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Assessment of the Utilization of Digital Media for Reputation Management by a Leading Transportation Company (Company G), Abuja

Ukpele Margaret Kwene & Mercy Tartsea-Anshase
Bingham University, Karu, Nasarawa State, Nigeria
meggykwene@yahoo.com; mamet4u@gmail.com

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Abstract

This study investigates the use of digital media for online reputation management (ORM) by Company G, Abuja, with the aim of evaluating its strategies and impact on corporate image. A descriptive qualitative research design was employed, involving purposive sampling of 12 staff members across key departments responsible for reputation-related functions. Data were collected using a structured interview guide comprising 14 questions and analyzed thematically using the research questions as an analytical framework. Findings indicate that Company G actively utilizes a range of digital technologies to manage its reputation, with notable improvements observed over the past 3–4 years in areas such as brand visibility, complaint resolution, customer loyalty, sales conversion, and public trust. Despite these successes, the company continues to face challenges including negative reviews and misinformation. The study concludes that Company G has implemented a robust ORM strategy that effectively leverages digital tools to enhance corporate reputation. It recommends further investment in ORM, faster response times, stronger community engagement, the use of engagement

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incentives, and partnerships with influencer marketers to strengthen digital reputation management practices.

Keywords: Digital Media; Online Reputation Management; Corporate Image; Social Media Strategy; Organizational Communication

INTRODUCTION

Reputation is important to people as well as organizations, as it determines the social standing of a person in the society including organizations and institutions. That is why every organization makes efforts to succeed. The success of organizations depends on many factors, and one of these factors is reputation. In the opinion of Harvey (2023), organizations cannot ignore reputation because it impacts the sales of products or services, the share price if publicly listed, and the type of employees an organization can attract and retain. Organizations with strong positive reputation also attract the best people. Walker (as cited in Hamidi et al., 2023) avers that reputation represents the valuation or appraisal which the public produces on that specific image.

The reputation of an organization therefore is a function of the value assigned to it by its stakeholders. It is built upon perceptions of previous and future institutional performances. This global perception describes the attraction an organization produces at different public levels when it is compared with competing organizations (Walker as cited in Hamidi et al., 2023). The stakeholders' Perception is corporate reputation. Ji et al. (2017) place organization reputation at the core of public relations objectives, while Kuba (2023, p.1) sees corporate reputation management as" The practice of shaping and maintaining a positive public image for a company or organization." Kuba (2023) further notes that it is an essential part of modern business, especially in the digital age, where information about a company, whether positive or negative, can spread rapidly and have significant impacts thus, making digital media an important reputation management tool by organizations (Ramos & Casado-Molina, 2021).

Tracing its history, reputation management has existed since the beginning of human societies. Long before the advent of the internet, the reputation of a person was spread through word of mouth. Traders in marketplaces, religious figures, and political leaders all

depended on their personal credibility and community standing. Guilds and merchants in medieval Europe built their reputation through quality craftsmanship and trustworthiness, bolstered by the endorsements of influential patrons. As society entered the industrial age, there was a rise in mass communication, and reputation management became increasingly strategic. Companies and politicians began to use newspapers and early advertising to control narratives, shape public perception and mitigate scandals (Campbell, 2024).

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, pioneers such as Ivy Lee and Edward Bernays developed strategies to manage the reputation of businesses and individuals and thus, were credited to contributing to the development of public relations (PR) as a profession. By the 1950s and 1960s, reputation management evolved alongside corporate branding. During this period, brands like Coca-Cola and McDonald' S built strong reputation through carefully managed marketing campaigns, press releases and media statements for damage control and response to crises. Evolving television and radio with 24-hour news cycles further expanded the reach of these strategies to the mass market of the modern era (Campbell, 2024).

Scholars such as Mtengwa and Muchenje (2023) note that the rise of internet and social media in the 2000s brought about a paradigm shift in the field of public relations and everything began to accelerate. On the other hand, reputation management is now widely classified into two areas: online reputation management and offline reputation management. Online reputation management seeks to manage public' S perception of an organization in the digital space. While offline reputation management focuses on shaping public' S perception of an organization outside the digital sphere. According to Campbell (2024), the evolution of reputation management has closely followed advancements in communication technology and the rise of the internet.

Campbell (2024) remarked that" Conventional public relations was never equipped to deal with the new challenge because of the highly technical nature of the new virtual world." Online reputation management (ORM) became a concern for organizations, making reputation management more complex as platforms proliferated. In the opinion of Sheng et al. (2019), the proliferation of online review and social media platforms has had a major impact on reputation management. With the presence of digital media tools such as Google search engine, social media like Facebook, X and so on, consumers are increasingly forming opinions about businesses and people based on reviews and social media remarks. Mtengwa

and Muchenje (2023) further point out that recent developments in Artificial Intelligence, Search Engine Optimization (SEO) strategies and social media monitoring are another revolution for reputation management.

In their study, Pollák et al. (2019) note that with the advent of the internet, the flow of information has accelerated tremendously, one could say that a few mouse clicks are enough to destroy a good reputation today. There are many entities that are deliberately attempting to destroy corporate reputation, whether they are fierce competitors or dissatisfied employees or clients. The internet gives users the ability to permanently interfere with the online reputation of organizations or people. Thus, a positive reputation is truly becoming one of the most effective weapons that might be highly effective in a hard competitive fight and at the same time, it determines the market value of an organization.

It is evident that organizational reputation management has evolved a lot in recent years with the influx of new media and the internet. The internet has revolutionized every facet of business and personal life. Aboudoul et al. (2020) note that the emergence of digital technologies and online platforms have significantly altered the way in which organizations shape perception, drive trust, and influence the behaviour of their target audience. Organizations have found that the use of online platforms in building and maintaining a strong brand reputation and driving consumer engagement, particularly in competitive sectors has become pivotal (Oksiutycz & Kunene, 2017). To Pollák et al. (2019), the issue of managing reputation, especially online reputation as a new phenomenon in the form of fragile intangible assets is gradually gaining importance and it is becoming one of the essential prerequisites for responsible and sustainable reputation management. Digital reputation management therefore," Is the process of managing user perception on the internet, or as a systematic monitoring of corporate reputation in as wide a range of online media as possible, and potentially influencing this reputation in the positive direction" (Laurencik as cited in Pollák et al., 2019, p. 64).

