warning signs" announcing the likely occurrence of the crisis. If these early warning signs are identified, amplified and put into practice effectively, then many crises can be prevented before it occurs, what is the best way to manage a crisis. To accomplish this, organizations need to constantly scan their internal and external environment operations, in order to find early warning signs of potential "time bombs" (latent defects) before it is too late to correct. In short, they have to stop being reactive to being continuously proactive.

With the internet and the possibility of interaction and search for online information, image crises happen almost in real time, at the same time of the event, reported instantly in networks, or even when past events come to light through social networks. The bad news resulting from intentional or unintentional failures lead to a rapid visibility, since it is highly enhanced by interest groups, stakeholders, activists and society that somehow is reached. These events are easily spread across the web and gain strength with every click.

The internet is not just a fast channel of information and Communication. It has democratized opinion, powering the subject. This social and citizen Media is an aggravating component of crises, because it creates instant visibility depending on their size and nature, considering that many crises are already born with high potential for visibility. This device requires the presence of a planned and detailed structure of communicational strategies to be used in digital social networks in order to be successful in the network and obtain recognition of stakeholders. However, there is no standard method for the use of social networks by organizations. Thus, depending on the acting branch, the services offered, the language used and also what they want to pass on to users, some specific strategies can be added or banned. Regarding the strategies used, Coutinho (2007) says that companies know the effectiveness of social Media and are using them to strengthen the relationship with the consumer, but warns that there is still no set formula or standard to assist in the task.

Figure 2: Ideal cyclic process for performance of organizations in digital social networks



Source: Prepared by the authors

To explain the importance of feedback related to digital social networks in order to build a positive image in the online environment, we brought some examples of well-done actions and reactions by companies on social networks.

One of the Brazilian brands that best works content in social networks, and has the recognition of its public is the Ponto Frio[1]. Through a penguin mascot, the repertoire of the brand varies according to what is being said on the network, using humor to elaborate the content of the posts.

1 Chain of retail stores.

Figure 3: Post using content circulating on digital social networks

Source: Post removed from the social networking site Twitter

As for the relationship, Schweppes[2] has been very successful in the position shown below, on the pronunciation of the brand:

Figure 4: Interactive post with the consumer of soft drink brand

Source: Post removed from the social networking site Twitter.

2 Soft drink brand.

About the product / service, actions like the HABIB'S[3] strategies are very well accepted by consumers and users of Digital Social Networks:

Figure 5: Relationship strategy from the customer's post

Source: Post removed from the social networking site Twitter.

Russell and Rose (2012, p. 273, *our translation*) argue that "interacting ethically and responsibly adds positive results in both the organizational image and their relationships"

3 Brazilian fast food chain specialized in Arabian food.

in networks. In addition, a strategic management can identify trends and dissatisfaction, in addition to prevent conflicts.

Monitoring networks for crises prevention

The term "to monitor" expresses the meaning of following, observing events regarding of a given object in a certain geographic space and time. Applied to the area of social networking, monitoring has a very consistent and broad definition. Thus, we will bring some knowledge on the implementation of this activity on the online environment in order to give a broader understanding of the subject.

According to PaperCliQ, the monitoring of digital social networks "is the collection, storage, classification, categorization, addition of information and analysis of public online mentions" of terms and pre-defined issues, for a given organization.

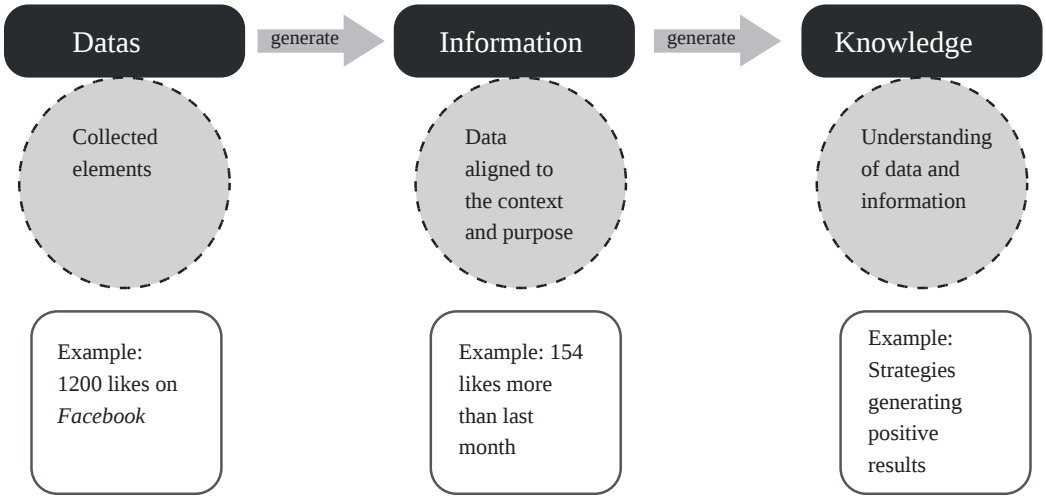
Through monitoring the organization of the public in the network can be known and, by this, it is possible to identify market trends that can generate strategic insights. It also enables numbers and indicators that validate or invalidate a given strategy and enables the identification of how the organization is perceived in social networks. Such monitoring, if carried out in an investigative and preventive way, helps to identify signals on the organizational image and reputation, identifying image crises to come.

