2020

Strategies for News Professionals to Mitigate Negative Social Media Posts

Airielle J. Vincent
Walden University

Walden University

College of Management and Technology

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Airielle J. Vincent

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Review Committee

Dr. Branford McAllister, Committee Chairperson, Management Faculty

Dr. Stephanie Hoon, Committee Member, Management Faculty

Dr. Raghu Korrapati, University Reviewer, Management Faculty

Chief Academic Officer and Provost

Sue Subocz, Ph.D.

Walden University

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Abstract

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Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

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Management

Walden University

December 2020

APA 6

Abstract

Businesses use social media to promote services and products as well as connect with current and potential customers. The purpose of this qualitative, multiple case study was to explore and understand the strategies that effectively remedy negative social media comments, the skills used to employ remedial actions, the reasons why organizations fail to develop effective strategies, and the motivations to develop them among the participants and their organizations. The conceptual framework of this study combined elements from the skills approach to leadership and e-leadership theory. The target population included news directors, assignment managers, and executive producers who have used social media for 1 year or more to increase news channel ratings. Data collection included semistructured interviews with a sample of 20. The data analysis process involved cross-case thematic analysis. The findings indicated that social media positively influenced organizational reputations through *building the brand* and *reaching a bigger audience*. The main factor that prevents news organizations from developing effective social media strategies was the *lack of resources* to organize effectively a *specialized social media team*. A dominant theme was the dilemma whether to respond to a negative comment or to ignore and delete it. Among the leadership skills that help in combating negative social media posts, the research participants identified communication skills, professionalism, creativity, and understanding as the most useful. This study contributes to positive social change by explaining the strategies and constraints within news organizations while dealing with negative social media.

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Dedication

I am grateful to God for giving me the determination and perseverance to pursue a

doctoral degree. I dedicate this doctoral study to my family, especially my mom, who has

always pushed me to excel in education.

Acknowledgments

I am extending my sincere thanks to everyone who supported me throughout this process. To my team of committee members, words cannot express my gratitude for making this dream of mine a reality. To Dr. Branford McAllister, thank you for all of your commitment and support. To Dr. Stephanie Hoon and Dr. Raghu Korrapati, thank you for your patience, guidance, and assistance. To my friends and colleagues, thank you for listening, sending encouragement, and your patience during this process.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

This study centered on social media management, skills, and strategies. Social media use has increased significantly in recent years, with 74% of U.S. adults using social media as of 2017 (Weeks, Ardèvol-Abreu, & de Zúñiga, 2017). Businesses, in particular, are seeking growth and connection with consumers through social media platforms (Mishra, 2015). Negative and unresolved social media comments hurt businesses because negative posts reach a wider audience and the effects last longer than positive feedback (Lee & Ro, 2016). Creating and maintaining a social media strategy is one of the most pressing leadership and management challenges in the current business environment as a result of the modern prevalence and reliance on social media. Some organizations can harness social media in a positive manner to increase success; for others, the strategy backfires when negative social media interactions or attention damage an organization's reputation (Katsyri, Kinnunen, Kusumoto, Ottinen, & Ravaja, 2016; Lambret & Barki, 2018). Determining which skills and strategies are ideal to address and mitigate negative social media attention effectively could help businesses and professionals succeed and avoid lasting reputation damage should a social media crisis occur (Turan & Kara, 2018).

This chapter serves as an overview of the study. First, I explain the background, provide the problem statement, and present the purpose of the study. The research questions are then listed, followed by the conceptual framework of the study. Subsequently, I explain the nature of the study and provide key terms and definitions.

The assumptions, scope, and delimitations of the study are discussed, followed by the

limitations of the study. I explain the significance of the study before concluding the

chapter with a summary.

Background of the Study

Social media platforms have become an outlet for individuals to voice their

opinions about the goods, services, and media they consume, whether positive or

negative. As more people around the globe turn to social media for their personal and

business lives, organizational leaders need to realize the impact social media platforms

can have when building relationships with existing and new customers (Turan & Kara,

2018). However, organizational leaders also need to be aware of the damages that

negative word of mouth can cause to organizational performance and reputation (Lambret

& Barki, 2018). The social media environment has posed new challenges for business

leaders because now, not only do they need to consider the individual comment while

constructing their response, but also how other Internet users are reacting to the comment

(Mishra, 2015). Specifically, public social media complaints can be damaging when they

gain support from other users and organizations have no control in stopping it (Mishra,

2015). Therefore, an active social media presence can be a powerful tool to facilitate

business growth and success or a platform that facilitates lasting damage to a company's

brand or image (Mishra, 2015).

Ascertaining the proper corporate response to negativity on social media is critical

(Mishra, 2015). Many organizations that aim to develop a positive reputation on social

media platforms do so by maintaining a social media policy that dictates best practices, recommendations, or rules of engagement (Jankauskaite & Urboniene, 2016). However, previous research (for example, Kwayu, Lal, & Abubakre, 2018; Lambret & Barki, 2018) has focused on nonmedia organizations or the composition of general guidelines and skills for managing social media content. However, prior research has not been specific to a context.

The use of social media sites can help news organizations become more competitive and established by acquiring or sharing information immediately (Cole, DeNardin, & Clow, 2017). Some researchers (for example, Katsyri et al., 2016; Winter, Bruckner, & Kramer, 2015) have suggested that social media management is essential for television channels, including the news; however, the ways in which news organizations connect with viewers through social media and the policies that govern those interactions differ from social media use within nonmedia organizations. Social media management strategies that are effective within the context of nonmedia organizations may have different implications for news organizations (Al-Rawi, 2017; Winter et al., 2015). Accordingly, researchers have argued for the importance of assessing how news organizations address citizen concerns; responding to concerns correctly is important because media reputation influences the development of collective reputational judgments (see Etter, Ravasi, & Colleoni, 2019). Therefore, it was imperative to study social media management and best practices within the context of diverse organizations, including news organizations.

Problem Statement

Organizations and businesses involved in a myriad of industries have increasingly used social media to promote services and products and to connect with current and potential customers (Balan & Rege, 2017; Etter et al., 2019). Oyza and Edwin (2016) found that 62% of business leaders revealed cultivating an efficient social media strategy as one of the most significant challenges they face. The social problem in my study was that harmful and unresolved social media comments hurt businesses because negative posts reach a wider audience and the effects last longer than positive feedback. Some organizations create and maintain a social media strategy and harness social media in a positive manner to increase success, while others have no plan or their strategy backfires when negative social media interactions or attention damage an organization's reputation (Katsyri et al., 2016; Lambret & Barki, 2018).

Recent research has indicated that social media management, policies, and strategies are effective for reducing negative attention and enhancing organizational reputation (for example, Kwayu et al., 2018; Mishra, 2015). Additionally, effective social media management requires leadership skills such as decision-making, problem-solving, communication, and e-leadership (Jiang, Luo, & Kulemeka, 2017; Luo, Jiang, & Kulemeka, 2015). However, there remains a lack of research concerning social media management within the context of news media organizations (Katsyri et al., 2016). The research problem in my study was a lack of knowledge and understanding regarding the specific content needed in social media management policies and strategies. Furthermore,

researchers have yet to develop a list of strategies and/or skills associated with effective management of social media content within the context of news organizations (Kwayu et al., 2018; Lambret & Barki, 2018). As a result, leaders in the news business who manage social media sites do not employ a specific and relevant set of skills to effectively manage negative posts (von Nordheim, Boczek, & Koppers, 2018; Welbers & Opgenhaffen, 2019).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative, multiple case study was to explore and understand the strategies that effectively remedy negative social media comments, the skills used to employ remedial actions, the reasons why organizations fail to develop effective strategies, and the motivations to develop them. The target population consisted of news directors, assignment managers, and executive producers in a Midwestern metropolitan area who have used social media for 1 year or more to increase news channel ratings. In this study, I explored the experiences of these news leaders who manage social media sites for news organizations and have the responsibility to oversee and strategize the handling of negative comments posted on social media. I planned to select at least 20 leaders including news directors, assignment managers, and executive producers among five news organizations, which represented the cases. I conducted a cross-case analysis using interviews and an examination of Twitter posts to identify central themes.

Research Questions

The primary research questions that guided this study were the following:

RQ1: How do leaders in the news business perceive the influence of social media on their organizations' reputations?

RQ2: What are the factors that prevent news organizations from developing effective social media strategies and the motivations for developing them?

RQ3: What strategies do news professionals use to manage negative comments posted on social media sites?

RQ4: What leadership skills do news professionals perceive as useful in combating negative social media posts?

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework that guided this study involved elements from the skills approach to leadership (Mumford, Zaccaro, Harding, Jacobs, & Fleishman, 2000) and e-leadership (Avolio, Kahai, & Dodge, 2000). The skills approach to leadership includes five factors that influence leader performance: "competencies, individual attributes, leadership outcomes, career experiences, and environmental influences" (Northouse, 2016, p. 47). The skills approach to leadership is the counter perspective to the notion that leadership traits and skills are inherent, or natural, for effective leaders; the skills approach conceptualizes leadership skills as something that is possible to improve through training or education (Mumford et al., 2000). The skills approach to leadership informed my study as a means of understanding how effective social media management results from individuals employing specific leadership skills related to factors, such as social judgement, problem-solving, and technological knowledge.

Abdul-Ridha and Jader (2018) described e-leadership as the ability to facilitate changes in individuals' thinking, feelings, attitudes, behavior, or performance through advanced information technology. In other words, e-leadership describes leadership within the era of information. Several processes and operations that occur within many industries are mediated by technology; therefore, modern organizations frequently require leadership that addresses the role of technology within the organization (Abdul-Ridha & Jader, 2018). In my study, e-leadership was used to view how leaders apply their skillset to manage an organization's social media presence. When considering use of social media within news organizations, e-leaders, who may be news directors, assignment managers, and executive producers who manage the organization's social media, use social media to encourage viewership and better understand public perspectives (Luo et al., 2015). The concept of e-leadership informed my study by framing the exploration of the strategies and skills necessary for effective social media management within news organizations.

Nature of the Study

The study was qualitative in nature. A qualitative method is useful when the goal of a study is to gather detail-rich data for in-depth exploration of a phenomenon (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Furthermore, qualitative research is useful for understanding human behavior and perspectives (Burkholder, Cox, & Crawford, 2016). Quantitative research, by contrast, centers on determining the frequency, or extent, of a research phenomenon (Tracy, 2019). A quantitative methodology was not as appropriate for my study because I

aimed to determine how a research phenomenon (i.e., social media management) occurs rather than to quantify aspects of the phenomenon. Mixed methods research involves the use of both qualitative and quantitative methods (Burkholder et al., 2016). A mixed methods approach was not suitable for my study because the research questions did not necessitate quantitative data collection.

In this study, I employed a multiple case study design. A case study research design was beneficial to conduct an in-depth examination of social media management within the context of news organizations. Case study research allows researchers to examine issues by understanding the facets of the business problem, specifically the *how* and *why* (Tsang, 2013; Yin, 2017). Case studies designs can be used to portray how the interactions of elements involved in one or more cases affect a phenomenon (Burkholder et al., 2016). I chose a multiple case study design because the aim was to examine the nature of the research phenomenon within the context of multiple news organizations in the selected Midwestern metropolitan area.

Other qualitative designs, such as phenomenology, ethnography, and grounded theory, were not appropriate. Researchers use an ethnography design to study the culture of people (Thomas, 2015; Yin, 2017). A researcher uses phenomenology to examine a lived experience from the viewpoint of someone experiencing the phenomena (Thomas, 2015). The primary goal for grounded theory is to build theory from social relationships and behavior that has limited exploration (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Conducting multiple case study research was the most appropriate approach to understand the social

media strategy phenomena in the context of news organizations in the selected Midwestern metropolitan area.

Each participating news organization represented a case. From each news organization, I planned to choose at least 20 leaders including news directors, assignment managers, and executive producers to participate in semistructured interviews. Twitter posts from the participating news organizations were also collected prior to the interviews to contextualize participants' responses. I used thematic analysis to analyze both forms of data (see Braun & Clarke, 2006). I obtained informed consent from each participant prior to data collection.

Definitions

The following key terms and definitions were relevant to this study:

e-leadership: "A social influence process mediated by AIT (advanced information technology) to produce a change in attitudes, feelings, thinking, behavior, and/or performance with individuals, groups, and/or organizations" (Abdul-Ridha & Jader, 2018, p. 46).

Skills approach to leadership: A conceptualization of leadership that centers on the role of technology and information in modern leadership roles (Mumford et al., 2000).

Social media: Platforms and websites with the primary goal to enable social networking and interactions among users (Winter et al., 2015). Some of the most

frequently utilized social media websites in the United States include Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Snapchat.

Social media management: The process of managing social media operations for an organization or business. More specifically, social media management involves developing and implementing social media activity, analyzing the results of social media campaigns, and engaging with followers (Luo et al., 2015).

Assumptions

Certain research assumptions informed this study. First, I assumed that participants were open to sharing their responses to the interview questions and that the information they provided was truthful to the best of their knowledge. I advised the participants that they could leave the study at any time and that their perspectives would remain anonymous. Another assumption was that participants would not edit or alter existing Twitter posts or delete comments before I analyzed them to misrepresent the organization's social media interactions. Participants were not aware of which specific Twitter posts I analyzed until I published the results in order to prevent manipulation. Furthermore, multiple news organizations were involved in this research because I assumed that the nature of social media management in individual organizations involves key similarities and/or differences that would lend useful information for analysis.

Scope and Delimitations

This study was a qualitative investigation of social media management strategies and skills used to manage negative comments posted on the social media sites of news

organizations. I chose the focus of the study due to the significant and potentially

negative implications of news media organizations and other businesses failing to address

negative social media interactions on their social media pages (see Turan & Kara, 2018).

Furthermore, there was a significant gap in the literature pertaining to skills and strategies

enacted by news organizations when negative social media comments arise. The unique

relationship and forms of engagement between news organizations and their audiences

warranted further investigation to determine how news professionals seek to manage the

potentially harmful implications of negative social media interactions (see Al-Rawi,

2017).