As an integral part of economic development in Nigeria, the transport sector has a significant impact on the movement of people and goods, which affects other sectors of the economy. However, the transportation industry in Nigeria is faced with a myriad of challenges including safety issues, service reliability and fierce competition (Okotie, 2022). As a result of these issues, reputation management becomes an important aspect for businesses in the road transportation sector, where customer satisfaction and trust are also

paramount. Thus, leveraging digital media for reputation management is no longer optional, it is a necessity to transform the traditional road transport experience in Nigeria, and social media, websites, corporate blogs are examples of digital media platforms that provide a dynamic space for organizations to engage with their customers, handle complaints as well as promote their values. However, studies have shown that there appears to be a lack of a strategic framework in place as most organizations were not monitoring, engaging, integrating and leveraging digital media adequately (Becker & Lee 2019; Jankauskaite & Urboniene, 2016). Similarly, Okujeni et al. (2023) pointed out that there is a perception that corporate entities in Nigeria are yet to substantially key into the digital world in their engagement with their publics. In recent years too, the city of Abuja has witnessed tremendous economic growth. Abuchi (2022) quotes Muhammed Bello, the then FCT minister (2015-2023) who stated that the city of Abuja is emerging as a global economic hub for Africa and has witnessed an exponential surge in internet penetration and digital engagement across diverse sectors. This surge has catalyzed a paradigm shift in how businesses curate, project, and safeguard their reputations in the digital sphere.

Despite the growing awareness in the business world of the power that digital media networks offer, numerous studies including that of Szwajca (2017) and Becker and Lee (2019) have shown that there appears to be a lack of strategic framework in place as most firms were not leveraging digital media adequately. These authors note that digital media is used in a passive way, more as tools for sales promotion or advertising than as an instrument for creating permanent, open relationships with the recipients. To this end, Ureña et al. (2019) notes that there is a relative content vacuum in the professional literature in terms of corporate reputation management and development in the virtual environment; its application particularly in the context of the transportation sector in the Nigerian market has received less attention. It is against this backdrop that this study seeks to assess how a leading road transportation company (which shall be called Company G to maintain anonymity) in Nigeria leverages digital media (not limited to social media) platforms/strategies (e.g., social media, websites, SEO efforts, online reviews, content creation/marketing, influencer partnerships etc) to manage its online reputation in the past 3-4 years.

Objectives of the Study

1.The objectives of this study are to:

2. ascertain the kind of digital technologies Company G utilizes for its reputation management.

3. identify the type of digitized content tailored for reputation management by Company G.

4. determine the extent of utilization of digital technology/content for reputation management by Company G.

5. ascertain the level of impact of digital media on key areas of operations and the reputation of Company G.

6. ascertain the challenges faced by Company G in utilizing digital media for reputation management.

Conceptual Clarification

Key concepts as they relate to this study are thus expounded to include:

Digital Media

Digital media is a component within the ever-evolving information and communication Technologies (ICTs) landscape. As a public relations tool, Idoko (2023) refers to digital media platforms as various online platforms that allow users to create, share, and interact with content. These platforms include social networking sites, blogging platforms, video sharing websites, and online news portals. Recent statistics indicate a growth in activities related to online reputation management (Kemp, 2023). Abdulghani (2019) notes that social media, search engines and online marketplaces as well as the convergence of these platforms with nearly all existing activities have permeated and impacted society, productivity, economic growth and business creation in Nigeria. These platforms have also changed the way in which public services, healthcare and education are provided, shared and used for reputation management.

Reputation

Reputation is synonymous to a good name, both for a person or something. It comes from the Latin word *reputationem,* which means" Consideration." It is how people consider, or label, you—good or bad (Vocabulary.com, n.d). Credit, honour, fame, recognition, image,

mark, a name, and repute, are only few of many synonyms offered by the Merriam Webster English dictionary (n.d.) enabling different expressions of the word reputation. Very many people have already heard about a certain type of reputation. In the opinion of Fombrun (as cited in Esenyel, 2020) reputation is a" Collective assessment of an organization' S past actions and results that describe the organization' S ability to deliver valued outcomes to multiple stakeholders" (p.26). Vollenbroek et al. (as cited in Dollen, 2014) view reputation as the stakeholder' S overall evaluation of a company over time. This evaluation is based on the stakeholder' S direct experiences with the company, any other form of communication, symbolism that provides information about the company' S action, and/or a comparison with the actions of other leading rivals." In the corporate world, reputation is seen as a major element of an organization' S history alongside and included in financial performance and innovation. Similarly, RepTrak-formerly known as the Reputation Institute (2019) defines reputation as the emotional connection that stakeholders (consumers, investors, employees, regulators) have with a given company. The Reputation Institute (2019) went further to identify a set of seven major factors that drive business reputation: products, innovation, workplace, governance, citizenship, leadership, and performance.

Online Reputation Management

The very essence of the concept of corporate reputation from the perspective of the internet is often referred to as online reputation or virtual reputation. Pollák et al. (2019) note that" It is nothing other than reputational issues in the internet environment." This statement may well serve as the simplest definition of the term. To Portmann et al. (2015), online reputation" Is the publicly kept social evaluation of an entity based on the entity' S previous behaviour, what was posted by the entity, and what third parties share about the entity on the internet" (Motivation section). Similarly, Kanika (as cited in Zraková et al., 2019) notes that online reputation encompasses a wide range of aspects of the business presentation in the internet environment.

From the point of view of corporate practice, practitioners describe" Online reputation management" (ORM) as a process of managing user perception on the internet, or as a systematic monitoring of corporate reputation in as wide a range of online media as possible, and potentially influencing this reputation in the positive direction" (Laurencik as cited in Pollák et al., 2019, p. 64). Additionally, Beaumont (as cited in Ratnayaka, et al., 2023) notes that" Online reputation management covers continuous online monitoring, avoiding

contralateral topics on social media, expanding online presence, making the inventories of digital assets and negativities and building the strength of the controllable" (p.228). Kelly (2021) elucidates further by stating that, ORM monitors, influences and manages the perception of the customers about the company, which helps to safeguard the companies from potential PR crisis. Describing the practice of ORM, Misra (2019) notes that ORM is a continuous process and it is not just practiced only during a crisis. Similarly, Lee (2022) points out that ORM can be done proactively and reactively. Lee (2022) adds that preventing the reputation from future damage is more valuable than finding solutions for the existing damage.