E-life also concluded that monitoring is not just a strategy, but also has the function of a real time thermometer, which allows to measure the satisfaction level of the public, meet their needs and also to predict possible crises through constant analysis of their feelings shared on the network.

In theory, the monitoring of social networks aimed at the knowledge provided about what happens regarding the organization and its assets – tangible and intangible – in digital social networks. But being a relatively new activity, where should the organization begin when seeking the information provided by the monitoring? Which are the ways to use monitoring as an ally of the organization in order to obtain relevant results?

Knowing the functions of the activity, we sought to understand the basic process of monitoring online social networks: the small points collected (data), when grouped, form more concise elements (information), which when interpreted and analyzed, generate concrete and precise reports (knowledge), as noted in Figure 6.

Figure 6: Basic components of the monitoring of digital social networks



Source: Prepared by the authors

Referring to Figure 6, we see that data, when ordinated and organized, allow us to obtain information, and this information, when interpreted, bring the knowledge of what we seek.

As for his typology, monitoring has some variables, which can be defined according to the organization and also according to its objectives and needs. Thus, we observe two types of monitoring, which are classified according to the needs and objectives that it aims to achieve. They are:

- **Full monitoring** – tools that perform all the steps and that are not restricted to data collection and information classification. A single platform performs the various stages of the process. Most of the time, these are paid software.
- **Partial monitoring** – tools that enable advanced data processing, that means, perform only one or the other part of the process, not the complete process, as full monitoring does. Most partial monitoring platforms are available for free.

We listed some software for monitoring digital social networking and digital social Media, followed by their web addresses and their possibilities of use:

Figure 7: Monitoring Software digital social networks

SOFTWARE	SITE
TweetEffect	www.tweeteffect.com
TrendsMap	www.trendsmap.com
HowSociable?	www.howsociable.com
Omgili Buzz Graphs	www.buzz.omgili.com
TweetStats	www.tweetstats.com
Topsy	www.topsy.com
Grader	www.marketing.grader.com
Collecta	www.collecta.com
Hootsuite	www.hootsuite.com
Keotag	www.keotag.com
SocialMention	www.socialmention.com
TouchGraph	www.touchgraph.com

Source: Prepared by the authors

The partial monitoring software allow the achievement of achieve satisfactory results in small and medium-sized businesses that do not have a high demand. However, if the organization's demand is high, as with companies in the telephony branch, airlines and even political organizations, the best way to conduct monitoring is through full tracking software, which generates complete reports, according to the organizational need.

Step by step monitoring of digital social networks

The monitoring of digital social networks can be presented as a cyclical process which has five main stages, as can be seen in this step by step guide.

Step 1 – Briefing

The first stage of monitoring digital social networks is the Briefing, which can be defined as a set of necessary information to do a certain job, in other words, it is the data that allow us to perform a strategic planning. To plan monitoring is necessary to define some basic points:

1. What are the objectives of the monitoring? What does the organization want to achieve with the monitoring? Does it aim to predict crises? Does it want to know what the market trends are? Does it intend to evaluate the performance of an online campaign on social networks?
2. What are the social networks that will be monitored? Which social networks is the organization in? Which one do you want to monitor? Some digital social networks for specific purposes generate benefits for certain organizations. For example, Instagram and Pinterest cannot be excluded from the list of networks to be monitored by a store that sells clothes and accessories due to their visual character. The same occurs to Foursquare when it comes to restaurants and bars looking to learn more about their public, and YouTube, which can lead to satisfactory results when monitored by audio and video producer, for example.
3. Who is responsible for implementing the monitoring? Who will be responsible for carrying out the activities related to monitoring? An internal professional of the organization or a third party company? Regardless of the choice of an internal or external professional, the people responsible for the activities must have investigative profile, strategic vision and know efficient methodologies, and have analytical skills to structure, correlate, classify and analyze the data and information obtained. It is essential that the monitoring manager is able to pass the information and knowledge acquired to the other members of the organization for making decisions.
4. What is the research object of the monitoring? The research object is the element to be searched and monitored: the organization, the brand, the competition, the public, the product, a campaign, a problem that can generate crisis?
5. What are the key words that will be used? Having defined the object of research, one must know the terms that will be searched. It is important to identify related terms, hashtag, abbreviations and acronyms, and add new terms to the search whenever these are identified.
6. What is the monitoring running time? What is the implementation period execution of the monitoring? Will it be hold periodically? How often?