I delimited the research scope to a Midwestern metropolitan area due to ease of

access and to ensure the results were not confounded by differences related to

geographical region. At least 20 leaders from news organizations were involved so that I

could compare the strategies and skills that were uncovered from each organization. I

delimited participants to news directors, assignment managers, and executive producers

because these leaders of news organizations interact most frequently with viewers and

critics on social media. While the findings may be generalizable to other news

organizations and stakeholders, the unique relationship between news organizations and

social media audiences makes it unlikely that the findings are transferrable to other types

of organizations or media companies.

Limitations

This study involved limitations, challenges, and/or barriers. Because I collected information about the management of negative social media comments during this study, interviewees may have tried to misrepresent an organization's social media presence or management strategies in their responses. Another potential limitation pertaining to analysis of Twitter posts was that few or no negative comments may have been posted during the data collection phase.

Significance of the Study

In this study, I aimed to identify strategies employed by news professionals who manage social media sites to combat the potentially negative implications of unfavorable social media comments. The study offers an original contribution to existing literature related to social media management and business outcomes by addressing a gap pertaining to the strategies and skills used within news organizations. Previous research investigations have generally centered on nonmedia organizations and/or a general set of guidelines and social media management skills that did not address the importance of tailoring social media best practices according to industry and organizational context (Kwayu et al., 2018; Lambret & Barki, 2018).

Significance to Practice

The results of this study are significant for organizations, particularly news organizations, aiming to mitigate the negative consequences of unfavorable social media interactions. Determining the strategies and skills that professionals actively use for this

purpose within news organizations may also be useful for determining the extent of the research problem. Strategies that the participants identify as being successfully used to address social media challenges could be useful for other news organizations. Furthermore, elucidating effective strategies used by news professionals may enhance news organizations' capacities to remain competitive in their market among other news organizations that are on social media. The findings may also help new and established news professionals remedy their own social media crises and/or enhance the skills they employ within their news organization and when interacting with the public.

Significance to Theory

The results of this study advance knowledge in the discipline. The findings can be used by leaders in news organizations to identify the strategies that effectively remedy negative social media comments, the skills used during these remedial actions, the reasons why organizations fail to develop effective strategies, and the motivation to develop them among the participants and their organizations.

Significance to Social Change

This study may lead to positive social change by providing news leaders with information to support decisions related to managing negative posts on social media. If news professionals were informed of the leadership skills that are useful for managing negative social media content, they could enhance their leadership role within the news organization and relationship with the public. The strategic and effective use of social

media can humanize communication leaders by making them appear accessible, trustworthy, and collaborative (Jiang et al., 2017).

Summary and Transition

In this study, I intended to address the lack of knowledge and documentation of key strategies that news directors, assignment managers, and executive producers use to manage negative comments posted on social media sites. Furthermore, it was unknown whether news directors, assignment managers, and executive producers who manage social media sites attain a specific set of skills they employ to effectively manage negative posts (de Vries, Veer, & de Vries, 2018; Syrdal & Briggs, 2018). In response to this problem, the purpose of this qualitative, multiple case study was to explore the strategies and skills employed to manage negative comments posted on social media sites for news organizations in the Midwestern metropolitan area using participant interviews and an examination of Twitter posts about the participants 1 week prior to interviews. Participants included news directors, assignment managers, and executive producers at news organizations in the Midwestern metropolitan area. I used thematic analysis methods to analyze the resulting data. In the following chapter, I provide a review of current literature that was relevant to this study.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Social media platforms allow news professionals to reach and build relationships with a larger audience. The problem that inspired this study was that harmful and unresolved social media comments hurt businesses because negative posts reach a wider audience and the effects last longer than positive feedback. The purpose of this qualitative, multiple case study was to explore and understand the strategies that effectively remedy negative social media comments. People around the world are increasingly engaging with social media platforms for personal and business reasons (Weeks et al., 2017). Organizational leaders need to be aware of the damages that negative word of mouth can cause on organizational performance and reputation (Kapoor et al., 2017; Lambret & Barki, 2018). In this chapter, I explain the literature search strategy, discuss the conceptual framework, and provide the literature review.

Literature Search Strategy

My literature search strategy involved searching the electronic databases of Google Scholar, ProQuest, EBSCOhost, JSTOR, and Ovid with specific search terms and phrases, individually or in combination. The search terms used included *news media, news organizations, news channels, social media, organization reputation, Twitter, negative social media content, negative publicity, social media comments, social media management, policies or guidelines, social media platforms, news organizations AND social media, e-leadership*, and *skills approach to leadership*. The phrases that I used in combination included *negative comments OR negative word of mouth AND social media*

OR Facebook OR twitter OR Instagram AND cost or profit OR loss AND small business OR SME. I also used the following phrases: *negative comments OR negative word of mouth OR negative review OR negative feedback AND social media OR Facebook OR twitter OR Instagram AND strategies OR response AND management*. In cases where there was little current research, I turned to other sources. During an extensive review of the literature, I found no research published in the past 10 years documenting the strategies news organizations should employ to effectively manage social media or the skills required to do so. As a result, I looked at how other businesses deal with the unpredictable nature of social media crises and how instant worldwide exposure may cause negative results to organizational performance or financial loss. The literature search resulted in 75 relevant sources that consisted of books, theses, dissertations, and scholarly research studies from academic journals. Of the 75 sources, 96% were published between 2015 and 2019, and 4% were published before 2015.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of my study combined elements from the skills approach to leadership developed by Mumford et al. (2000) and e-leadership theory developed by Avolio et al. (2000). The skills approach to leadership consists of five factors that influence leader performance: "competencies, individual attributes, leadership outcomes, career experiences, and environmental influences" (Northouse, 2016, p. 47). Three competencies lead to successful leadership: social judgment, problem-solving, and knowledge (Northouse, 2016). According to Mumford et al., these competencies can

work together or independently to influence outcomes. Northouse (2016) stated that four individual attributes (i.e., personality, general and crystallized cognitive ability, and motivation) within this approach influence the three leader competencies; however, if leaders do not develop skills, their individual attributes have minimal influence on leadership outcomes.

The two leadership outcomes within this approach are effective problem-solving and leader performance (Northouse, 2016). In this approach, career experiences influence both leadership competencies and individual attributes, and environmental influences are external factors that influence leadership outcomes alongside the influence of individual attributes through leadership competencies (Northouse, 2016). This approach holds that effective leadership is resultant from leader competencies that impact multiple facets of the environment, such as leadership outcomes, environments, and career experiences (Northouse, 2016). Therefore, I used this approach to explain why news professionals should employ a specific set of skills related to social judgment, problem-solving, and technological knowledge.

Abdul-Ridha and Jader (2018) defined e-leadership as "a social influence process mediated by AIT (advanced information technology) to produce a change in attitudes, feelings, thinking, behavior, and performance with individuals, groups, or organizations" (p. 46). Successful social media managers use e-leadership during social interactions. E-leadership theory allows professionals to discover internal and external environmental

opportunities and challenges, execute communication strategies accordingly, and promote a positive relationship between the organization and the public (Jiang et al., 2017).

To apply this theory to the context of social media in news organizations, e-leaders in news organizations (e.g., news directors, assignment managers, and executive producers who manage the organization's social media) can use social media to encourage involvement and enhance the quality of relationships with the public (e.g., news channel viewers and followers; see Luo et al., 2015). However, these outcomes would also require the e-leader to have knowledge of strategies to combat social media negativity and the ability to employ these strategies.

Few researchers have focused on the association between social media use and e-leadership. Jung (2010) examined the role of the social media platform, Twitter, in e-leadership by interviewing 10 leaders to gain a better understanding of their perceptions of Twitter and how they use it to exercise leadership within their organization. Jung concluded that social media plays a significant role in e-leadership by breaking down communication barriers, allowing relationships to be formed, and affording intellectual stimulation and the sharing of knowledge. Although traditional modes of communication are still relevant in organizations, social media can help leaders broaden relationships with others within the organization or outside of the organization.

Similarly, Jiang et al. (2017) established that e-leadership is a conceptual framework for examining the perceived influence of social media on personal work lives, work-life conflict, and behaviors. The researchers found that using social media such as

YouTube and Facebook, for communication purposes, crisis management, and environmental scanning, predicts positive perceptions of job tasks and behaviors. However, when social media use was associated with adverse effects, leaders reported feelings of decreased control in their work and increased work-life conflict.

Together, the skills approach to leadership and e-leadership theory can be used to explain how specific skills are needed to effectively manage socio-environmental influences and information that is disseminated through technology rather than traditional means. The outcome of obtaining these skills would then be enhanced organizational performance and a maintained reputation.

Literature Review

In the following subsections, I describe, compare, contrast, and critically analyze studies related to the research topic and research questions. The constructs of interest include social media in organizations, the platforms used, and the types of comments received; social media and organizational reputation; social media in news organizations; and strategies for managing social media content. These subsections include a summary of how researchers have approached issues related to the concepts and a synthesis of what is known, controversial, or remains to be studied in the literature.

Social Media in Organizations

Kapoor et al. (2017) stated, "social media comprises communication websites that facilitate relationship forming between users from diverse backgrounds, resulting in a rich social structure" (p. 531). Following a systematic review of the literature, Kapoor et

al. proposed that social media are defined by a digital environment that facilitates communication, creation, and interactions between individuals. Organizations, from large-scale enterprises to small businesses, are integrating social media into their business strategy to remain competitive or attain a competitive advantage through enhanced website traffic, brand awareness, and supporting consumer satisfaction (Balan & Rege, 2017; Calli & Clark, 2015; Cole et al., 2017). Another benefit of adopting social media into the business strategy is that it helps organizations establish a position in the international marketplace by allowing organizations to explore markets outside their original boundaries (Chyi & Tennant, 2017). As a communication platform, social media permit organizational leaders to engage with multiple stakeholders simultaneously and create a space for public relations and advertising (Jankauskaite & Urboniene, 2016).

Kwayu et al. (2018) explored the use of social media as a method for enhancing organizational competitiveness and how its use influences corporate strategies and practices by collecting interview data from 12 employees at a Tanzanian telecom organization. The framework of their study included an interpretive paradigm. Kwayu et al. revealed that social media use in the organization influenced competitiveness and practices using advertising, sales, promotion, product development, information sharing, outsourcing, and feedback.

Balan and Rege (2017) focused on social media's influence on small businesses, applying data mining in their quantitative study to identify patterns of Twitter use related to small businesses. Specifically, they investigated the use of the hashtag, #smallbusiness,

in Twitter posts. Their study showed that small businesses used Twitter to reach a wider audience, engage with their customers, and gain feedback from customers regarding product preferences.

Calli and Clark (2015) conducted a literature review to discover reasons why some small- to medium-sized organizations do not adopt social media into their business practices. Their literature review revealed that some small- to mid-sized organizations do not utilize social media. Reasons for lack of social media use included a poor understanding regarding using social media, lack of minimal strategic focus, and lacking the technical knowledge to adopt social media.

de Vries et al. (2018) conducted a study similar to that of Calli and Clark (2015) and examined the use of social media in small- to medium-sized organizations. The results of their study revealed that these organizations often lack the knowledge, time, and resources necessary to employ an active social media strategy to engage with their customers. Furthermore, interviews with owners of small businesses revealed that they fear the costs of poor engagement with their customers on social media outweigh the potential benefits of its use.

Social media platforms. The most common social media platforms are Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, LinkedIn, and YouTube; however, Facebook is the world's leading social networking site with 2.23 billion users as of December 2017 (Kallas, 2017). According to the number of users, YouTube ranked second, followed by Instagram, Twitter, and LinkedIn (Kallas, 2017). Social media platforms provide various features

that allow users to interact with content (Almgren & Olsson, 2016). Each of these
platforms enables users to comment on posts and share or like the content posted by
another entity, given the user who posted the original content enabled these features
(Judina & Platonov, 2019).

User comments. Social media users often make comments on organizations'
social media pages, and the purpose of the comments range from formal reviews of
experiences, products, or services to informal conversation or questions. Consumers often
gravitate to the reviews section of an organization's social media site to read about
others' experiences before making a purchase decision (Kapoor et al., 2017). Barnes
(2015) suggested that more users read comments than contribute to the comments
themselves. The content within the comments can range from hostile to adoration;
however, negative comments have more impact than positive ones (Lee & Ro, 2016).

Ksiazek, Peer, and Zivic (2015) reviewed a large body of literature on civility and
hostility in online discussions, noting that antagonism often involves the use of profanity
and threatening language. Similarly, Springer, Engelmann, and Pfaffinger (2015)
suggested that the presence of poor-quality or hostile discussions can deter other users
from commenting. Furthermore, negative comments posted on organizations' social
media sites can decrease their performance by negatively influencing customer value,
sales, customer loyalty, and recommendations (Springer et al., 2015).

Ksiazek (2015) suggested the quality of user comments needs improvement and
that it is the responsibility of the organization to encourage civil discussions. Negative

social media comments that are not resolved can do more damage than positive comments do good because negative comments reach a broader audience and the repercussions linger (Li, Cul, & Peng, 2018). In this regard, Stroud, Scacco, Muddiman, and Curry (2015) found that discussions have better quality and civility when organization members reply to users' comments. This suggests that organizations that engage more with their customers on social media have more positive outcomes than those that put forth little effort.

Social Media in News Organizations

Like other organizations, the use of social media sites can help news organizations become more competitive and established by acquiring or sharing information immediately (Cole et al., 2017). The advent of social media has created a challenge for print and television news organizations, as it diverts audience attention (Cornia, Sehl, & Nielsen, 2019). News organizations increasingly rely on social media for most of their online traffic, while traditional news organizations are witnessing a decline in their online traffic (David, Tandoc, & Katigbak, 2019; Shearer & Gottfried, 2017). Researchers have attributed the decline in traditional news organizations to the decline in readership (see, for example, Omar, Ismail, & Kee, 2018). Furthermore, participatory culture is taking over the once passive learning, leading to a new media landscape (Mustaffa, Sannusi, Hasan, & Saad, 2017).

News organizations also use social media to draw attention to their stories and reach a broader audience (Bivens, 2015; Josephson & Miller, 2015; Judina & Platonov,

2019). They are able to draw this attention by combining information and entertainment in social media content (Bivens, 2015; Judina & Platonov, 2019). The use of social media by news organizations has successfully captured the attention of a younger audience (Geniets, 2016).