Literature Review

There exists a handful of academic publications relevant to this research. Examining some of them will provide an understanding as regards the objectives of this study.

Online Reputation Management Strategies Adopted by Organizations

The available literatures show that digital media is the best communication tools for organizations to interact with both internal and external stakeholders; to build and maintain a positive online reputation as well as promote their products and services. This is because it is easy to use and requires relatively minimal cost to engage and communicate with the target audience (Saadudeen et al., 2021; Maboee et al., 2024).

According to the survey carried out by Vaculčiaková (as cited in Pollák et al., 2019), 89% of consumers decide based on the reputation of a company or popularity of a brand when it is necessary to choose between two comparable products. Furthermore, 72% of the respondents add that the reputation of a company significantly influences its business and investment decisions. A 2019 Forbes' Survey also found that customers read an average of 10 reviews before making a purchase decision. This statistic shows how important it is to build and maintain a positive online reputation (Koulogeorge, 2020).

Online reputation management requires a combination of strategies. According to Petrilli (2023), online reputation management strategies serve as a guide to establishing, developing, maintaining or repairing reputation on the web. A favourable online reputation can be built and promoted using a variety of tools and services. Konečný et al. (2022) echo that a well thought out reputation strategy can positively impact a company' S market worth

and overall success. Hence, managing and improving online reputation requires a conscious and deliberate action to implement a handful of strategies. Licata (2022), Pitman (2022), and Scott (2023) highlight some proven ORM strategies. They postulate that the initial stage in the ORM process is conducting an analysis. Organizations need to thoroughly examine their current online reputation before implementing an ORM process (Pitman, 2022). The goal here is to examine the publics' Perception of their organization. This enables the organization to see what is working and what requires improvement. A good place to start is to examine the organization' S own website, blogs, social media profiles, and other third-party sites. Other ORM tools (paid and free) are also available to help in the audit process. Conducting a thorough analysis will help in the effective implementation of their ORM strategies (Licata, 2022).

Following an online reputation analysis is the study of organizations' Target audience. Scott (2023) avers that an understanding of an organization' S audience forms the bedrock of online reputation management success. Content creation is another strategy adopted by organizations in a bid to manage their online reputation. Scott (2023) however, asserts that the real measure of great content is in its capacity to address the challenges facing the audience. Thereby, building and maintaining a positive reputation. According to Petrilli (2022), publishing is the next step in the ORM chain after creating fresh and captivating content. He further notes that content should be published on a regular basis across all channels, including social sites, owned media, industry newsletters, and more. Consequently, regular publication of fresh content contributes to the development and maintenance of business reputation, ensuring that an organization gains online visibility even in competitive market places.

Based on the PESO model, Licata (2022) categorizes the channels as paid, earned, shared and owned media. Online reputation management strategies also involve investing in search engine optimization (SEO). Extensive literature highlights SEO as an essential part of online reputation management. Casul (2022) avers that combining SEO and ORM is similar to killing two birds with one stone. SEO is the process of improving the online visibility of an organization. Furthermore, organizations must strive to earn positive online reviews in their online reputation management efforts. Yuen (2024) notes that online reviews are powerful for businesses in this digital age as they have the ability to influence consumer purchasing decisions. These reviews can make or break a business. Addressing negativity is another effective strategy and organizations should answer promptly to

complaints/comments with empathy as stated by (Moser, 2021). Petrilli (2022) maintains that, implementing ORM strategies is essential to building reputation and achieving business success. However, measuring and tracking reputation (monitoring), is an essential component of the whole picture. Organizations must ascertain whether their ORM efforts are ultimately yielding results. This is done by establishing key performance indicators (KPIs) first.

Analyzing related issues, Valeria (2024) points out that staying on top of customer reviews and feedback is critical to successful online reputation management. Valeria (2024) however, notes that manually managing it can be challenging. Automating the process can save time and effort while keeping up with customer sentiment. This should however, be carefully done to ensure accuracy and effectiveness. Ved and Oza (2023) posit that rapid advancements in artificial intelligence (AI) have revolutionized how organizations manage their online reputation. AI-powered tools possess the potential to assist organizations and individuals in tracking their digital media activity, monitoring their online reputation and analyzing vast volumes of data to spot potential issues that might pose a reputation risk.

Correctly set online reputation management strategies can contribute to the overall success of a business and have an impact on its market value. Many strategies exist for establishing and managing the reputation of an organization. However, it is important to understand that success requires more than just good technology or high-quality product/services (Pollák et al., 2019). Consequently, organizational reputation management requires proactive and continuous efforts that encompass strategic planning, effective communication and a commitment to maintaining a favourable perception and relationship with various stakeholders.

The Impact of ORM on Organizations

The importance of online reputation management is gradually increasing, especially in light of the current competitive business landscape. Organizations need to, without delay, actively manage their virtual reputation. Casul (2022) notes that organizations can benefit greatly from having a positive online reputation in a number of ways including enhanced customer interaction, online exposure, lead creation, and sales conversion.

Authors in the field of ORM report that ORM raises the conversion rate of sales and in turn, increases profit. According to Casul (2022), the ultimate objective of managing the online reputation of an organization is to turn prospects or leads into paying clients. Casul

(2022) reports that according to a Harvard business school working paper, every star rating a business gets can increase revenue by as much as 9%. Pitman (2022) indicates that 81% of consumers say online reviews definitely influence their purchase decisions. Businesses that have products with lots of excellent reviews attract more customers. This stresses the importance of online reputation management in today' S digital-heavy world (Casul, 2022).

Enhancing customer experience, products and services is another key benefit of ORM (Casual, 2022). This author notes that online reputation management makes client feedback analysis possible by engaging with online reviews. This feedback is very beneficial in developing products, enabling organizations to better attend to the needs of their customers and tailor their products to meet their needs. Thus, improving customer experience and in turn, maintaining a positive reputation. Another benefit is that ORM impacts the SEO efforts of an organization. By assisting organizations move up the search engine results page (SERP) ladder, managing online reputation benefits the search engine optimization (SEO) rating of an organization. If a business generates enough interest among customers, the visibility of the website increases as well. Thus, increasing brand awareness (Raketa, 2023).