Step 2 – Data Collection

What is the method used to collect data? One of the biggest difficulties of professionals of social networks monitoring is working with the large amount of data available and to deciding what should be relevant. Therefore, in some types of monitoring, samples can be used to collect data in order to facilitate the work and obtain satisfactory results. But when we seek signals identifying embryonic crises, it is best to avoid the use of samples. According to the e-book provided by BuzzMonitor, when the purpose of monitoring is to detect crises, working with samples is not advised because of the risk of critical points being unnoticed or evennot being included in the analyzed testimonies.

In monitoring aimed at identifying possible crises, the Census Collection, as defined by BuzzMonitor is the best option. This collection method allows you to consult all the individuals who are part of the focus of interest, and allows the observation of testimonies shortly after their publication, building a quite updated framework and no error percentage.

Step 3 – Metrics

As well as other stages of monitoring, metrics must be related to the objectives of the process and can change over the years and with the introduction of new platforms in the online environment. The metrics listed below are some of the ones that passed through little change, but can be adapted according to the pursued objective. The definition of the metrics is critical in the process since an error in this step may be binding in any evaluation.

Regarding the monitoring aimed at identifying image crises, the metrics exemplified below can be of great importance and may assist in the identification process.

- *Engagement Metrics:* linked to public participation, as well as their participation around the online presence of the brand, in other words, it evaluates the relationship made through social networks. It is represented by the number of comments, shares, replication, likes, retweets.
- *Range Metrics:* are alluding to the actual and potential range, that is, how far the content created and shared by users reach or can reach, for the dissemination of content. In this case, the viewership figures are measured like fans, followers, friends, access, downloads etc.
- *Sentiment Metrics:* linked to sentiment analysis, we can evaluate the feeling inserted in the statements and see whether this is positive, negative or neutral, using the following formula: *Neutral Testmonies + Positive Testmonies – Negative Testmonies/Total of Testmonies*

- *Influencers Metric:* it is related to users with greater influence in social networks and enables the identification of influencers among the organization's connections. As influencers we mean supporters, detractors, or simply the opinion makers on a particular organization, which means people who talk about the topic searched. This category also can monitor what we call flags. As flags, we understand the profiles that are always connected and have posts regarding trends, as the case of Ponto Frio, previously shown. If these flag profiles mention or even ironically speak about a certain brand or product it is because it suffers some sort of potential problem (risk).
- *Satisfaction Metrics:* refers to users' satisfaction as regarding the quality of the service offered by the company and other online factors as well as the doubts resolved.
- *Metric of Themes and Topics:* identifies the themes or issues related to organization, whether favorable or unfavorable, that were more or less mentioned during the defined period.
- *Profile Metrics and Public Location:* linked to public analysis and segmentation of the target group, where it is located, what are their demographic data.
- *Market Trends metrics:* related to the understanding of the market in order to improve products and services, analyzing preferences and suggestions of its effective and potential public, thereby generating strategic insights.

Step 4 – Data Rating

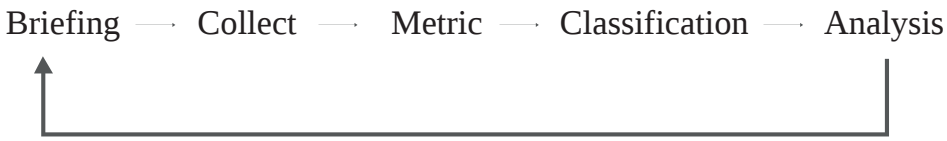
After processing the metrics, we sought to interpret them according to a classification in order to organize the data collected so that it is possible to cross them and get the information displayed. Vieira (2012) says that, in most cases, the data have four categories:

- *Positive:* represented by praises to the organization, its products, services and also for referrals.
- *Negatives:* comments or complaints about the organization, products and services.
- *Neutral:* do not present a value judgment, generally news or questions.
- *Mixed:* praise and criticism in the same statement, a factor that requires proper analysis due to possible ironies.

Step 5 – Data Analysis

Data analysis is the last and most important stage of monitoring online social networks because it will generate knowledge so that actions can take place. At this stage, also according to the objectives of each organization, all data collected during the process will be interpreted, transformed into knowledge, which are organized in the report. The results will guide the future actions of the organization, as well as the next planning, which is why monitoring is considered a process.

Figure 9: Process of monitoring digital social networks



Source: Prepared by the authors

Figure 9 illustrates in a cyclical manner the essential steps that must be followed for any monitoring which can be conplemented and adapted according to the organizational objectives. Thus, we see clearly that the analysis of monitoring is what provides basis and guides to the next steps and continues the process, in other words, the knowledge gained generates feedback to the procedure itself.

Through monitoring the digital social networks we sought to find ways to avoid and prevent crises warning signs to be strengthened and spread, generating specific crises. This is where many organizations are in doubt. How to prevent potential crises? Is there a metric formula that shows the way to prevent crises?

This formula or recipe that can prevent crises in a standard way does not exist due to the number of organizations with identity, culture, own image and different reputation with different internal ways of acting and thinking, and goals that diverge. However, there are ways to reverse these situations by monitoring, which when adapted according to the organization, can bring positive results.

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