Judina and Platonov (2019) posited that the interactivity and ability to reach a broad audience are the main reasons news organizations are increasingly using social media. The content news organizations choose to share on social media relate to specific criteria such as news values. Judina and Platonov explored how likes, shares, and comments from the public are determined by news values. Two state-represented news organizations on the social media site Vkontakte, TASS and Russia Today, and two private represented news organizations, RBC and Meduza, are the same site. Social media posts were coded and then analyzed to identify themes. The findings revealed news value preferences among news organizations when determining content to include on social media. Specifically, the results showed positive correlations between exciting news and the number of likes, news stories associated with conflict or celebrities and the number of comments, significant events, and the number of shares and comments. Surprisingly, Judina and Platonov found a negative relationship between exclusive news content and a number of comments.

Finally, the results of the study revealed private news organizations posted more soft news content and stories about conflict. Journalists also use social media to monitor audience feedback and reactions to articles, paying attention to comments or what readers

are posting on social media about their news organizations (Ferrucci, 2018; Tandoc &

Vos, 2016). Journalists' interest in social media is a new phenomenon as professionals

typically disregard influences from external agents (Tandoc & Maitra, 2018). The

essence of journalists' change in their practices was illustrated in the study by Tandoc

and Maitra (2018). The purpose of their study was to investigate the influence of social

media, specifically Facebook, on journalism by exploring how news organizations

reacted to Facebook's algorithm modification that spotlighted videos uploaded directly to

the platform (Tandoc & Maitra, 2018). During this modification, Facebook not only

changed the rules within the organization but also for its users, including news

organizations who typically set their own journalistic rules. To carry out their research,

Tandoc and Maltra examined posting activity on a large scale by collecting data from 232

U.S. news organization-operated Facebook Pages. These researchers revealed that the

majority of news organizations adhered to Facebook's new rules regarding native videos

by producing a greater amount of social media videos. The implication of this finding

was that the field of journalism demonstrated a change in typical behavior, allowing

influence from an external agent. The results of the study also showed that broadcasting

news organizations adapted to the new Facebook rules quicker than print news

organizations.

David et al. (2019) conducted interviews with 16 of the primary news media

journalists in the Philippines to investigate the organizational provisions encompassing

social media teams and how they impact the incorporation of social media into

journalists' decision making. Authors revealed journalists consider audience preferences when making editorial decisions; however, decisions are dependent upon the provisions encompassing social media teams. Some of the organizational provisions involved the presence of social media editors in meeting on news stories, collaboration amongst social media teams and reporters, and exposing primary editors to interaction analytics up front. Furthermore, the decision-making process was different when social media teams were involved in the journalistic processes and given equal authority in editorial and reporting decisions. Also, the social media team's gatekeeping roles were enhanced when their mangers and editors were involved in producing content. Social media teams were charged with gatekeeping roles that enhanced the information garnered regarding the reactions from the audience and potential news ideas extracted from social media discussions and were able to facilitate influence from the audience. David et al. concluded that the drivers of incorporating social media into news organizations' production process were the dominance of digital news formats over print formats, mass-market orientation, and legacy brand history.

A concern of news organizations when posting stories on social media is that they are credible; otherwise, the organization may experience negative publicity or a declining audience (Blackstone, Cowart, & Saunders, 2017; Waters, 2016). Waters (2016) conducted a quantitative survey research study using a sample of young adults on Twitter to compare perceptions of credibility on mainstream and new media news outlets according to their tweets. The independent variable was the news outlet (mainstream and

new media) and the dependent variable was perceived message credibility. The results of

the study revealed the news outlet had a significant influence on participants' perceptions

of message credibility in the tweet, where mainstream news outlets on Twitter were

perceived as more credible than new media news outlets on Twitter. Furthermore, results

revealed that perceptions of messenger credibility were influenced by media skepticism.

Walters concluded that mainstream news organizations on Twitter are believed to provide

more credible information than new media organizations, even for those who are

skeptical about information disseminated from mainstream media.

Rath, Kim, Huh, and Srivastava (2018) used Twitter data from 315 U.S.

newspaper organizations and their audiences to investigate the effects of the central

characteristics of news organizations on the engagement of their audiences through

multiple regression analysis. Rath et al. analyzed the quantity of tweets, skill of the

Twitter user, and trustworthiness according to the Trust Scores in Social Media

algorithm. The results of the study revealed significant influences on news engagement of

the audience from the trustworthiness of the news organization and the amount of Twitter

activity. This finding indicated that new organizations' trustworthiness effectively

predicts news audience engagement. Rath et al. also found that the number of tweets

negatively influenced the number of replies and retweets from the audience, while the

level of skill in Twitter use poorly predicted engagement from the audience. These

researchers contended that the structure of news organizations' social media was a

stronger predictor of audience engagement than amount of social media activity;

therefore, news organizations' audience characteristics are a stronger predictor of engagement than the number of news posts. Rath et al. further concluded that news organizations need to enhance their presence and outreach on social media instead of focusing connectivity aspects of social media platforms to enhance audience engagement. That is, perceived characteristics of news organizations drives engagement more than their practices.

News platforms. According to Duggan (2015), over 20% of American adults use Twitter. Among Twitter users, 81% use the platform as a source of daily news (Rosenstiel, Sonderman, Loker, Ivancin, & Kjarval, 2015; Sundstrom & Levenshus, 2017). Twitter is the third largest social media platform used as a news source (Malik & Pfeffer, 2016; Shearer & Gottfried, 2017). Furthermore, Twitter is recognized as a common tool for news organizations to distribute breaking news (Blackstone et al., 2017). Lee (2016) reported that 31% of Facebook users and 59% of Twitter users look to these platforms as their source for breaking news.

Audience members interact with news tweets by sharing, liking, or commenting (Gottfried, Barthel, Mitchell, & Shearer, 2016; Rath et al., 2018). Research shows that the level of skill in Twitter use and the amount of content disseminated varies among different news organizations (Engesser & Humprecht, 2015; Ferrer-Conill & Tandoc, 2018). The number of followers and tweets on news organizations Twitter accounts has been found to predict engagement from the audience (Meyer & Tang, 2015).

Furthermore, the use of hashtags and photos and the nature of the tweet content can predict the engagement of news organizations' audience on Twitter.

According to Josephson and Miller (2015), journalists mostly use Twitter and Facebook to disseminate news to their audiences. However, Cox (2016) found that 82% of news organizations used Twitter to post social media content, whereas only 18% used Facebook. Specifically, news organizations posted on Twitter 3,490 times and only 768 times on Facebook over the course of 7 days. Cox found that The Huffington Post published most of the posts examined, reaching 2,008 Twitter posts and 386 Facebook posts. CNN was the only news organization that posted more on Facebook than Twitter. Of the topics posted on social media, news organizations' choices were relatively similar, aside from the topics of lifestyle and politics. The topic most frequently posted on Twitter was politics, while politics was only the second most common topic posted on Facebook. However, news organizations used Facebook more than Twitter to post stories related to lifestyle posted lifestyle. Internet-only news organizations posted several topics, such as entertainment, science, environment, and technology, on Twitter more frequently, but posted crime and lifestyle topics more on Facebook. In comparison, television news organizations posted more business, economy, entertainment, health, and lifestyle stories on Facebook and more political stories on Twitter. Cox concluded that newspaper organizations favor Facebook for lifestyle posts but use twitter for political and entertainment-based stories.

Bruns (2018) stated that news organizations generally use Twitter more often than other social media platforms for fundamental types of news engagement. The reason for this is that over 95% of Twitter user accounts are public, meaning that any user can follow them without needing permission from the host. Conversely, roughly 72% of Facebook accounts are set to private by its users. The public nature of Twitter allows for quick, widespread dissemination of breaking news stories, whereas the dissemination process is much slower and requires more feature enabling on Facebook. Furthermore, the differences in infrastructure between Twitter and Facebook causes significant variations in the forms of audience engagement. Because of this, Bruns considered Facebook as news organizations' showroom, where lengthy messages can be broadcasted, and Twitter as news organizations' chat room, where users can interact with one another and the posted content. However, Bruns also admitted that this viewpoint may be accurate only for posts that are set as public and can be observed; the private personal profiles or group page realms that are not public on Facebook may involve significant discussions of news related material. Nevertheless, Twitter maintains the position as a central component of the connection between social media and journalism.

User comments. Like any other organization on social media, news organizations permit their audience members to comment on their stories or like and share their content (Barnes, 2015; Waters, 2016; Winter et al., 2015). However, the degree to which users can interact with news media is dependent upon the news organization's account privacy settings (Waters, 2016). Though, Opgenhaffen and D'Haenens (2015) found that

relatively few news organizations apply restrictions to their social media accounts. News organizations allow users to comment on posts because these comments are a valuable source of information to news organizations (Malik & Pfeffer, 2016).

Winter et al. (2015) suggested the usefulness of social media as an information source has led news organizations to use social media platforms, such as Facebook, to share articles or publish news stories. Winter et al. aimed to explore how social media users perceive journalistic content and whether user reactions to content alter the influence of central news articles using an experimental design and a sample of 197 Facebook users. During their experiment, users were shown posts from a reputable news organization on Facebook as well as the corresponding news article. Subsequently, they were asked to engage with the content through commenting and/or liking. The results of the study revealed that negative comments decreased the persuasiveness of the original news article; however, positive comments showed no changes in persuasiveness. This finding supports Lee and Ro's (2016) finding that negative social media comments have more impact than positive ones. The results of the study also showed comments from users who found the topic personally relevant influenced persuasiveness more than comments from users who had subjective opinions. Lee and Ro contended this finding was possibly due to those who felt a connection with the topic elaborating more. Converse to expected, a greater number of likes did not influence conformity, suggesting that comments are more effective than the preferences of users.

While both news organizations and their digital audiences find social media commenting platforms valuable, both groups convey apprehension about the quality of discussions ensuing (Barnes, 2015; Meltzer, 2015; Springer et al., 2015). Recent research has illustrated that the purpose, quality, and number of user comments on news organizations' social media sites varies based on the content of the news itself. Rowe (2015) found that when involving political news discussions, comments left on news organizations websites have more deliberative quality than comments left on the social media accounts of news organizations. Rowe established this finding after comparing 500 comments from The Washington Post website and 500 comments from The Washington Post Facebook account that were related to 21 different news articles. Along with finding that comments on the website were more deliberative. Rowe found that these comments were also more ideologically balanced. However, Rowe did find that users commenting on Facebook were more open with their personal opinions than those commenting on The Washington Post website.

In summary, news organizations use social media to draw attention to their stories, reach a broader audience, and become more competitive (Bivens, 2015; Josephson & Miller, 2015; Judina & Platonov, 2019). Most news organizations use Twitter and Facebook to disseminate news to their audiences (Josephson & Miller, 2015). However, Cox (2016) found that 82% of news organizations used Twitter to post social media content, whereas only 18% used Facebook. News organizations allow users to comment on posts because these comments are a valuable source of information to news

organizations (Malik & Pfeffer, 2016). The following section provides information

regarding how social media user comments relate to organizational reputation.

Social Media and Organizational Reputation

Negative publicity on social media can do more harm to an organization than

decrease sales and customer loyalty; it can damage an organizations reputation.

According to research findings, consumer engagement in social media is positively

associated with an organization's reputation (Dijkmans, Kerkhof, & Beukeboom, 2015).

This relationship is said to exist because organizations that use social media are

vulnerable to negative publicity, which could damage the organization's reputation

(Schulze Horn et al., 2015). One of the biggest obstacles to protecting organizational

reputation from negative social media publicity is that the content in users' comments is

beyond the organization's control (Alfiero, Cane, De Bernardi, & Tradori, 2016;

Szwajca, 2017). Furthermore, social media users have the ability to collectively weaken

confidence in organizations (Cheung, 2016). Specifically, public social media complaints

can be damaging when they gain support from other users and organizations have no

control in stopping it (Mishra, 2015).

Blevins and Ragozzino (2019) contented that organizational reputation is a

multidimensional construct that cannot be measured by negative social media content

alone; the nature of the organization's response must also be taken into consideration.

Hence, ascertaining the proper corporate response to negativity on social media is critical

(Mishra, 2015). Additionally, the speed of response after a social media crisis is related to the level of damage done to an organization's reputation (Sümer, Demir, & Şatir, 2017).

Dijkmans et al. (2015) aimed to discover whether and to what extent social media activities and engagement are beneficial to an organization's reputation. Specifically, the purpose of the study was to establish the relationship between 3531 KLM airline customers and noncustomer engagement in the organization's Twitter and Facebook activities and their perceptions of KLM's reputation based on survey data (Dijkmans et al., 2015). The results of the study revealed KLM customers were more engaged in KLM's social media activities and perceived KLM's reputation more positively than noncustomers. However, the relationship between social media engagement and organizational reputation was stronger among noncustomers. Dijkmans et al. suggested that this relationship is stronger because noncustomers do not have their own experiences to inform their perceptions of the organization's reputation; rather, they rely on witnessing the positive customer supportive interactions between KLM and its customers to form their opinions.

Schulze Horn et al. (2015) conducted a literature review to analyze social media's threat to organizational reputation and its influence on the customer, employee, and organization, which are the three actors in the situation. To conduct the literature review, Schulze Horn et al. reviewed research studies related to the influence of each actor and evaluated the findings according to real-world cases of reputation threats through social media and organization response strategies. The results of the literature review revealed

that there is a need for organizations to create a collection of response strategies from several different angles that relate to each of the actors in reputation damage. Furthermore, the best method for organizations to manage their reputation successfully is to develop an organizational climate that is capable of mitigating risks to their reputation that arise from its employees or itself. According to the real-life cases, organizations lacked the appropriate knowledge required to manage social media dangers. The results also indicated that response strategies should be developed to manage the reputation threat at the source.