According to Rane et al. (2023), ORM significantly increases customer loyalty, turning them into brand advocates. Organizations can improve client loyalty by monitoring social media reviews and comments. Addressing complaints quickly presents opportunities to build strong relationships with clients, turning them into brand ambassadors; that spread the word about an organization. ORM is also important for recruitment as it increases the publics' Trust in an organization by enhancing its credibility (Pitman, 2022). This author reports that a strong reputation can help lower the cost of recruitment, attract better candidates and speed up the time taken to fill vacancies. Those who share the ideals of an organization are drawn to them because of their high reputation. Research shows that 69% of job seekers typically decline offers from organizations with a negative reputation (Pitman, 2022).

As can be seen, online reputation management (ORM)is essential. In the current digital era where the online reputation of an organization is an important factor in building and maintaining public perception and stakeholders' Relationship. Consequently, it becomes imperative for organizations like Company G to leverage digital platforms to build a solid online reputation. Online reputation management is considered as more significant in the

marketing strategies of travel companies (Rodríguez-Díaz et al., 2018). Company G prides itself as a technology-focused company that harnesses physical and digital tools to move people from one place to the other. Zraková et al. (2019) note that there is fierce competition in the transport and logistics companies. For this reason, it is important for such companies to harness digital tools to build and maintain a positive reputation and increase sales.

Challenges Faced by Organizations in Utilizing Digital Media for Reputation Management

Research indicates that in as much as ORM creates opportunities for businesses, it at the same time poses a number of challenges (Sharma, 2024). For instance, Valeria (2023) argues that reputational management challenges may be due to internal or external factors. The internal concerns can make the external issues even more dire. Some ORM challenges along with tips to mitigate them are discussed here. Internal factors that affect reputation management include low awareness level of the importance of ORM. According to Dietrich (2015) the first common issue organizations face is the notion that they are immune to reputational harm. Such organizations are caught off guard when negative publicity occurs because they think that if their goods and services are excellent, then negative reviews and customer complaints will never be an issue. Luther et al. (2017) are of the view that notwithstanding the fact that communities are managed and content largely controlled, the unregulated nature of the internet provides the perfect environment for reputational risk. Adding that given certain circumstances," The voice of an individual may be equal to the voice of a corporation, since the virtual environment erases the typical advantages of brick-and-mortar businesses." Dietrich (2015) therefore, advises that organizations should proactively guard their reputation and avoid becoming complacent as negative reviews; at any time, can originate from competitors, irrational customers, or even disgruntled former workers.

Another challenge is a lack of understanding of how reputation management works. Valeria (2023) notes that a lot of businesses are vigilant in taking proactive measures to protect their brand since they are aware of the threat of harm to their internet reputation. This, the author notes, is commendable, but proactive measures might backfire if they are implemented without the appropriate planning and strategy. This is particularly valid when it comes to using social media. Providing frequent updates on the company' S Facebook and Twitter profiles can be quite beneficial in fostering a favorable online reputation. But it is

only useful when it is conveyed clearly. For this reason, the job of ORM should be handled by a professional who is vested in the organization' S vision. Organizations can as well hire a professional reputation management company as they possess a wealth of ORM knowledge and experience and can offer highly powerful software solutions (Dietrich, 2015 & Valeria, 2023).

Insufficient resources is another factor that significantly affects ORM by organizations. Valeria (2023) notes that insufficient resources can pose several challenges for organizations trying to manage their internet reputation. It is challenging to monitor and react promptly to online mentions or reviews without enough staff or equipment, which might result in delayed or inadequate responses. This can result in negative sentiments festering and spreading unchecked, which could damage the organization' S reputation. Additionally, insufficient resources can limit the ability of an organization to engage in proactive reputation-building initiatives like content creation, social media management or corporate social responsibility activities which could put the organization at a disadvantage compared to its competitors. Okujeni et al. (2023) point out that in an environment like Nigeria where essential infrastructure like power and internet access are still a challenge, connectivity issues can hinder instant access to messages.

In contrast, reputation management challenges due to external factors encompass challenges including negative reviews and feedback. Sharma (2024) notes that the reputation of an individual or organization can be severely impacted by negative reviews and feedback. Siddiqui & Singh (2016) enumerated some negative effects of social media on businesses, such as negative comments that can damage the reputation of an organization and possibly cause it to fail; hacking; wrong online brand strategy that can destroy businesses due to its viral potential; difficulties in gauging the success of campaign efforts; and the time commitment required to monitor unfavorable responses. Sharma (2024) suggests that negative reviews must be handled professionally and quickly in order to demonstrate a commitment to customer satisfaction. To reduce the impact of negative reviews and foster trust with stakeholders, organizations should publicly acknowledge concerns and provide transparent responses.

The propagation of false information and online defamation also pose serious threats to ORM. False or defamatory content can damage the reputation of an individual or organization and may lead to legal repercussions. Proactive monitoring of online content,

prompt response to false information and if necessary, legal action are essential measures an organization may take to safeguard their reputation and credibility (Sharma, 2024). Managing social media crises is another externally induced ORM challenge. Sharma (2024) asserts that if not effectively managed, social media crises have the potential to escalate and damage the reputation of a person or business. Sharma (2024) suggests that it is imperative for organizations to have a well-defined crisis management plan for the purpose of immediately addressing unfavorable comments, clarifying misinformation, and upholding transparency with its publics. In a crisis, maintaining open lines of communication is essential for restoring confidence and mitigating reputational harm.

Privacy issues are yet another important component of ORM. Sharma (2024) asserts that online sharing of personal information puts people at risk of identity theft or reputational harm from unscrupulous entities. Therefore, caution should be exercised when sharing personal information online, privacy settings should be effectively utilized and proactive measures taken to protect sensitive data. This body of literature underscores the multifaceted nature of challenges faced by organizations in their ORM efforts.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical perspective that informs this study is the technological determinism theory. Theoretical frameworks provide structure, context, and direction for understanding and interpreting a phenomenon under investigation. Hence, the researcher explores how the technological determinism theory explains why and how organizations strategically utilize digital media in managing their reputation.

The primary proposition of the technological determinism theory is that technology in any given society defines its nature. The American sociologist Thorstein Veblen, who established the causal link between technology and society is usually credited with the creation of this theory. According to him, technology is what propels the culture of a society and determines its course of history; as society adjusts and adapts to new technologies and innovations (Hauer, 2017).

In 1964 the theory was further expounded as it relates to the media by Marshal McLuhan. The basic premise of the technological determinism theory is that technology, the media in particular, significantly impacts how individuals think, feel and act as well as how societies organize themselves and function (Asemah, 2022). In the opinion of Croteau and Hoynes (2019) technological determinism is an approach that identifies technology, or

technological advances, as the central causal element in processes of social change, with each new discovery comes a transition to a different society. Scholars note that new media are not only an addition to existing media, they are also new technologies and therefore do have a deterministic factor as well. Marshal McLuhan made a famous quote that" The medium is the message." This implies that the communication medium influences the mind of the receiver. The emergence of news print, television and the internet have all demonstrated the influence that technological advancements have on society.

Most interpretations of technological determinism according to Hauer (2017) share two general assumptions:

i." That the development of technology itself follows a predictable, traceable path largely beyond cultural or political influence, and

ii. that technology in turn has" Effects" On societies that are inherent, rather than socially conditioned or produced because that society organizes itself to support and further develop a technology once it has been introduced."

Although, the deterministic model of technology is widely propagated in society, it has also been widely contested by academics. Langdon (1997) argues that contemporary theorists of technology and society no longer consider technological determinism to be a very accurate view of how people interact with technology. Major opposition to technologically determinist thought has surfaced within the social construction of technology (SCOT) literature.

SCOT research, such as that of Mackenzie and Wajcman (1999) argue that culture, politics, economic structures, regulatory frameworks and other factors have a significant, if not total influence on the course of innovation and its social consequences. The maxim" What matters is not the technology itself, but the social or economic system in which it is embedded" Is at its strongest and most akin to social determinism.

In a similar vein, Green (2010) explains that, it made sense to discuss technology as neutral when it is perceived as being outside society. This theory however, ignores the fact that culture is not static and society is dynamic. Green (2010) adds that there is nothing neutral about society when" Technology is implicated in social processes." This confirms one of the major problems with technological determinism because of the denial of human responsibility in the change process. There is a loss of human involvement that shapes technology and society.

Hauer (2017) argues that the technological determinism in its strictest interpretation is an extreme theory that does not offer much help to anyone trying to understand complex sociological dynamics. Nonetheless, we can quite confidently say that today, the internet and the nature of new media is fundamentally changing the structure of society. The expansion of computers, networks and the internet has revolutionized many facets of not only human communication, but also the entire life of society.

The rising popularity of new media has changed the nature of society and the way individuals act–the way we shop, hire employees, pay taxes, utilize the library, earn academic degrees, educate ourselves and the way organizations do business (Hauer, 2017). In the context of this study, this theory could help investigate how an organization' S utilization of digital media impacts their reputation management strategies, stakeholders' Interaction and influences public perception.

METHODOLOGY

This research uses a descriptive design. Nassaji (2015) explains that descriptive research includes surveys and fact-finding enquiries of different kinds. The qualitative research approach was adopted to gain a better understanding of the phenomenon under study. According to Ugwu and Eze (2023)," Qualitative research involves gathering and analyzing non-numerical data (such as text, video, or audio). It can be used to uncover intricate details about a situation or to spark fresh research concepts." Gathering in-depth information from organization' S staff is crucial for understanding the impact of digital media on reputation management.

According to McCombes (2023) deliberate sampling also known as purposive or non-probability sampling, entails the researcher using their expertise to choose a sample that will be most expedient to the research purpose. It is often employed in qualitative research where the goal is to gain in-depth knowledge on a particular phenomenon rather than draw general conclusions from statistics or when the population is small and specific. Using deliberate sampling, 12 Company G staff across multiple departments (IT, marketing, sales and operations officers) were selected to ensure the representation of key roles related to online reputation management. The participants were staff who have worked with Company G for more than 4 years.

There are divergent views regarding the appropriate sample size for qualitative research. For example, Bekele and Yohannes (2022) note that sample sizes between five to fifty participants are considered valid in qualitative research. This is often determined by factors such as the focus of the research, the type of research question, available resource and time, institutional committee requirements, the nature of the selected group, the experience of the researcher with qualitative research, and so on. In view of this, the selection of twelve respondents for this study is deemed adequate given the relatively small number of staff who are directly or indirectly responsible for digital media strategies for reputation management by Company G.

An in-depth interview was used in order for flexibility in questioning while ensuring that the main goals of this study were addressed. According to Rutledge and Hogg (2020) an in-depth interview is a qualitative research technique used to conduct detailed interviews with a small number of participants. Interviews have an advantage of adaptability and follow up with respondents' Answers for clarification or to obtain additional information. In-depth interview was appropriate for this study as it allowed for a comprehensive exploration of each of the questions as it relates to the topic under review. An interview guide consisting of 14 questions was used to collect data from 12 key personnel of Company G that would yield the most information. Since primary data was needed for the study, it was hoped that this instrument enabled the researcher to obtain detailed information on the organization' S use of digital media for reputation management purposes.

Formal requests through structured interview guides were sent to 12 key personnel of Company G. All of the targeted participants responded to the requests and participated in the exercise. The in-depth interviews were conducted virtually for 7 respondents domiciled in Lagos and face to face in the offices of the 5 staff domiciled in Abuja, using an audio recorder. The timeline for data collection for was July-August, 2025. The 4-week time frame allowed the researcher ample period to administer the surveys and gather relevant data.

A total of 12 staff across multiple departments of Company G participated in the qualitative component of the study. To maintain confidentiality, codes (IN001-IN012) were assigned to the participants. Qualitative data gathered from the participants was explained and categorized in themes, substantiated by participants' Quotation. To organize and analyze responses systematically, the research questions served as the framework for grouping

questions from the survey instruments into thematic categories ensuring that they align with the objectives of the study.

Table 1: Grouping of Questions from the Survey Instruments

S/No.	Research Question	Survey Question
1	What kinds of digital technologies does Company G utilize for reputation management?	2, 3
2	What are the types of digitized content tailored for reputation management by Company G?	4, 5, 6, 7
3	What is the extent of utilization of digital technology/content for reputation management by Company G?	8, 9, 10, 11
4	What is the level of impact of digital media on key areas of operations and the reputation of God is Good Motors?	12
5	What are the challenges faced by God is Good Motors in utilizing digital media for reputation management?	13, 14

Table 1 above indicates grouped questions from the survey instruments that provided answers to the research questions.