Sümer et al. (2017) asserted that "it is significant for organizations to maintain their relationships with their stakeholders during crisis over social media in order to repair their images" (p. 519). Based on this assertion, Sümer et al. aimed to examine the influence of social media crisis responses, such as denial, evasion of responsibility, mortification, reducing the offensiveness of the event, and corrective action, on trust, reputation, and behavioral intentions. These researchers collected data from a convenience sample of 1,800 Facebook users in Antalya Turkey using a questionnaire. The results of the study revealed evasion of responsibility and denial influenced stakeholders' perceptions of trust and organizational reputation. However, stakeholders' behavioral intentions were not influenced by any of the crisis response strategies. Because the formation of trust is dependent upon organizational reputation, the assumption is that the variables that influence reputation also influence trust. Furthermore, because the notions of trust and organizational reputation are closely

related, they are similarly influenced by repair strategies. Sümer et al. suggested that evasion of responsibility and denial have a greater negative influence on stakeholders' perceptions of organizational trust and reputation than other response strategies. Sümer et al. concluded that promoting organizational reputation is not effective when the organization demonstrates denial or evasion of responsibility when repairing its image after a social media crisis.

The studies discussed in this section related to my study's third research question: how do news professionals perceive the influence of social media on the organization's reputation in the Midwestern metropolitan area? One of the research results relevant to this research question was that the biggest obstacle in protecting organizational reputation from negative social media publicity is that organizations cannot control the content in users' comments (Alfiero et al., 2016; Szwajca, 2017). Another relevant finding was that noncustomers do not have their own experiences to inform their perceptions of the organization's reputation; rather, they rely on witnessing positive customer supportive interactions between the organization and its customers to form their opinions (Dijkmans et al., 2015). Finally, social media responses that illustrate evasion of responsibility and denial influenced stakeholders' perceptions of trust and organizational reputation (Sümer et al., 2017). These findings are consistent with the scope of my study, which was to explore participants' perceptions of social media's influence on organizational reputation.

Strategies for Managing Social Media in Organizations

According to Lambret and Barki (2018), the advent of social media has made the risks companies face and the nature of crises experienced more complex and dangerous because any user can have a megaphone and contact with millions of people instantly. The unpredictable nature of social media crises and instant worldwide exposure may cause "negative mainstream media coverage," resulting in decreased organizational performance and financial loss (Lambret & Barki, 2018, p. 297). Therefore, social media crisis management strategies cannot focus solely on predicting the formation of a crisis; new tools and resources that focus on reversing the damage are required for effective management (Lambret & Barki, 2018).

On social media platforms, businesses could easily track, monitor, and respond to consumers' comments with the goal to ultimately eliminate negative online reviews (Min et al., 2015; Sparks et al., 2016) and protect reputations during the crisis (Liu, Kim, & Pennington-Gray, 2015). Previous research has identified implementing social media policies or strategies as a way of reducing negative attention and enhancing organizational reputation (see, for example, Kwayu et al., 2018; Mishra, 2015). However, existing literature consists mainly of general principles and guidelines that do not relate to any specific context (Lambret & Barki, 2018). Jankauskaite and Urboniene (2016) noted that many organizations that aim to develop a positive reputation do so by maintaining a social media policy that provides guidelines for sharing organizational content, dealing with complaints, engaging with negativity, and creating positive,

professional content and training leaders how to follow it. These policies are also developed to promote civil, productive discussions among users and protect the organization from any legal ramifications that may result from user comments (Ksiazek, 2015). According to Crawford and Gillespie (2016), policies are frequently aimed towards reducing profanity, moderating discussions, and ensuring that users can rate and rank other user comments. Some organizations employ a set of alternative response strategies to remedy negative social media comments (Carneiro da Silva, 2019).

Mishra (2015) highlighted the notion that customer complaints on the Internet create risky and unpredictable communication with customers because of their public nature. To investigate this issue further, Mishra examined three incidences of consumer complaints against the Indian brands Snapdeal, Amul, and Air India that were posted on social media using a case study methodology. After analyzing communication from these brands, Mishra found that the organizations made several effective decisions with regard to managing negative comments on social media. However, Mishra also noted that these brands still had room for improvement based on a review of the literature. For example, brands in today's marketplace should place more focus on perceptions of fairness when publicly handing issues, while still maintaining a persuasive and influential message. They should also use a polite and conversational tone when responding to complaining consumers. Furthermore, brands should consider how other consumers who are witnessing the interaction would perceive the communication. Finally, the brands experiencing negativity should take measures that thwart other brands from benefiting

from their social media turbulence. Organizations can accomplish this by taking the complaint as an opportunity to enhance customer loyalty and provide a better brand experience.

Li et al. (2018) contended that organizations are increasingly responding customer reviews on public Internet platforms to influence buying behavior of prospective consumers and increase their profitability. The purpose of this study was to highlight the importance of managing Internet content and semantically tailoring responses to the reviews and explore the influence of such responses on prospective consumer buying behavior. Li et al. used field and experimental research design to analyze organizational responses to Online review content. The results of the study showed accommodating responses to negative product reviews and defensive responses to general negative reviews about the organization effectively increased sales and promoted consumer purchase intentions. However, the influence of the organization's response was mediated by the diminished causal features of negative reviews aimed toward the organization. Li et al. concluded that their findings provided important implications for organization interventions for Internet platforms.

Like Lambret and Barki (2018), Benthaus, Risius, and Beck (2016) contended that organizations would benefit from employing a set of social media guidelines for managing its use and ensuring professional engagement. In their research, Benthaus et al. evaluated how a social media strategy that incorporates social media management tools can enhance public perceptions of the organization using a mixed methods design. For

the quantitative phase of the research, 15 million tweets posted from users' Twitter

accounts regarding 45 large global organizations who are also on Twitter, and 160,000

subsequent messages sent from the organizations' Twitter accounts were analyzed. For

the qualitative phase of the study, Benthaus et al. interviewed six experts on social media.

The quantitative results of the study revealed the use of social media management

strategies with tools positively influenced public perceptions as opposed to web-based

strategies. In terms of the underlying influential aspects of social media management

tools, interview responses indicated that organizations, for the most part, use social media

for marketing, communication, human resources, and customer care. In terms of

influences on public perception of organizations, the results of the interviews indicated

that social media management tools supported employee-related organizational practices

and workflow. The interviewees explained how the social media management tools

allowed them to manage user requests by identifying the requests, designating them to the

appropriate person, and monitoring the solutions. Furthermore, social media management

strategies were found to significantly enhance attitudinal loyalty among users (Benthaus

et al., 2016). One interview respondent posited that activities and content on social media

that are targeted towards specific groups enhanced the organization's reputation most.

Overall, findings from the quantitative phase suggested that organizational strategic use

of social media management tools enhanced word of mouth from the social media

audience and improved relationships with the social media community.

Researchers have examined the implementation of different combinations of policies and how effective they are in encouraging civil discussion (Braun, 2015; Crawford & Gillespie, 2016; Ksiazek, 2015). To successfully employ these policies, however, would require the organization to view social media as a medium for exercising them. Szwajca (2017) noted that recently, the use of social media and the Internet has grown exponentially, contributing to a change in the communication environment where consumers can publicly share their opinions regarding an organization and its products or services. This new process creates potential threats to individuals and organizations reputation and public image. Therefore, organizations cannot disregard the possibilities, and thus, should use social media as both a communication channel for marketing and a tool to protects and develop their reputation. Szwajca conducted a literature review to explore the extent of social media use and the direction of activities organizations participate in to manage their reputation in the Polish market. The results of the review revealed that Polish organizations acknowledge the possibilities associated with social media and attempted to apply the potential to their marketing strategies. However, in terms of using social media as a communication channel, organizations tended to lean toward traditional communication channels, considering social media as more of a promotional tool and not a tool for direct engagement. The problem with this is that their social media use did not promote the development or protection of their organizational reputation on the Internet, causing these organizations to suffer the consequence.

The studies included in this section did not address social media strategies in the context of news organizations; however, they provided insight into potential communicative strategies news organizations could use to effectively respond to negative posts on their social media accounts. For example, several researchers have suggested using a polite conversational tone (Mishra, 2015) and accommodating responses (Li et al., 2018), and to take into consideration how other users may perceive the responding message (Mishra, 2015). Although the content within this section aligned with my study's scope regarding managing social media content, there was one limitation than cannot go without mention. That is, all but two of the studies were literature reviews, and thus, did not add any further supporting evidence.

Social Media Management in News Organizations

Researchers (for example, Katsyri et al., 2016; Winter et al., 2015) have suggested that social media management is essential for television channels, including the news. According to Kitsa and Mudra (2018), many TV channels see a decrease in viewer activity when their social media sites are not professionally maintained. This relationship between TV channel viewing and social media is important to news organizations because more people are now visiting social media to read news stories or watch news related videos from their favorite news channels (Katsyri et al., 2016; Winter et al., 2015). This increases interaction with the public via the ability to comment, and thus, increases the opportunity for negative comments and diminished reputation (Katsyri et al., 2016; Winter et al., 2015). Furthermore, researchers have shown that news

organizations play a pivotal role in directing public attention to the organizations they report on and forming organizational evaluations by selectively communicating and framing content to large audiences (Etter et al., 2019). Accordingly, researchers have argued the importance of news organizations addressing the concerns of citizens because of how media reputation influences the development of collective reputational judgments (Etter et al., 2019).

Like organizations in other industries, news outlets often have organizational policies and guidelines to manage their social media comment sections (Braun, 2015; Opgenhaffen & D'Haenens, 2015). Furthermore, news organizations are increasingly designating social media managers and editors (Ferrer-Conill & Tandoc, 2018; Powers, 2015; Tandoc & Vos, 2016). Combined, organizational structure and policies within the news organization can filter or intervene in the degree to which social media interferes with news operations (David et al., 2019; Jung & Villi, 2018).

However, the relationship between news organizations and social media is a bit different from the relationship between nonmedia organizations and social media. Specifically, strategies that work for managing negative social media comments in nonmedia organizations may not be effective for news organizations because of the relationship news organizations have with the public and the social significance and value of their judgments (Al-Rawi, 2017; Winter et al., 2015). During an extensive review of the literature, two recently published studies were found regarding news organizations' strategies for managing social media.

One recent study found in the literature search on news organization strategies to manage social media was conducted by Opgenhaffen and D'Haenens (2015). According to these authors, the use of social media by news organizations and journalists may influence aspects such as gatekeeping, objectivity, and transparency. Because of the fear of negative influences from social media use, news organizations are increasingly developing guidelines to set boundaries and manage news employees' social media use. Opgenhaffen and D'Haenens conducted a literature review to describe the social media guidelines employed by market-leading news organizations and compare similarities and differences. Opgenhaffen and D'Haenens performed content analysis to explore existing guidelines for social media use and elaborate on the differing guidelines according to how they relate to journalism principles. With regard to the journalism principle of objectivity, guidelines included remaining neutral in discussions, not using real names or sharing personal information, and not stating personal opinions to controversial topics. In terms of gatekeeping, related guidelines included encouraging users to contribute to the process of news research and production and to discourage users' violation of others' privacy. Finally, guidelines related to transparency included prohibiting journalists from sharing confidential information about the organization or colleagues, announcing news that the organization has not been made aware of, and disseminating news that is not credible.

The second recent research study identified in the literature was conducted by Lee (2016). Lee framed the literature review according to regulatory focus theory and framing

to evaluate the employee social media guidelines of three British and nine American central news organizations and explore how their guidelines were framed. Lee discovered the following social media guidelines of mainstream news organizations through searching the Internet. Lee found that guidelines were mostly concerned with the accuracy of information disseminated, as insufficient verification of facts was the most frequently mentioned topic. The issue of violating the journalistic element of objectivity by voicing personal preferences and opinions regarding news stories was the second most frequent topic addressed in guidelines. The third topic most commonly addressed in the guidelines was the potential dangers associated with inappropriate behaviors on social media sites. The fourth most commonly addressed item in the guidelines was damaging news organizations' reputation and credibility through social media content.

Lee (2016) found that each of the news organizations perceived the use of social media as too perilous for an individual journalist to manage and were more cautious than excited in its use. Furthermore, the majority of guidelines suggested that journalists should consult with an editor or social media expert before posting content rather than relying on personal judgments. In terms of how guidelines were framed, all guidelines examined framed the use of social media as a risky business practice and messages were framed according to how the news organization can prevent potential issues. Lee's findings illustrated that even though social media is viewed positively in the realm of news media, news organizations may be more cautious and critical when it comes to their own employees using social media.

Though these guidelines for social media use may be useful in decreasing the likelihood of receiving negative social media publicity, a lack of knowledge and documentation of key strategies that news directors, assignment managers, and executive producers use to manage negative comments posted on social media sites remains. Furthermore, it is unknown whether news directors, assignment managers, and executive producers who manage social media sites attain a specific set of leadership skills they employ to effectively managing negative posts (de Vries et al., 2018; Syrdal & Briggs, 2018). Identifying and documenting skills and strategies news directors, assignment managers, and executive producers use to effectively manage social media negativity could help new and established news professionals remedy their own social media crises

Social Media and Leadership

Northouse (2016) stated,

leadership effectiveness as measured by outcomes is a direct result of leader competencies and the indirect result of individual attributes working through leader competencies…and that career experiences work indirectly to affect leadership outcomes, while environmental influences work indirectly and directly to influence leadership outcomes. (p. 86)

In this regard, active social media management would result from news professionals employing a specific set of skills related to social judgment, problem-solving, and technological knowledge. However, the context of social media would also

require a sense of e-leadership, where leaders have the experience of strategies to manage social media engagements and the ability to employ these strategies.

The following studies are discussed in terms of leadership's relationship with social media. According to Luo et al. (2015), it is essential to explore public relations leaders' perceptions of integrating social media as a communication tool to understand the influence of social media on the public relations profession. The purpose of their study was to explore the use of social media and how it has influenced leadership behavior among 43 U.S. public relations leaders using qualitative interviewing. The results of the interviews revealed four central themes. First, ideas regarding how leaders in public relations can strategically use social media to exhibit expert power, obtain decision power by presenting tangible outcomes, display leadership vision in social media use, and establish leadership over peers. According to Luo et al., their study contributed theoretically to the public relations leadership area by creating three mechanisms for public relations leaders to develop their leadership. That is, leaders, can develop their leadership through enhancing capabilities in managing social media, gaining influential expert power, and building relationships with leaders from other areas within the organization. Luo et al. suggested that future researchers should focus on how social media engagement and management among public relations leaders have influenced the organizational structure and the influence leaders may have on the ethical use of social media.

Dahlin and Gratell (2018) conducted a qualitative research study aimed to examine how social media influences entrepreneurial leadership using semistructured interview data from seven entrepreneurs. Interview data were coded and analyzed for themes using a grounded theory approach, which resulted in three core themes: new social context, leadership enhancer, and cast expander. Using these three themes, Dahlin and Gratell built a model to demonstrate how they intersect and influence internal (entrepreneurial enhancer) and external (cast expander) entrepreneurial leadership. The theme new social context was named because of how it relates to social media creating a new reality for leaders, which presents new opportunities and risks as a new communicative paradigm. When applied effectively, leaders can use social media to spread the organization's vision and expand the cast. However, in the context of social media, leaders as ambassadors must be aware that the content shared on social media could potentially harm the organization if perceived poorly. In terms of the entrepreneurial enhancer theme, Dahlin and Gratell found that it is the leaders' responsibility to learn how social media platforms work and produce content that facilitates both social and professional interactions. Social media can enhance entrepreneurial leadership when used as a tool to communicate external and internal team goals. Furthermore, an active corporate social media account allows leaders to monitor the activity of competitors' clients, forecast opportunities, network, motivate followers, and expand the cast by gaining new. Essentially, social media is a useful leadership tool

because it lowers communication barriers, permits outreach to multiple stakeholders simultaneously, and draws the attention of followers.

Jung (2010) found from interview data collected from 10 leaders that social media played a significant role in e-leadership by breaking down communication barriers, allowing relationships to be formed and intellectual stimulation and knowledge to be shared. Furthermore, social media can help leaders broaden relationships with others within the organization or outside of the organization (Jung, 2010). Like the results from Luo et al.'s (2015) study, Jiang et al. (2017) found that social media use, such as YouTube and Facebook, for communication purposes, crisis management, and environmental scanning predicted positive perceptions of social media's influence on job tasks and behaviors. The studies discussed in this section related to my study's second research question: what leadership skills do news professionals perceive as useful in combating negative social media posts in the Midwestern metropolitan area?

Summary and Conclusions

Researchers have indicated that large-scale enterprises are frequently utilizing social media to attain a competitive advantage through enhanced website traffic, brand awareness, and supporting consumer satisfaction. However, organizations that use social media are also more susceptible to negative publicity, which could damage the organization's reputation (Schulze Horn et al., 2015). In terms of news syndicates, social media draw attention to key stories, reach a broader audience, and further competitive strategies (Bivens, 2015; Josephson & Miller, 2015; Judina & Platonov, 2019).

Organizational structure and policies within the news organization can filter or intervene in the degree to which social media interfere with news operations (David et al., 2019; Jung & Villi, 2018). Yet, how news directors, assignment managers, and executive producers effectively manage negative posts is absent in academic literature (de Vries et al., 2018; Syrdal & Briggs, 2018).

There was a significant gap in the literature pertaining to the skills and strategies used by news organizations when negative social media comments arise. The unique environment of social media poses new challenges for business leaders to consider individual comments, assess proper responses, and understand how internet users are reacting to the feedback (Mishra, 2015). E-leaders in news organizations (e.g., news directors, assignment managers, and executive producers who manage the organization's social media) can use social media to encourage involvement and enhance the quality of relationships with the public (e.g., news channel viewers and followers; Luo et al., 2015). However, these outcomes would also require the e-leader to have knowledge of strategies to combat social media negativity and the ability to employ these strategies. Hence, my research problem was the lack of knowledge surrounding why it is imperative and how to implement and maintain social media management policies and strategies. The increasing use of social media platforms among news organizations necessitates further research on the topic to gain a better understanding on how news organizations can effectively respond to social media negativity. In Chapter 3, I provide a detailed account of the methodology of my study.

Chapter 3: Research Method

The purpose of this qualitative, multiple case study was to explore and understand the strategies that effectively remedy negative social media comments, the skills used to employ remedial actions, the reasons why organizations fail to develop effective strategies, and the motivations to develop them among the participants and their organizations. In this chapter, I provide details pertaining to the research methods used in this study. The chapter includes a discussion of the research design and rationale, my role as the researcher, the methodology, and issues of trustworthiness.

Research Design and Rationale

The primary research questions that guided this study were the following:

RQ1: How do leaders in the news business perceive the influence of social media on their organizations' reputations?

RQ2: What are the factors that prevent news organizations from developing effective social media strategies and the motivations for developing them?

RQ3: What strategies do news professionals use to manage negative comments posted on social media sites?

RQ4: What leadership skills do news professionals perceive as useful in combating negative social media posts?

The research design that I used was a multiple case study. A case study design provided a detailed description and understanding of how news organizations address negative comments posted on social media (see Yin, 2017). Researchers conduct case

studies to better understand the interactions of case units related to the central research phenomena (Burkholder et al., 2016). The central research phenomena in this study were the social media management strategies and leadership skills used to address unfavorable social media interactions online, particularly within the context of news organizations.

A multiple case study design was the most appropriate approach for this study because the aim was to understand the nature of social media strategies and leadership skills used within the context of news organizations. Furthermore, a multiple case design provided the opportunity to gather a more comprehensive understanding of the research phenomena as well as the ability to compare and contrast strategies used in different news organizations to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the research phenomena (see Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The inclusion of multiple data sources contributed to a more comprehensive understanding of the central phenomena (see Yin, 2017).

Role of the Researcher

My role as the researcher included conducting interviews, ensuring proper data collection management, and completing the data analysis for this project. I was the sole researcher and did not use volunteers to assist in the process of data collection and management. For data collection, I conducted direct interviews, transcribed and reviewed the data collected, and carried out the data analysis process.

As the researcher, I had no prior connection to or relationship with participants and had no contact with them outside of this study. I was not actively employed within the news industry; however, I worked in the industry in the past. To ensure that any

instance of personal bias was documented, I followed the guidelines of Tufford and Newman (2012) regarding bracketing for the mitigation of personal bias. I also used a field journal to write personal notes and bracket possible personal bias issues as they arose.

As the primary researcher, I had a role to ensure the ethicality of the study. To achieve this, the study did not commence until I received approval from the Walden University Institutional Review Board (IRB). I also required all participants to fill out an informed consent form indicating their voluntary involvement and ensuring that they were informed of personal confidentiality. To further ensure the ethicality of the study, I used codes for each participant and kept all data in a locked file cabinet and on a password-protected computer. Per IRB recommendations, I will keep these data for 5 years before permanently destroying the physical and electronic materials.

Methodology

Qualitative methods are appropriate when the research phenomena need to be examined in depth (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The research questions in my study centered on understanding the nature of the research phenomena by means of determining *how* and *what*. Researchers use quantitative methods, by contrast, to quantify facets of social phenomena and answer questions such as how much or to what degree (Burkholder et al., 2016). Researchers use quantitative methods to test hypotheses about the relationship between variables (Burkholder et al., 2016). For those reasons, quantitative

methods were not appropriate in response to my research questions. In the following

subsections, I provide details concerning elements of the research methodology.

Participant Selection Logic

The target population for this study included leaders in the news business in a

Midwestern metropolitan area. Participants were required to be news directors,

assignment managers, or executive producers who had been active on social media for 1

year or more as a means of increasing news channel ratings and engagement with

viewers.

Yin (2017) noted that saturation for qualitative assessments occurs when themes

are repeated from participant interviews. I planned to interview and observe six social

media managers from five different news organizations unless I achieved saturation (i.e.,

no new information was generated) and I had interviewed at least 20 leaders in five news

organizations.

I used a purposive sampling strategy for this study. Purposive sampling entails

selecting participants on the basis of specified inclusion criteria (Palinkas et al., 2015).

The use of purposive sampling ensured all participants had knowledge and experiences

that were relevant to the topic of the present study. Using the purposive sampling

strategy, leaders, including news directors, assignment managers, and executive

producers, were selected from news organizations. To ensure that participants met the

criteria, a screening process occurred during recruitment. To contact the news

organization and leaders, I provided a recruitment e-mail to the news directors of the

stations in which the purpose of the study, IRB approval information, and the participant

inclusion criteria were included. Furthermore, I offered to hold Zoom or Google Hangout

interviews as a means of interviewing for the ease of participants.

Instrumentation

I used two forms of instrumentation:

- an interview guide for collecting data from the semistructured interviews, and

- a collection form for examining Twitter posts from the participating

  companies.

For the semistructured interviews, I expected data collection to elicit the following

information:

- the strategies news professionals use to manage negative comments posted on

  social media sites,

- leadership skills news professionals perceive as useful in combating negative

  social media posts, and

- news professionals' perceptions of the influence of social media on

  organizational reputation.

For the process of collecting data from semistructured interviews, I developed an

interview guide (see Appendix A)for the interview process consisting of open-ended

questions. To ensure the proper development of the interview guide and the relevance and

validity of the questions that I asked, I used Castillo-Montoya's (2016) interview protocol

refinement (IPR) framework. The IPR framework was critical because it is used to align

research questions and the study purpose with the interview questions. Additionally, the IPR framework was ideal for constructing interview questions that are inquiry based, based on a pilot study, and included a conversational tone for the comfort of the participants.

The next data collection instrument consisted of the assessment form for the Twitter accounts of the participating companies (see Appendix B) to examine the responses of participants to negative comments and the attitude of the audience. In the data collection form, I assessed company responses as effective or ineffective based on the number of likes and positive feedback following the remedial post. One week prior to the interviews, I monitored the Twitter accounts of participants to see how they responded to negative comments and whether their responses appeared to remedy the negative attitude of the audience member. Accordingly, during this process, the data collection form aided in assessing how participants responded to their negative feedback and the response used to assess the negative attitude of the Twitter audience member.

Pilot Study

Castillo-Monotya (2015) suggested using a pilot study for increased reliability and validity of the instrumentation and to ensure that the instrumentation (e.g., the interview protocol) is clear, contains valid questions, and is ideal for gaining participant information. I conducted the pilot study before the interview process with two reviewers who provided feedback regarding the clarity and the validity of the answers. No changes were suggested to the interview protocol as a result of the pilot study.

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

I used two sources of data, semistructured interviews and the review of participant Twitter posts, to address the research questions in this study. To recruit participants for this research, I contacted leaders of news organizations in the Midwestern metropolitan area by phone to identify news organizations that were willing to participate. After initial contact, I provided a recruitment e-mail with details regarding the purpose of the study, IRB approval information, and my personal contact information. Upon securing permission to conduct the study from the selected organizations, I procured a list of members from each who fit the inclusion criteria. I contacted potential participants by e-mail with information about the study and a letter of informed consent that was to be returned if an individual wished to participate. Individuals who wanted to take part in the study e-mailed the signed letter of informed consent back to me; provided their Twitter username; and coordinated a date, time, and public location for their interview.

Interviews lasted approximately 60 minutes each. I used an audio recording device so that the participant responses could be transcribed before analysis. Upon completing their interview, I thanked the participants for taking part in the study and advised them to contact me with any further questions.

To collect data from the participants' Twitter posts, I used the data collection form for the assessment of the negative attitudes of Twitter audiences and the effectiveness of participants' responses based upon the likes or comments upon the post.

If I found fewer than three negative audience responses on a participant's Twitter page for the designated week being analyzed, the previous week was examined.

Data Analysis Plan

I applied cross-case thematic analysis to the data collected in this study. Thematic analysis involves identifying reoccurring themes and patterns within the data that are relevant within the context of the study (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

I coded the interview transcripts and Twitter posts and then compared each news organization's social media posts and comments to each other. I used Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step thematic analysis approach as follows:

1. Reading and rereading the data to become familiar,

2. Generating initial codes,

3. Identifying themes in relation to each research question as well as the entire data set,

4. Reviewing/revising themes,

5. Defining the final list of themes, and

6. Producing a write-up that details the nature of each theme within the research context.

Following this procedure, I first transcribed the interview recording. After the initial transcribing, I returned the transcripts to the participants for member checking for increased validity. Member checking was critical because it ensured that the participants were aware of their responses and could point out any glaring errors, if any, before data

analysis (see Tracy, 2019). After the final assessment of the transcripts, I uploaded them into the organizational coding software, NVivo. NVivo is software that has multiple visualization tools for organizing data that allowed me to examine similar text and explore for resultant themes. In NVivo, codes are named *nodes*.

I uploaded the transcripts and then immersed myself with the data by rereading the transcripts. After this process, I assessed for similar words and phrases and applied nodes to these for further analysis. I used the tools within NVivo to apply nodes to analogous textual elements (words, sentences, phrases, or paragraphs) across each of the interviews. I compared the identified nodes between interview transcripts to assess for similarities that may contribute to themes that address the research questions. For each of the interviews, I followed the coding procedures identified in Braun and Clark's (2016) coding guidelines. This included assessment of analogous phrases or words, development of themes based upon coding strategies, final discussion and presentation of the themes in chapter four and five. After this was complete, I assessed emergent themes based upon the identified nodes in the initial data analysis process. After the final thematical analysis, I presented the themes in a coding matrix that I created in Microsoft Excel, for comparative analysis with the Twitter posts.

After data collection, I assessed Twitter posts by examining the response of the audience, which was based upon their responses and the likes or dislikes left upon the post. After this, I compared these Twitter responses for similarities or dissimilarities with respondents' interview remarks. For this, I compared the themes apparent in the

interviews for each news organization with the Twitter responses analysis. This initial process occurred by each individual case before the resulting cross-case analysis. Case comparison was critical, as it allowed me to compare how the three organizations report and handle of negative social media responses. Comparing these cases also enabled me to examine how strategies are similar or different across each organization. Specifically, this aided in addressing research question three regarding the strategies news professionals use to manage negative comments posted on social media sites. Next, I reported the resultant findings for each of the cases in a written format before embarking upon cross-case analysis.