RESULTS

To maintain confidentiality, codes (IN001-IN012) were assigned to the participants. The in-depth interview questions were in line with the research questions and presented as follows:

Table 2: Describe briefly your position in Company G and your involvement with the organization' S digital media activities

Interviewee Code	Position	Department
IN001	Station Manager	Operations
IN002	Enterprise Growth Officer	Sales
IN003	Creative Specialist	Information Technology
IN004	Marketing Manager	Marketing
IN005	System and Network Administrator	Information Technology
IN006	Operations Manager	Operations

Interviewee Code	Position	Department
IN007	Associate Product Manager	Information Technology
IN008	Back-end developer	Information Technology
IN009	Social Media Manager	Marketing
IN010	Creative Strategist	Marketing
IN011	Associate Product Manager	Information Technology
IN012	IT specialist	Information Technology

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Table 2 shows the positions, departments and assigned codes of the interviewees.

Does your organization utilize digital media for reputation management?

An aggregation of the views of interviewees indicated that Company G utilizes digital technologies for reputation management. This unanimous acknowledgment suggests that Company G' S ORM efforts are well established.

How would you rate your organization' S use of digital technologies/content for reputation management in the last 3-4 years (2021 to date)?

All the participants typically rated the organization' S use of digital technologies/content for reputation management in the last 3-4 years as" Very high"," High"," Superb " Excellent" And" Good." Adding that Company G has a strong presence across major digital media platforms. One of the interviewees (IN002) stated that" Company G is digitally inclined and maintains active and branded profiles on various digital channels with each platform serving a specific communication goal. This internal validation implies that Company G is not only active on digital media platforms, but is also intentional in leveraging these platforms to address customer concerns and promote brand credibility.

What are the kinds of digital technologies used for reputation management by your organization?

It was common for participants to state that the digital technologies include but are not limited to social media channels (Facebook, Instagram, X, TikTok, LinkedIn, and YouTube), an online booking portal, official website and own blog. The tech team spoke highly of Company G' S mobile app which is available to IOS and android users launched in

2016; with an addition to the app launched in 2021 an e-wallet. One member of the tech team (IN007) described it as follows;

Our app is an innovative travel management platform that makes it easier for our customers to book their trips, choose their seats and pay securely. The e-wallet has functionalities that allow users to fund their wallets and pay for various services such as electricity bills, airtime, purchase bus tickets and more.

The participants additionally stated that online support services are provided via Company G' S website contact forms, emails, SMS and WhatsApp business messaging. An interviewee (IN008) pointed out that social listening tools; google alerts and hootsuite are used to monitor mentions, ratings and sentiments across their online platforms. IN008 further added that SEO practices are used to improve the visibility of their website. This finding reflects that Company G adopts a multi-channel digital strategy rather than a single communication medium in its ORM drive, thus enhancing its online visibility.

Why are the mentioned digital technologies chosen over others?

All the interviewees shared the view that the digital technology(ies) largely depends on the targeted audience as well as the communication objective. A respondent (IN010) further explained this point by citing examples stating," We use our website for corporate branding, social media is used to share videos, images, stories and reels as well as engage customers, while we use email to inform our customers of offers, service disruptions and other initiatives." He added that Instagram and TikTok are used to attract new audiences, especially the younger generation, while Facebook is used to drive engagement. However, when asked if they collaborate with influencer marketers to create content, the (IN010) response was simply" We are working on that." This result implies that Company G' S selection of digital channels is not haphazard but rather strategic. The combination of various channels conveys a holistic approach to reputation management.

What are the types of digitized content tailored for reputation management (for e.g, informational content/service updates, booking guidelines, text/visuals, press releases, FAQs, safety updates, testimonials, collaboration with brand ambassadors, storytelling, CSR content, crisis communication)?

Common among the responses is that in the last 3-4 years diversified digital content (textual/visuals) like promotional, informational, CSR stories/charitable events, branded videos showcasing for example their captains' Training travel tips, feedback surveys, sharing

screenshots of customers' Reviews and updates. Additionally, participants (IN004) noted that FAQs, travel tips and articles are also used to educate and inform the public. While regular press releases are used to address major brand news and respond to crises. Email newsletters are used especially for updates, offers and other initiatives that Company G introduces from time to time. Customers are also encouraged to rate the organization' S services as well as leave a positive review online. A respondent (IN010) said that the digitized content largely depends on the targeted audience as well as the communication objective. This data implies that Company G adopts a largely informational and credibility-focused rather than entertainment-focused content strategy. While this approach enhances corporate reputation, it is also suggestive of an opportunity to diversify into more engaging or emotionally driven content to enhance audience connection.

In what ways is customer feedback /user generated content incorporated as part of Company G' S digitized content?

All the participants explicitly stated that customer feedback and UGC constitutes a major part of Company G' S ORM strategy. Participant IN003 stated;" We encourage our customers to rate our services as well as leave a positive review online." One of the participants (IN009) added that;" We regularly launch survey campaigns and the feedback we get helps us to identify customer needs and preferences which we turn into an opportunity to improve service delivery." This makes our customers feel heard and valued. Another participant (IN010) stated;" We understand the importance of reviews in influencing the decisions of potential customers. Hence, we are vested in positive customer reviews, we repost customers' Reviews like their travel experiences." This result indicates that Company G values participatory communication; recognizing the power of customer voices in shaping public perception. This strategy can lead to higher customer loyalty, stronger credibility and ultimately an improved online reputation.

How frequently does Company G post or update content on its digital media channels?

There was an overwhelming agreement by the respondents that indicated that the frequency and consistency of content updates vary across digital media channels. On the website and blog, the respondents stated that content is rarely posted. On social media platforms, 4 (IN001, IN004, IN006, IN007) out of the 12 participants stated that the organization is more active on X; with regular content posting ranging from once every one

to three days. While 6 (IN002, IN005, IN008, IN009, IN011, IN012) of them noted that Facebook is frequently used; with content posting at intervals of one to two days. The remaining 2 (IN003, IN010) respondents identified Instagram as the most used to post content; with one to two days intervals of posting. The social media platforms identified by all the participants as being the least used were YouTube and TikTok with infrequent posts. This data suggests that while Company G has an online presence, its ORM communication strategy may lack uniformity as some platforms may be more actively managed than others. Thus, reducing customer engagement and trust. This inconsistency signals an opportunity for Company G to standardize its digital content framework and synchronize messaging across platforms.