After finalizing this process, cross-case analysis (see Yin, 2017) commenced, in which I compared cases (news organizations) to explore for similarities and differences after the preliminary analysis process concludes:

1. Transcribe interviews.

2. Complete member-checking and adjust if necessary.

3. Follow Braun and Clarke's (2016) six-step thematic analysis for thematic analysis of the interviews.

4. Perform the Twitter analysis for each individual case.

5. Compare thematic analysis with Twitter analysis for each individual case.

6. Complete cross-case analysis for the Twitter analyses and thematic results.

7. Finalize and report resulting findings from the data analysis process.

After this process was complete, I wrote up my final assessment. I based the evaluation upon the thematic results of each case study and the cross-case study comparison of the Twitter responses.

Issues of Trustworthiness

Credibility

The trustworthiness of qualitative research consists of credibility, reliability, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Credibility refers to the internal validity of a study, or how effectively the measures used reflect the research phenomena in reality. Use of Castillo-Montoya's (2016) IPR framework helped to ensure the credibility of the responses gathered using the developed interview guide. The use of multiple data sources also contributed to credibility.

Transferability

Transferability refers to the external validity of a study. In other words, transferability is how effectively the findings may be applied in other research contexts (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). I enhanced transferability through cross-case analysis, as focusing on a single news organization would have been significantly limiting. To enhance transferability, I documented the data collection instruments to ensure proper audit trail and ask participants to confirm their responses. I also used a qualitative data analysis software (NVivo) for analysis.

I also enhanced transferability through cross-case analysis, as focusing on a single news organization would have been significantly limiting. Maintaining a detailed audit

trail of all procedures enacted during this research also enhanced transferability. However, after reporting the findings, I examined the results to assess how the findings are generalizable to the general population of news syndicates. For this purpose, comparative assessment of the findings with the results of the study occurred to assess the generalizability of the resultant data.

Dependability

Dependability refers to how similar the results of another study would be if the same research was conducted again in an identical research context (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). For dependability, I conducted a pilot study to ensure that the instrumentation (e.g., the interview protocol) was ideal for gaining information from participants. This process occurred with two reviewers who provided feedback regarding the clarity and the validity of the questions. For this purpose, I chose two reviewers from my professional field to provide feedback before proceeding with interviews with the participants.

Confirmability

Lastly, the confirmability of qualitative research refers to how accurately the findings reflect the true nature of the data that was gathered, rather than the researcher's own biases and preconceptions (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Use of multiple data sources enhanced confirmability, as the Twitter posts contextualized participants' interview responses. Providing detail-rich descriptions of the research methods used also helped to enhance confirmability, as it enhanced readers' ability to assess how I conducted the study and whether bias may have influenced the results (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Ethical Procedures

Whenever human participants are involved in a study, procedures to ensure their ethical treatment must be enacted (Yin, 2017). I required all participants to sign letters of informed consent form prior to participating. I also obtained permission from the participating organizations and the Walden IRB before the study commences. Participants were aware that they could leave the study at any time if they were uncomfortable, and that the results would have no influence over their employment. Participants' identities are anonymous in this study, using numerical identifiers (e.g., P1, P2, and so on) in lieu of their names. I stored all physical documents in a locked file cabinet and all electronic documents and data on a password-protected computer (Yin, 2017).

Summary

In this qualitative, multiple case study, I researched the strategies and leadership skills employed to manage negative comments posted on social media sites for news organizations. Using a case study research design led to a detailed description and understanding of how news organizations address negative comments posted on social media (see Yin, 2017). The central research phenomena involved in this study were social media management strategies and leadership skills used to address unfavorable social media interactions online. Further, I chose a qualitative methodology for this research because the research phenomena needed to be examined in-depth with enough detail.

The participants for this research consisted of news directors, assignment managers, and executive producers who have been active on social media for 1 year or more as a means of increasing news channel ratings and engagement with viewers. The data sources included in this research were semistructured interview responses and Twitter posts from the participants. I conducted cross-case thematic analysis with the resulting data. In Chapter 4, I will present the findings of the study organized by research question.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this qualitative, multiple case study was to explore and understand the strategies that effectively remedy negative social media comments, the skills used to employ remedial actions, the reasons why organizations fail to develop effective strategies, and the motivations to develop them. The study had four central research questions:

RQ1: How do leaders in the news business perceive the influence of social media on their organizations' reputations?

RQ2: What are the factors that prevent news organizations from developing effective social media strategies and the motivations for developing them?

RQ3: What strategies do news professionals use to manage negative comments posted on social media sites?

RQ4: What leadership skills do news professionals perceive as useful in combating negative social media posts?

In this chapter, I describe the pilot study, research setting, demographics, data collection procedures, data analysis procedures, and evidence of trustworthiness; present the results; and conclude with a summary. The Results section is organized by research questions and emergent main themes.

Pilot Study

Upon receiving approval from Walden University IRB (IRB Approval Number 06-21-20-0935360), I conducted a pilot study with two participants who provided

feedback regarding the recruiting process and the interview guide. Both participants had similar answers to the questions. Participant 1 encouraged the use of Zoom in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. This participant mentioned that some of the questions were repetitive; she felt that she kept answering the same questions over and over again. The second participant agreed that conducting the interview via Zoom was the safest route to take. This participant said that questions were straight forward. The pilot study participants evaluated the structure, length, writing style, and comprehension of the interview questions as positive.

I concluded that the interview questions for the news professionals were in line with the general research methodology and the four research questions. There were no deviations from the IRB self-ethics checklist. I did not use the data that I collected during the pilot study in the actual study. There was no need to make changes to the interview guide and data analysis strategies because I did not address the repetitiveness of questions as an aspect of an interview protocol in the IPR framework of Castillo-Montoya (2016). To ensure consistency in participant answers, repetitive questions are necessary to a certain extent.

Research Setting

As the researcher, I had no prior contact or relationship with participants and did not have contact with them outside of this study. I worked in the news industry before, but I was not actively employed within the industry. During the interviews, I did not reveal to the participants that I worked in the same field as their's.

The COVID-19 pandemic influenced this study. I could not conduct face-to-face interviews, so I arranged with the participants to switch to online interviews. The interviews were conducted in a home setting, using the Zoom platform.

Demographics

I anonymized the research participants following the research ethics and interviewed 20 individuals from five news organizations.

Table 1

Participants

Participant	News organization
P1	FOX
P2	FOX
P3	FOX
P4	FOX
P5	WKBD
P6	WKBD
P7	WDIV
P8	WDIV
P9	WDIV
P10	WDIV
P11	WMYD
P12	WMYD
P13	WXYZ
P14	WXYZ
P15	WXYZ
P16	WXYZ
P17	WXYZ
P18	WMYD
P19	WKBD
P20	WKBD

Data Collection

To recruit participants for this study, I e-mailed a study invitation to the contact person at five news organizations in the Midwestern metropolitan area. Each contact person forwarded the invitation to potential participants who met the inclusion criteria. In the invitation, I provided details regarding the purpose of the study, IRB approval information, and my personal contact information. Volunteers e-mailed me if they were interested in taking part in the study. I contacted potential participants with information about the study and a letter of informed consent. The participants signed the informed consent form before participating in interviews.

Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, I conducted all interviews online via the Zoom platform. Interviews lasted approximately 60 minutes. I used a voice recorder on my computer to transcribe the participants' responses after the interviews were concluded. Upon completing their interview, I thanked participants for taking part in the study and advised them to contact me with any further questions. I collected data through semistructured interviews with open-ended questions. Data saturation occurred after conducting interviews with 20 participants.

Data Analysis

I analyzed all the interviews conducted for this study using NVivo and the six-step thematic analysis process that Braun and Clarke (2006) outlined. I began to familiarize myself with the data while I was transcribing the interviews. In the initial coding phase, I explored participants' words, sentences, and quotes in the interview

transcripts to create nodes in the Nodes section in NVivo for information gathered that were related specifically to the research questions.

The next step of coding involved grouping created nodes to form specific themes of descriptive data they referred to. After regrouping the nodes in NVivo, I transformed the most dominant nodes into themes, alongside less dominant nodes, which I then attached to the themes. I also formed some new themes. Table 2 presents the themes that emerged under each corresponding research question in the Results section.

Table 2

Themes

Themes	Research question	Files
Building the brand	1	10
Reaching and communicating with larger audience	1	11
Lack of resources to organize a social media team	2	9
Respond to, or delete a negative comment?	3	20
Having specialized social media team and plan	3	9
Communication skills and professionalism	4	14

Table 2 depicts dominant themes from all four research questions, while Tables 3, 4, 5, and 6 depict the nodes and themes that emerged from each of the research questions. The Files column refers to the number of research participants who expressed certain nodes or themes. In the Results section, I explain how I created and connected each theme with nodes.

Table 3

Codebook for RQ1 (Influence on Reputation)

Nodes	Files
Positive influence	11
Building the brand	10
Reaching larger audience	7
Feedback	5
Communication with public	4
Everyone express opinion	4
Humanization	3
Political topics	3
Young people	3
Not so important	2
Source	2
Maintain mission and autonomy	1
Networking	1

Table 4

Codebook for RQ2 (Factors for Developing Strategies)

Nodes	Files
Everyone responds differently	5
Not having an effective strategy	5
Lack of resources to hire social media manager	3
Constant transformation of social media	2
Generation gap	2
Bad marketing	1
High turnover	1
Lack of education on platforms	1

Table 5

Codebook for RQ3 (Strategies)

Nodes	Files
Responding to negative comments	18
Having a social media team and plan	9
Delete insulting comments	7
No universal strategy	4
Pay attention	4
Identify shortcoming	3
Prohibit hate speech and threats	2
Provide more information	2
Remain persistent in work	2
Strategic storytelling	1

Table 6

Codebook for RQ4 (Leadership Skills)

Nodes	Files
Communication skills	8
Professionalism	7
Understanding	5
Creativity	4
Writing skills	2
Think one step ahead	1

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Credibility

I ensured credibility by implementing Castillo-Montoya's (2016) IPR framework during the data collection process. The interview guide questions were aligned with the main research questions. The use and cross comparison of multiple data sources also contributed to credibility.

Transferability

I ensured transferability through cross-case analysis because focusing on a single news organization would have been significantly limiting. Each news organization represented a case. Maintaining a detailed audit trail of all procedures enacted during this study also enhanced transferability. I examined the results to assess how the findings are generalizable to the general population of news syndicates. I also conducted a comparative assessment of the findings with the results of the study to assess the generalizability of the resultant data.

Dependability

For dependability, I conducted a pilot study to ensure that the instrumentation (i.e., the interview guide) was suitable for gathering information from participants. Two reviewers provided feedback regarding the clarity and the validity of the interview questions.

Confirmability

The use of multiple data sources ensured confirmability because the Twitter posts contextualized participants' interview responses. Providing detail-rich descriptions of the research methods used also helped in enhancing confirmability because it enhanced readers' ability to assess how I conducted the study and whether bias may have influenced the results.

Study Results

The news professionals that I interviewed for this study answered the interview questions about their perception of the influence of social media on their organization's reputation, factors preventing the development of effective strategies and motivations for developing them, strategies for managing negative comments, and leadership skills that they find useful in combating negative social media posts. This section is organized by research questions. For each research question, one or two themes emerged from grouped nodes.

RQ1: Influence on Reputation

This research question addressed both negative and positive publicity on social media. The first theme within this research question was *building the brand*, and the second one was *reaching and communicating with a larger audience*. *Building the brand* was one of the most dominant nodes in the data analysis, which led to it becoming a theme. *Reaching and communicating with a larger audience* was a combination of two nodes: *communication with the public* and *reaching larger audience*.

Eleven out of 20 participants said that the influence of social media on their organizations has been positive. Even though negative comments exist, the general influence of social media could be positive, as P12 explained, "As far as the station's reputation, I'd say it's mostly positive, although we do see our share of negative feedback." All comments have the potential to engage the viewers: "I guess we get both positive and negative comments and they all impact the station. But they are both

opportunities for us to get closer to our followers" (P15). "I believe social media

comments are always positive. Yes we get some negative comments and some negative

chatter on our platforms but you can always turn that into a positive which is awesome,"

said P2.

Building the brand. As the most positive aspect of social media influence on

organizations' reputation, the participants emphasized that social media helps them to

build a brand. Ten out of 20 participants said that social media helps them to build their

brand. "Social media has a big influence. It helps us grow our business and build our

brand," said P3. Emphasizing the transformation of media in the digital era, P14 said,

"Social media has changed the game. It allows us to build our brand, get audience

feedback, and be more personable."

P15 connected building of the brand with successful marketing, responding, "The

biggest thing that I'd say social media helps with is branding and promotion. Our main

goal is to help push our brand and market the station, specifically the website." P17

stated,

> In my 30 years of experience as a broadcaster, I've seen many changes come and
>
> go. The explosion of social media has changed our world as anchors, reporters,
>
> and journalists overall. It's a new and important way of branding, marketing
>
> stories, and even a television station.

Building a brand is about awareness: "I say the biggest thing is that it increases

awareness of who we are. I guess branding we can call it. Half of the world uses social

media," said P4. It is also about "what we put out is what people understand about us" (P11). These participants showed an understanding of the capacities of social media to establish news organizations' reputations.

Reaching and communicating with larger audience. Another positive aspect of social media is that it allows a news organization to reach a larger audience. Seven out of 20 participants said social media helps them to reach more people, not only in the selected metropolitan area, but in other cities and states as well. P3 explained that,

> Social media has the ability to reach a bigger audience, you know. I can reach someone in North Carolina or California with social media, but we can only reach someone in the [redacted] area with the news. Those social interactions allow us to build followers and viewers. Sometimes we have people in Idaho saying they're watching our news since they can watch it online. And I believe the only reason we get that kind of reach is from social media.

P15 said,

> Social media makes sharing the news easier. I'm able to take a story that only reached people in Metro [redacted] on the news and show it to anyone who has social media. It allows us to get our content to more people is my point.

"Half of the world uses social media. So using different platforms allows us to reach new and target followers," P4 said. P14 explained that it is not enough to post only on one social media site. Different social media should be used to reach a bigger audience and be visible:

I think the average person has eight different social media accounts. That means

we can pretty much be everywhere in that person's life. If we're posting on

Facebook, IG, Snapchat, YouTube, and Twitter, that five right there. Where every

time they flip back and forth from those platforms they are seeing our brand.

That's major.

Three participants said that reaching a bigger audience is beneficial because it increases

the traffic on the news organizations' website. For example, P13 said, "If I can get

someone to look at our post, I can get half of those people to go to our website. Our goal

is to increase website traffic as well as increase our followers." Therefore, social media

represents a tool for being present and more visible. This allows news organizations to

communicate more intensively with the public. As P10 said, "One post can reach

thousands of people and can have a devastating impact on your organization's

reputation."

Other aspects of social media influence on organizations' reputations, listed by

participants were communication with the public, the opportunity that everyone can

express their opinion (especially on politics), getting feedback from the audience,

reaching younger people (who are more present on social media), and humanization.

RQ2: Factors for Developing Strategies

To answer the second research question, I tried to identify the reasons why

organizations do not adopt social media into their business practices. Research

participants were not able to clearly identify and articulate the factors that prevent their

organizations from developing effective social media strategies. However, when I coded and grouped their answers, one theme that addresses this issue emerged. I identified a *lack of resources to organize a team* specifically for social media management as a factor that prevents news organizations from developing effective social media strategies, and therefore as a theme.

The theme, *lack of resources to organize a social media team*, united several nodes that refer to factors preventing the development of more effective social media strategies that would prevent negative comments. Five out of 20 participants responded in a very general manner, simply by saying that not having an effective strategy is a problem. P10 explained how many companies invest in social media, but that there are still many challenges to face:

> By now, it is pretty clear that social media is here to stay and has to be a part of any organizations media plan. So, many companies are dedicating resources to social media. The struggle has been, especially for local television stations, determining just how much time and effort to dedicate to responding to negative feedback. I'm not sure we've found that balance yet.

P12 said that they do have effective strategies, but that they need additional staff, which would focus only on social media:

> We have a clear set of guidelines and community rules for our social media pages, but monitoring each and every comment, like, share or reaction could be

someone's full-time job. However, like most news businesses, budgets won't

allow for the extra bodies.

P19 compared the social media strategy in the previous worksite with the current one:

The fact that our social media manager is so on top of it is such a great thing. At

my last station, it was kinda like a free for all. We had nothing in place [. . .] it

was absolutely terrible. We all were just trying to figure out what worked best for

us.

P13 stressed how the COVID-19 crisis made the situation even worse in terms of work

tasks and the resources:

With COVID-19, our station has had a lot of people doing different roles. We

have anchors and reporters posting on social media and using social media more

and all of our strategies are not being passed on to them.

Lack of education on platforms may also be a consequence of insufficient resources, as

P9 said, "Lack of training and investment in education on platforms, usage."

The inability to organize a social media team well definitely is evident in the

tendency to respond to the comments arbitrarily and differently. For example, P18 said:

"I guess the only thing that would prevent us from developing strategies would be that

everyone deals with social media differently. Everyone responds differently and everyone

reacts to an issue differently." Also, P4 said: "It can be difficult to develop strategies for

social media because everyone handles things differently. I can't tell one person how to

respond." In that way, "employees can hinder us from being successful on social" said

P16. Participants listed the generation gap, constant transformation of social media, high turnover, and bad marketing as reasons that prevent the development of more effective social media strategies.

RQ3: Strategies

Negative social media comments may hurt news organizations' reputations because negative posts reach a larger audience. In this research question, the main dilemma for news professionals was whether to respond to a negative comment or to delete it. I addressed this dilemma as the first theme. *Having a specialized social media team* and plan was one of the most dominant nodes, which I transformed into a second theme.

Respond to, or delete a negative comment? Eighteen out of 20 participants talked about the ways of responding to negative comments, while they were talking about the strategies that news professionals use to manage them. Fifteen out of 20 news professionals involved in this research said that one of the best ways to manage negative comments is to respond to them. "We try to respond to all comments positive, negative, or neutral. We do a lot of posts where we are asking for a viewer or follower feedback, and by responding it lets people know we care," P3 explained. P2 said that it is important to be clever when it comes to responding to negative comments:

> You have to have the brains to respond to it the way you feel is the best way to respond. Of course, there are certain rules in place, like respond to every comment in a timely fashion and try to be as kind as possible.

P7 said that the best solution is to be honest:

> As a lead anchor at my station, I find it's easiest to answer people directly and honestly and most of the time for me that is all people really want, and they usually back down from the negativity. If that is not the response, we can agree to disagree depending on the topic. I stay far away from politics or anything polarizing.

The timing is also important in managing negative comments, as P14 stressed: "We also try to catch something immediately. Response time matters. We try to be transparent with all of our answers and we never go negative. Two negatives do not make it any better." P12 also said: "We try to respond to all of our Facebook messages. Negative comments, whether they are regarding on-air or online, are responded to by an actual person of our team."

The dilemma of whether to respond or delete negative comments occurs when the comments get offensive. For example, P13 shared: "I teach all of our digital producers to respond to all comments unless it is an offensive comment. So if there is profanity or offensive matters. I leave that up to their discretion." P10 said that it depends how offensive the comment is:

> It really depends on just how inflammatory the comment is. Typically, we allow viewer comments to stand alone. As journalists we try to be fair and impartial and let viewers come to their own conclusions. So, editing or responding to those comments is typically frowned upon.

"So comments that are racist, sexist, or really negative do not get a response," said P15. "If it is just mean and hateful criticism, then I may ignore them or offer a sweet and salty response," P11 said. P12 explained how having a clear set of guidelines may help:

> We have a clear set of guidelines for our social media pages that prohibits, threats, hate speech, etc. In most cases, users are just expressing their opinions, even though they may be different than our own it's our duty as a news organization to be unbiased. Users can be banned from our page for hate speech or threats.

Sometimes, negative comments may affect the psychological wellbeing of persons that they are directed to. P7 gave the example:

> A brand new meteorologist at my station would get inundated with negative comments about his appearance. He finally took our advice and blocked some of those comments so he would not be harmed psychologically. He was much happier at his job once that action was taken.

In this case, it is better to block these comments.

Two participants said that they just delete the comment, without further involvement. However, P18 thought that this is not professional management of the negative comments: "For example, a news anchor posted her story and any negative comment she just deletes. That is not what our digital producers are taught to do."

P11 showed that it is important to identify a shortcoming because negative comments could reveal the error made in a particular post: "Before I respond, I double-

check the criticism to see who is correct, me or the person criticizing me. If they're wrong, I post with proof that I'm right. If they are correct, I apologize or note the error." P12 confirmed that mistakes may happen:

> In one case, a viewer reached out about their specific county not in the TV crawl for COVID-19 numbers. After looking into it, we realized it was a glitch in the system and had it fixed. Although the viewer wasn't exactly nice about it, it's still worth looking into anything that can help our product.

These examples illustrate that it is important to pay attention to negative comments, because they may reveal a mistake. After identifying a mistake, social media managers should correct it and apologize.

Having a specialized social media team and plan. Nine out of 20 research participants said that *having a specialized social media team* and plan proved to be the best strategy in mitigating negative comments on social media. P13 said: "We have strategies that everyone is taught to follow. What can get in the way is when web producers are not the only ones posting." P15 said how it is important to have a good and experienced social media manager:

> Our social media manager who's over all of us is pretty good with developing strategies. She makes sure that we are all doing the same things when it comes to posting. So we post every hour and we have to post a picture to go along with the story. We also have to respond to any comments that come in. So we're pretty on top of it.

Also, P7 said: "We have a whole team dedicated to our social media platform, and there is a daylong plan of action we roll out Monday through Sunday." P20 also said that it is important to have a specialized team on social media:

> Having a well-rounded and experienced team is key to social media in the day and age of reporting online. Not only must these teams keep up with news of the day, they also need to have a good balance of feel-good vs. hard news to share and keep up with viral trends. In my experience, the more people on a digital team, the better.

The social media team should be polite in responding to negative comments and pay attention, as P8 said: "As every comment is from a viewer, each is treated respectfully. If it is a question I try to answer it, but not engage in a back and forth battle that ultimately, we can't win." P14 confirmed this strategy:

> When I look at a negative comment I have to make sure that I understand what the person is really upset about. The first place you usually hear about an issue is on social media. They could have an issue with something that we posted or they could have an issue with something that we ran on the 5pm news. So it's important to know exactly what they are upset about.

There are no universal strategies, but the social media team, which should be in charge when it comes to responding and managing negative comments, handles the situation based on experience and knowledge. In most cases, if negative comments are

insulting, offensive, or discriminating, the social media team deletes them. Otherwise, the team should respond to the negative comments.

RQ4: Leadership Skills

Research participants working in news organizations listed the following leadership skills as the most important: communication skills, professionalism, understanding, and creativity. *Communication skills* and *professionalism* emerged as the most important leadership skills.

Communication skills and professionalism. Eight out of 20 participants addressed *communication skills* as the most useful skill in combating negative social media comments. P13 said: "Our digital producers have to be able to communicate well and make connections. Social media is all about making connections and getting people to come back for more or want to stay for more." P2 elaborated:

I think this biggest leadership skill someone in my position has to have is communication skills. You have to be able to communicate with everyone so that they can understand the point you're getting across. Think about it, talking on social media and even talking through text can come off completely wrong. In this role, you have to be able to say what you mean and not piss people off.

Similarly, P3 explained:

When I'm looking for web producers I look for strong *communication skills*. We have to be able to share ideas on different platforms to different audiences. Communication is imperative. But they also got to be able to communicate to

news producers, reporters, anchors, news directors, and everyone else about what is going on. The web is the glue that holds everything together right now.

P14 explained how good *communication skills* include patience: "Elaborating on that point, communication is really what matters when handling negative social media posts. Can you listen to what an angry person is saying and make it a positive in a good way?" P12 also stressed out the importance of *communication skills*: "Leadership skills used in this situation are a responsibility to your users, providing feedback, context or perspective and overall communication with the viewer."

Further, seven out of 20 participants shared that professionalism turned out to be a useful leadership skill. P6 said, "I have learned the hard way on that one, and I've found staying above fray and the back and forth keeps your reputation and professionalism intact." P11 explained that it means to be a professional:

I have a strong sense of self confidence and know who I am as a journalist. Further, I know that some people just want someone to lash out on. I keep that in mind before responding. Also, I always post with the thought that this post will live forever, first and foremost in my mind. I ask myself, if I'm in a more elevated professional position, would I want to come face to face with this post again? That answer guides my response.

Four out of 20 participants said that creativity is a leadership skill. In that manner, P3 said:

I guess some more leadership skills you need are creativity. Web people have to

be able to develop an idea. And it has to be creative to grab attention. Also, you

have to be creative when handling negative social media posts.

P15 stated,

The most important skill I use to combat negative social media posts is creativity.

It's my job to make a response that is exciting, valuable and the idea has to stand

out for its positivity.

P8 connected creativity and understanding: "Active listening, ability to give and

accept constructive feedback, creativity in how we use social media." P12 said that the

entire team should work on better understanding and addressing the problems brought up

by the negative comments: "The entire team tries to use our best judgment when it comes

to handling these cases. Does the viewer have a legitimate concern, complaint, or

comment? If so, thank them for reaching out and try to mitigate the issue." Leadership

skills such as communication skills, understanding, creativity, and professionalism are

useful in mitigating negative comments on social media.

Summary

In response to RQ1, the leaders in the news business positively perceive the

influence of social media on their organizations' reputations. Two positive aspects of the

influence of social media on news organizations' reputations that the participants

identified were *building the brand* and *reaching a bigger audience*.

For RQ2, the main theme that keeps news organizations from developing effective social media strategies was the *lack of resources* to organize an effective social media team. The participants identified responding as an inefficient way to manage negative comments and revealed the lack of social media strategy.

In response to RQ3, the most dominant theme in the interviews with news professionals was the dilemma whether to respond to a negative comment or to ignore and delete it. The decision depends on how offensive the particular comment is. If it is a general comment, expressed in a negative tone, the news professionals would likely respond to it in a nice way. In this way, they show the audience that they care about the feedback. However, if the comment has the goal to insult, offend, or discriminate against someone, the news professionals will probably ban this person or delete the comment, without responding directly to insulting comments. Also, having a specialized social media team with a strategy, who know how to respond in each case, was one of the key components of a strategy to mitigate the impact of negative comments on social media. Among the leadership skills that help in combating negative social media posts explored in RQ4, the research participants identified communication skills, professionalism, creativity, and understanding as the most useful.

In Chapter 5, I interpret the results in the context of current research on the topic and the conceptual framework. I also provide recommendations for further research and implications for professional practice and social change to help news organizations to use more effective strategies in mitigating negative influence on reputation.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this qualitative, multiple case study was to explore and understand the strategies that effectively remedy negative social media comments, the skills used to employ remedial actions, the reasons why organizations fail to develop effective strategies, and the motivations to develop them among the participants and their organizations. I chose a multiple case study design because the aim was to examine the nature of the research phenomenon within the context of multiple news organizations in the Midwestern metropolitan area. One of the most important strategies in mitigating negative comments on social media, according to the news professionals interviewed for this study, is to have a specialized and well-organized social media team that knows how to respond to these comments adequately. In this chapter, I discuss the interpretations of the findings, the limitations of the study, recommendations for future research, and implications for social change.

Interpretation of Findings

The Influence of Social Media on Organizations

The findings showed that social media platforms allow news professionals to reach a larger audience and establish a trustful brand; however, negative comments may be harmful for businesses and for individuals to whom these comments are directed. These outcomes were consistent with prior research and in other businesses. For example, in the hospitality sector, Lee and Ro (2016) found that negative comments may have more impact than positive ones. Kapoor et al. (2017) suggested that social media

communication, creation, and interactions between individuals and influence organizations' reputation. In my research, the participants pointed out that social media has predominantly positive influence on news organizations' reputation and that reaching larger audience is the positive aspect of this influence. Strategic social communication, along with a clear social media plan and established roles for team members, improve news organizations' reputations.

Social Media Strategies

As Lambret and Barki (2018) and Benthaus et al. (2016) suggested, organizations benefit from employing a set of social media guidelines for managing its use and ensuring professional engagement. Social media guidelines also address the issue of negative social media comments.

In order to overcome and resolve negative comments, Mishra (2015) suggested responding in a polite, conversational tone. News professionals who participated in my study also suggested responding to negative comments right away, that these responses should provide additional information, and directing attention towards an understanding of negative comments. The dilemma around the way of responding to negative comments was the central theme in research participants' answers.