Does your organization actively monitor and respond to enquiries, comments, reviews, or messages online?

All the participants agreed that Company G actively responds to customer enquiries and complaints as well as acknowledges, tracks and acts upon reviews. 2 (IN003, IN008) out of the 12 participants noted that Company G uses basic monitoring/social listening tools; google alerts and hootsuite to monitor mentions, ratings and sentiments across online channels as well as SEO practices to improve the visibility of their website. This data reflects Company G' S proactive approach to reputation management, demonstrating a commitment to addressing customer concerns and acknowledging customer input in real time. Active monitoring of online activities also signifies that the organization likely has dedicated personnel/structures in place for ORM.

Does your organization have a well-thought-out, consistent content strategy in place for managing its reputation online?

Although not all respondents could clearly define the strategy, they all acknowledged that Company G has a well-thought-out ORM strategy. One of the participants (IN004) stated;

our ORM strategy involves everything you have asked earlier. As we ensure active social media engagement with our customers, monitoring and tracking online conversations. We regularly share fresh updates, positive customers' Reviews, safety initiatives and our CSR activities. We use SEO to ensure that our website ranks high on search engines, we maintain branded profiles across all our digital channels and in the event of crises, we endeavour to communicate timely and transparently to avoid escalation. We also train our staff, especially the frontline staff like the drivers, and attendants to deal respectfully with our customers as

we all know that offline behaviours often give rise to online reviews. All of these are aimed at building trust in the minds of both existing and potential customers.

This result indicates that the organization does not engage in haphazard ORM activities but rather has a structured, proactive approach and is guided by clear objectives. This practice is in line with modern ORM where conscious and deliberate action is pivotal to managing and improving online reputation.

How well does your organization adapt to evolving digital trends and technologies in order to effectively manage its reputation?

Here, all the participants stated that Company G adapts well. IN008 said that" There' S no gainsaying that our organization keeps up with digital trends. This is especially evident in our mobile app as well as online bookings. In fact, a tech blog-" Techcabal" Described us as Nigeria' S most technologically advanced road transport company. The mobile app is regularly updated with new features to provide seamless transactions positioning us a technologically driven organization in the minds of the publics. This finding shows that Company G is proactive and up-to-date with the ever rapidly changing digital media landscape. Being adaptable helps the organization maintain relevance, effectively engage customers and enhance its online reputation.

What is the impact of digital media efforts on the operations and reputation of your organization in the last 3-4 years (2021 to date)? Please, provide key performance indicators (KPIs)?

Responding to this question, all the participants admitted that digital media activities of Company G have largely impacted critical areas of their operations and reputation, resulting in increased brand awareness and visibility, positioning the brand as a modern mobility provider in the minds of people. They further noted that the online channels provide opportunities to communicate even in real time with the customers which has earned the organization a team of loyal customers who have turned into brand advocates. The respondents were also of the view that online channels provide the company the opportunity to communicate service changes, apologize for disruptions as well as manage crises, thereby mitigating reputation damage. One of the respondents (IN004) explicitly stated:

the Company G mobile app and website which facilitates seamless and secure online transitions have helped to build trust and confidence in the customers.

Another impact the respondents noted is in the area of online support, prompt and helpful responses to enquiries and issues which have all contributed to increased positive perception of the brand. They further noted that publicizing their CSR initiatives has helped to position Company G as a socially responsible organization. Responses from (IN003, IN009, IN010,) indicated that the impact of the organization' S digital media efforts has been obvious in increased sales conversion rate especially in the last 3-4 years. Furthermore, the respondents believe that the survey campaigns and reviews provide feedback that is turned into an opportunity for improvement thus, making their customers feel heard and valued. This data suggests that the digital media activities of Company G contribute to measurable business outcomes, such as attracting new customers and feedback integration; portraying Company G as responsive and customer-centric. This demonstrates that digital media is not just a communication tool, but also a strategic asset in achieving organizational goals.

What challenges does your organization face in utilizing (creating and distributing content) digital media for reputation management; can you provide an instance?

A pattern identified among the interviewees was negative reviews and user generated content from aggrieved customers who take to social media to post videos of a situation. Quoting a respondent" In fact this is one of the major challenges we are facing" (IN009). When asked to cite an instance, a participant (IN004) recalled;" It was an incident when one of our buses carrying passengers abruptly stopped in the middle of nowhere. One of the customers onboard that bus made a video and posted it online calling out the company." Other challenges broadly mentioned included fake news, technical glitches, internet connection problems, managing privacy and cyber threats. IN009 said:" Sometimes, our customers complain of delayed responses to issues online, we can attribute this to connection problems which delay our responsiveness." Cost issues, advanced digital media tools and training of digital media teams are some of the challenges we experience in using digital media for ORM" (IN008). This result suggests that while Company G' S ORM initiative is effective, it is not without its challenges. Issues like negative reviews and fake news mentioned above are risks inherent in digital platforms. Maintaining an effective online presence requires significant investment which can strain resources in terms of equipment procurement and personnel training. To safeguard its online reputation, Company G should address customer concerns promptly and continuously invest in ORM.

How has Company G tried to overcome these challenges?

The participants were asked steps taken by Company G to mitigate the challenges faced in their use of digital media for reputation management. IN010 said:" Although we have a crisis management plan, we all know that crises are by their nature unpredictable. In the event of a crisis, we try to be as transparent as possible, providing honest explanations of events, while stating actions taken to correct the occurrence." IN007 said:" We engage with customers on our social media platforms and try to respond promptly to their complaints and feedback." IN005 said:" Our mobile app is regularly updated with new features to provide seamless transactions. We also invest in digital media technologies as well as periodically train our teams." IN009 said:" We encourage users to share their travel experiences. All of these are geared towards maintaining publics' Trust." This result implies that Company G is proactive and strategic in safeguarding its online reputation. Prompt response to messages or emerging crises reflects a commitment to maintaining customers' Trust. Also, investment in digital resources, tools and skilled personnel highlights the fact that Company G is committed to strengthening its reputation in the online space.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study have been thematically discussed here in relation to the study' S research questions.