Constructive criticism deserves a fast, polite, and elaborated answer. The news organizations' leaders emphasized extremely offensive comments as unresolvable. I believe that these comments reveal the frustration of the people who post them. They do not post such comments for the sake of constructive criticism. As some participants said,

these comments sometimes do not deserve an answer; therefore, deleting these comments or banning these people is an adequate strategy. However, they did recognize that most of the comments should be resolved by responding in a polite, conversational tone, as Mishra (2015) indicated, and thereby encourage civil discussions in user comments (Ksiazek 2015).

The results of my study were consistent with deVries et al. (2018) that the lack of resources, knowledge, and time to carry out an effective social media engagement strategy represent a challenge for small- to medium-sized organizations; and the lack of strategic focus and technical knowledge to adopt social media, as identified by Calli and Clark (2015). News professionals expressed that their social strategies would be more effective if they had a team which is in charge only of tasks related to social media, or a specialized social media management team. Time was also addressed as valuable asset, especially in the COVID-19 context, where a lot of human and financial resources have been reorganized, changed, and redirected.

Technical knowledge or the knowledge of social media in general, may appear as a problem for news leaders of older generation, because they did not grow up with social media, as young news professionals did. Some research participants also said that the use of social media especially captures the attention of a younger audience, as Geniets (2016) pointed out. P5 said, "Young adults are turning to social media to get their news. By having good posts on social media then people will trust you." Therefore, it is important

to hire social media managers who understand younger generations and who are able to address the messages in the appealing manner.

The findings of my study confirm that news organizations use social media to draw attention to their stories and reach a broader audience, consistent with Bivens, 2015; Josephson and Miller, 2015; and Judina and Platonov, 2019. News professionals in my study said that reaching a bigger audience was one of the most important transformations that occurred in their business. Social media allows them to reach people not only in the selected Midwestern metropolitan area, but in other states as well.

Leadership Skills for Combating Negative Social Media

Because I employed the skills approach to leadership as the part of the conceptual framework of this study, I asked news professionals for their opinions on useful, social media-related leadership skills. In my study, news professionals emphasized four competencies that lead to successful leadership in social media management: communication skills, understanding, creativity, and professionalism. In previous research, Mumford et al. (2000) emphasized three competencies that in synergy lead to successful leadership: social judgment, problem-solving, and knowledge. The likely reason why these competencies do not match with the ones suggested in the literature is the specific context of the news industry and social media. Mumford et al. considered the general context, while my study focused on news organizations specifically. In another study considering the general context, Northouse (2016) found that the competencies of social judgment, problem-solving, and knowledge lead to successful leadership. I will

briefly explain how the findings from my study confirm the findings of previous studies, which address to the more general context.

In my research, several participants emphasized that good social media managers know how to respond to negative comments adequately and react in certain situations, which could be interpreted as *social judgment*. In particularly, they discussed the judgment required to decide whether to respond to, delete, ignore, or ban a comment using insulting language. As Li et al. (2018) suggested, unresolved negative social media comments can do more damage than positive comments do good because negative comments reach a broader audience. However, several news professionals in my study agreed that depending on a situation, insults, threats, and discriminatory language do not deserve a response and that the best way to solve problem is to delete the comment, ban the person who commented, or simply ignore it. My research participants indirectly addressed social judgment and problem-solving as leadership skills. They also discussed the issue of knowledge on social media which was consistent with prior research.

E-leadership theory was another part of the conceptual framework of my study. Luo et al. (2015) suggested that e-leadership can utilize social media to encourage viewership and better understand public perspectives. The participants in my study recognized this tendency when talking about the positive outcomes of the influence of social media on their organizations' reputations. Participants stated that negative comments cannot be prevented completely because in the era of social media, everyone can express an opinion. However, they rated the general influence of social media on

news organizations' reputations as positive because social media platforms enable them to reach larger audience, communicate with the public, and build their brand.

A few research participants emphasized that a good response to a negative comment may produce a change in attitudes. For example, in P14's response, "If it's a positive comment fantastic. But if it's a negative comment that gives me a chance to change someone's mind." In P7's quote, "I find it's easiest to answer people directly and honestly and most of the time for me that is all people really want, and they usually back down from the negativity," traces of e-leadership can also be found. Answering to a comment is a direct interaction between a social media manager and a consumer (audience), which can initiate a change in consumer's attitudes. One of the goals of e-leadership is to produce a change in attitudes, feelings, thinking, behavior, and performance of individuals or organizations (see Abdul-Ridha & Jader, 2018).

Together, the skills approach to leadership and e-leadership theory can be used to explain the need for specific skills to effectively manage socio-environmental influences and information that is disseminated through technology rather than traditional means. If social media managers employed in news organizations are able to develop desirable e-leadership skills through training and team efforts, the reputation of these organizations would be improved.

Limitations of the Study

I limited the scope of this study to news directors, assignment managers, and executive producers who had been active on social media for 1 year or more. I excluded

other news personal and news leaders outside of the selected Midwestern metropolitan area. Including these subpopulations of news professionals in the present study may have produced different results.

One limitation was concern about the potential for interviewees to misrepresent an organization's social media presence or management strategies in their responses. Giunchiglia, Zeni, Gobbi, Bignotti, and Bison (2018) proved that people underestimate their social media usage by 40%. Although I employed a pilot study to screen the questions to make sure they were effective to minimize response bias, there was no way to determine the extent to which participants answered the questions honestly. It is possible that there were some misrepresentation of organizations' approaches to social media. I was sensitive to this possibility during the interviews, and even more so during my analysis of the transcripts. As a professional in this field, knowledgeable of this work and these people, my assessment was that the responses to interview questions were honest, candid, and true.

Recommendations

In this study, I employed a qualitative, multiple case study design; however, quantitative research generally involves a higher sample size and obtains more generalizable results (see Tracy, 2019). Future research, perhaps quantitative, might survey a larger number of organizations as well as a broader geographical area. Future researchers could also integrate a survey with open-ended questions as an alternative to an interview, which might generate more candid replies and possibly elicit clearer and

more candid answers about the reasons why news organizations cannot develop effective strategies.

Media discourse analysis may also be helpful in investigating different types of negative social media comments by mapping dominant discourses that shape the attitudes of society on social media. This kind of study, for example, might focus on one particular set of attitudes and explore the way in which they are expressed in the specific context. The researchers could analyze only negative or positive comments, related to a particular topic (e.g., healthcare, elections, pollution, culture), or a particular event that was covered by media.

It would also be beneficial to look at and compare the social media strategies of larger and smaller news organizations and perhaps other functions within news organizations. Further research may be conducted among leaders working in large-scale, international news networks, or among national news agencies. It would be interesting to explore how larger-scale news networks organize their social media teams, or what criteria they use to engage with consumers and followers through social media management.

Implications

Participants responded that adequate and contextual reactions and responses to social media comments (especially negative ones); having a strong, organized, and specialized social media team; careful consideration of comments; and identification of potential shortcomings were the most important strategies used to combat negative social

media comments. They identified the lack of resources (i.e., material or nonmaterial) and a related failure to organize a social media team and plan as the main factor that prevents them from developing effective social media strategy. The study participants highlighted establishing their brand and reaching a larger audience as the main motivation for developing effective social media strategies.

The findings of my study provide valuable insight into news professionals' understanding of the strategies that effectively remedy negative social media comments, the skills used to employ remedial actions, the reasons why organizations fail to develop effective strategies, and the motivations to develop them among the participants and their organizations. Professionals and organizations, as well as society in general, may benefit from this knowledge because social media communication is clearly an important aspect of 21st century culture. Some of the findings may be useful to professionals in various other fields who experience the same challenges with negative social media.

Some organizations employ a company-wide social media policy to create and share relevant content, engage with consumers, and provide guidelines on how negativity and complaints should be handled (Jankauskaite & Urboniene, 2016; Kwayu et al., 2018). The findings of the literature review suggested that successful management of social media requires a set of leadership skills, such as decision-making, problem-solving, communication, and e-leadership (Jiang et al., 2017; Luo et al., 2015). The findings from my study further suggest that news leaders need skills and strategies to manage negative posts on social media. If news professionals at the individual level

received information about these effective leadership skills, they could enhance their leadership role within the news organization and relationship with the public.

At the organizational level, the results of my study may be used to enhance effective social media strategies within news organizations and other groups in the news industry. The results may also be useful to social media managers, web producers, and other actors in news organizations whose work centers on digital communication.

Positive Social Change Implications

This study's findings can encourage social change by explaining the communication effects of social media in the news business. The study can provide news leaders with information to support decisions related to managing negative posts on social media. This study may offer social change by starting a conversation about social media which will build a relationship with followers. In the era of fake news, people are moving away from watching the news and trusting information on social media that news professionals post. They are instead moving towards other facets posting on social media. This trend may have a very negative impact on a society.

Methodological Implications

By using a qualitative multiple case study design instead of other candidate methods, I gained a deeper insight into news professionals' approach to negative social media comments and reputation. Their answers and narratives showed how comments are handled on a daily level, what dilemmas they face with, how they perceive social media, what challenges they recognize in developing successful strategies, what skills they find

useful and how they make sense about their relationship to the audience and the consumers of social media. Through careful investigation of these questions, as well as through interpretation, I managed to explain *what* and *how* the phenomena of negative social media is manifested in the present context.

Implications for Theory

I utilized two conceptual frameworks in my research: skills approach to leadership and e-leadership. The skills approach to leadership demonstrated that it is important to understand how effective social media management can occur when individuals employ specific leadership skills related to factors such a social judgment, problem-solving, and technological knowledge (Mumford et al., 2000). E-leadership demonstrated that it is imperative to explore strategies and skills necessary for effective social media management within news organizations (Luo et al., 2015). Although the skills approach to leadership and e-leadership have rarely been investigated in the literature, findings from my study indicated that news professionals need specific leadership skills and strategies to deal with online social media management.

The specific leadership skills for combating negative social media comments were understood as the manifestation of broader leadership competencies, addressed by the skills approach to leadership. For example, the judgment required to decide whether to respond to, delete, ignore, or ban a comment using insulting language requires the skill of problem-solving. The communication skill requires the particular technological knowledge. Successfully answering a comment may result in a change in a

commentator's negative attitude. These interpretations of results corroborate theories in conceptual framework and put them in a news industry context.

Previous research portrayed social media strategies as a way of enhancing organizational reputation, but failed to address many other significant aspects of social media, especially in the news industry. My study addressed this gap, related to social media management and business outcomes pertaining to the strategies and skills used within news organizations. The ability to express and alternate the opinion on social media has been questioned in literature (see, for example, Weeks et al., 2017). Generally, flow of information has been transformed in the era of social media. The nature of interaction has also been transformed by advanced information technology. Online interaction between news organizations and audience may result in a change in attitudes, even if these attitudes are negative. Successful e-leadership improves the overall picture about the organization and contributes to good reputation.

Recommendations for Professional Practice

As empirical implications, I provide a set of recommendations or strategies for professional practice. The news organizations that are facing problems in dealing with the negative comments may find the results of this research helpful by following these strategies:

- Raise awareness about the enormous influence of social media.

- The use of various social media platforms helps in reaching larger audience.

- The use of various social media platforms further establishes the brand.

- Identify the shortcomings in the existing social media strategies. If there are no social media strategies in place, make sure to create them with the help of a professional team.

- Provide a team for social media management.

- Develop social media guidelines for your organization.

- Avoid giving social media management tasks to untrained people.

- Invest more into education on social media platforms (seminars, courses, etc.).

- Make sure that every comment is carefully considered.

- Make sure to respond to every negative comment that is not insulting, discriminatory, offensive, or profane.

- Check twice the criticized information.

- Respond in a polite and honest tone.

- Respond as soon as possible.

- Consult if you have a dilemma whether to respond to or delete the comment for inappropriate language.

- Provide social media managers/web producers who have good communication skills.

- Try to keep the professional atmosphere within the organization.

Conclusions

Social media is a powerful tool for communication in the contemporary world. The news industry is tightly related to media, and naturally, it has recognized the

potential of social media. Organizational leaders need to be aware of the damages that negative comments on social media can cause to organizational performance and reputation. Organizational leaders, therefore, need to focus on prevention of negative comments. Of course, it is not possible to entirely prevent the negative comments, because in the era of social media, everyone has the freedom to express an opinion or an attitude. Sometimes, people may transfer their frustration to the keyboard and forget that there is a real person behind every shared story or a post. These problems demand trained experts on social media, who know how to adequately respond to comments. These problems also require further scientific research.

This study contributes to understanding of news professionals' perceptions of the strategies that effectively remedy negative social media comments, the skills to employ remedial actions, the reasons why organizations fail to develop effective strategies, and the motivations to develop them among the participants and their organizations. News professionals are aware of the influence of social media in their job. They are able to recognize strategies that are working. However, they still face many challenges and they need to adapt to all new ways of communicating with the audience.

Strategic social media communication is an important tool for leaders. By developing effective social media strategies, leaders are able to reestablish their brand and adapt it to 21st century society and the digital era. A well-known brand is the highest value in today's business. The development of effective social media strategy and team is hard work, but it is an investment which pays off in the long run. The investment in the

development of effective social media strategies and specialized social media teams is

worthwhile and necessary.

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Appendix A: Interview Guide

1. In your experience, how do you perceive the influence of social media upon your organization's reputation?

2. Based on your past experience, have these comments been positive or negatively impactful upon organizational reputation?

3. What are factors that you perceive as preventing your organization from developing strategies that effectively handle social media?

4. How do these factors contribute or hinder your social media management strategies?

5. In your experience, how do you handle negative comments that are posted on your social media sites?

6. Can you provide examples that illustrate previous strategies that handled negative comments?

7. What are leadership skills that you use that are useful for combating negative social media posts?

8. Can you elaborate on leadership skills that have been useful for handling negative social media posts?

Appendix B: Twitter Data Collection Form

Twitter Post Description	Organization Case Study Number (Number used for confidentiality)	Total number of negative comments	Total number of positive comments	Response to negative comments on post
X	X	X	X	X