The study revealed that Company G actively uses digital media for ORM. This is evident in the participant' S unanimous high rating of their use in the last 3-4 years. They also stated that digital technology mix utilized by Company G for reputation management include social media channels (Facebook, Instagram, X, TikTok, LinkedIn, and YouTube), an official website, own blog, emails and SMS. The organization also has an app which customers use to buy tickets, book their trips and pay bills. Social listening tools; google alerts and hootsuite are used to monitor mentions, ratings and sentiments across their online platforms. This confirms that Company G maintains a strong digital presence. These results are consistent with the position of Petrilli (2022) who stated that content should be published on a regular basis across all channels, including social sites, owned media, industry newsletters, and more ensuring that an organization gains online visibility even in competitive market places.

Data gathered revealed that the organization uses diversified digital content. Respondents however noted that the digitized content largely depends on the targeted audience as well as the communication objective. Content identified include short videos,

text, images, stories and reels used to share updates, press releases, service features, travel tips, CSR stories/charitable events, promotional campaigns, feedback surveys, FAQs as well as inclusion of customers' Feedback. However, a respondent mentioned that the use of influencer partnerships they noted is underway. This result indicates that Company G' S content strategies are effective for information dissemination. However, there is room to make their content more interesting and interactive to drive community engagements. These results align with the position of Scott (2023), that various formats and platforms should be used for effective content distribution as they cater to different preferences and learning styles, allowing organizations to connect with a diverse audience, ensuring that a message resonates effectively across different channels and reaches the right audience in the right way. This research question is further evaluated against McLuhan' S 1964 technological determinism theory. According to Asemah (2022), the basic premise of the technological determinism theory is that technology, the media in particular, significantly impacts how individuals think, feel and act as well as how societies organize themselves and function. Findings from the study revealed that the use of digital media for reputation management by Company G is not solely the choice of the organization, but intrinsically shaped by the technological environment. If technological determinism holds true, then technology is key in shaping both organizational behaviour as well as the perception of stakeholders.

Furthermore, survey results showed that the dominant view of the respondents is that Company G has a strong presence across major digital media platforms; maintaining active and branded profiles on various digital channels as well as creating and sharing diversified content although, with varying frequency and consistency. These results mirror earlier findings by Pollák et al., (2019), who stressed that many strategies exist for establishing and managing the reputation of an organization. However, it is important to understand that success requires more than just good technology or high-quality product/services. Consequently, organizational reputation management requires proactive and continuous efforts that encompass strategic planning, effective communication and a commitment to maintaining a favourable perception and relationship with various stakeholders.

Additionally, All the participants believed that digital media activities of their organization have largely impacted critical areas of their operations and reputation, resulting in increased brand awareness and visibility, positioning the brand as a modern mobility provider in the minds of people. They further pointed out that the online channels which provide opportunities to communicate and promptly address complaints have contributed

to increased positive perception, earning the brand a team of loyal customers who have turned into brand advocates. Other impacts recorded include increased sales conversion rate especially in the last 3-4 years, ability to communicate service changes, apologize for disruptions as well as manage crises; thereby mitigating reputation damage, increased trust and confidence in the customers and the benefit of being able to humanize the Company G brand through their CSR content. Furthermore, feedback integration in service improvement makes their customers feel heard and valued and the mobile app which facilitates seamless and secure online transitions have all helped to build trust and confidence in the customers. The result shows that Company G' S online reputation management efforts are yielding positive outcomes. However, to sustain this trust in a fiercely competitive transport and logistics industry, it is imperative for Company G to improve its ORM strategies. Views expressed here agree with those expressed by Casul (2022), who pointed out that organizations can benefit greatly from having a positive online reputation in a number of ways including enhanced customer interaction, online exposure, lead creation, and sales conversion.

Results also revealed that Company G faces several challenges in their use of digital media for reputation management. These include negative reviews and user generated content from aggrieved customers, fake news, technical glitches on our website/mobile apps, privacy issues and cyber threats. Other challenges include complaints of delayed responses and follow up, cost issues, advanced digital media tools and training of digital media teams in using digital media for ORM. The challenges mentioned can have a significant impact on the company' S reputation and image. It therefore, becomes imperative for Company G to address them and improve their digital media strategy for reputation management. The mentioned challenges corroborates with those identified by Siddiqui & Singh (2016) who enumerated some negative effects of social media on businesses, such as negative comments that can damage the reputation of an organization and possibly cause it to fail; hacking; wrong online brand strategy that can destroy businesses due to its viral potential; difficulties in gauging the success of campaign efforts; and the time commitment required to monitor unfavorable responses. While the participants noted that the organization has a crisis management plan and efforts such as being as transparent as possible in the event of a crisis, regular update of the mobile app, investments in digital media technologies as well as periodic training of the digital media teams to mitigate the challenges associated with ORM, they also mentioned that crises are by their nature unpredictable. These efforts reinforce the views of

Sharma (2024) who suggested that it is imperative for organizations to have a well-defined crisis management plan for the purpose of immediately addressing unfavorable comments, clarifying misinformation, and upholding transparency with its publics to mitigate reputational harm. Sharma (2024) also noted that caution should be exercised when sharing personal information online, privacy settings should be effectively utilized and proactive measures taken to protect sensitive data. Organizations can as well hire a professional reputation management company as they possess a wealth of ORM knowledge and experience and can offer highly powerful software solutions (Dietrich, 2015).

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings, this study concludes that Company G has robust ORM strategies, leveraging various digital tools to manage and enhance its corporate reputation. This effort has yielded positive outcomes in the last 3-4 years including, increased brand awareness and visibility, provided opportunities to communicate and promptly address complaints, increased sales conversion rate, loyal customers and ultimately increased trust and confidence in the customers. However, there is room for improvement in the areas of response time, managing negative feedback, community engagements and consistent diversified content delivery across all channels to increase positive reputation outcomes. Company G should also consider hiring a professional reputation management company as they possess a wealth of ORM knowledge and experience and can provide highly powerful software solutions.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusions drawn from the study, the following recommendations are made:

1. Content should be delivered through multiple channels to boost visibility and tools like Yelp, Google Reviews should be used to track brand mentions in real time and analyze sentiments.
2. Online content should be tailored to specific customer segments to maximize effectiveness.
3. Company G should consistently create more diversified digital content, standardize its scheduling channels and synchronize messaging across platforms for more impact. Feedback mechanisms such as surveys and online polls should be integrated.
4. Company G should continuously invest in ORM; boost its online visibility, frequently update their channels and pay attention to the customers' Concerns.

5. The organization should develop a structured digital crisis management plan to promptly and transparently address issues to mitigate potential reputation damage.

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