

**IMPRESSION MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES AND PERFORMANCE OF ONLINE
BUSINESSES IN NAIROBI CITY, KENYA**

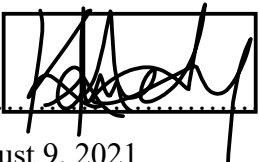
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DECLARATION


This research project is my original work and has not been presented for examination in any other university.

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This research project is submitted for examination with my approval as the university supervisor.

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ABSTRACT

This research investigates how impression management strategies impact the performance of online businesses in Nairobi. Various impression management strategies are canvassed by various scholars in general terms. The study is anchored in the impression management theory and the social capital theory. The broad categorizations of impression management strategies, namely, self-promotion, exemplification, intimidation, ingratiation and supplication were explored in terms of their applicability to the organizational environment. Of these, intimidation, self-promotion, and supplication were specifically investigated. A descriptive cross-sectional survey design was employed in order to minimize any mediating or moderating factors arising from the dynamic online environment. The Facebook profiles of 30 online businesses that are registered in Nairobi were studied. The study established very weak correlation between impression management strategies and performance of online businesses. The study recommends further research in the correlations between various variables in online businesses. Particularly, there is need to explore the relationship between member subscriptions and both positive and negative feedback to business posts.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

Impression management, a concept that has been discussed and used for many years, focuses on how actors present themselves in order to elicit certain impressions from their subjects (Leary and Kowalski, 1990). Erving Goffman (1959, 1963, 1967) is credited with being the originator of the concept and studies of self-presentation. Since then, the concept has received scholarly attention in various fields like organizational behavior, human resource management, psychology, and anthropology. The relationship between impression management and human resource functions has been the subject of academic interest in human resource management (Wayne and Liden, 1995; Singh and Vinnicombe, 2002; Bolino et al, 2008). Organizational performance indicates, inter alia, the relative success or failure of a business. While performance of offline businesses is closely tied to financial metrics, the performance of online businesses is a multidimensional construct and is thus measured through the metrics of site usage and traffic, multidimensional scorecards, and marketing metrics. Over the last ten years, the more user-interactive social media has replaced or complemented the more formal websites (Ghandour et al., 2011; Donkor, 2003; Rossi, 2012).

This study is anchored in the impression management the social capital theories. According to the theory of impression management, people often project their image based on their apparent audience (Goffman, 1959). Presentations of self are negotiated and prepared in the backstage. The theory describes the different faces that individuals opt to present and elucidates the preparation process. According to Woolcock (1998), the social capital theory comprises “norms and networks facilitating collective actions for mutual benefits”. The assumption that underlies the theory is that interpersonal relationships are stable and felt subjectively (Bourdieu, 1983). Social capital depends on context and may take any of several interconnected forms such as sanctions, obligatory form, intergenerational closure, norms, and trust.

Online businesses are those commercial entities that transact business mainly over the internet. These kinds of businesses have steadily developed over the last 25 years and were coined as “e-business” in 1996 by International Business Machines [IBM] marketing and internet team (Gerstner, 2002). Schultz (2009) attributes the initial rise in online businesses to the drastic pervasion of the internet phenomenon. UNCTAD (2020) reports that online businesses have gained an exponential increase in importance in 2020 due to the Covid-19 global pandemic and it is projected that this radical shift will remain even after the pandemic. Online businesses in Kenya, while gaining prominence even prior to 2020, have

gathered more momentum in the year 2020 due to the impact of Covid-19. Due to the limited contact between people, online trading has gained preference as the mode of commercial transactions.

1.1 Impression Management

Jones and Pittman (1982) define impression management as the creation of a desired impression in a specific other by one shaping their own behavior. Thus, impression management necessarily involves two parties: the actor, or the person who seeks to influence others' impression of self; and the subject, namely, anyone whose perception the actor seeks to influence, irrespective of whether the actor is his/her junior or senior (Arkin and Shepperd 1989; Feris et al. 1994; Bolino and Turnley 1999; Bolino et al. 2006).

Impression management is a conscious activity since the actor consciously wants the subject to view them in a certain way, whether the actor is aware that his/her actions constitute impression management or not. Studies have shown that activities that preclude self-consciousness due to high demands of the task have minimal or no strategic impression management at all (Duval & Wicklund 1972). In fact, acts that constitute impression management strategies are frequently interwoven with other elements of behavior that separately have other significances as well (Jones & Pittman 1982). In other words, impression management does not imply deceit or simulation on the part of the actor (although these can additionally be present).

1.1.1 Impression Management strategies

Impression management has been redefined in recent literature as an effort to control the self's image from the perception of others, whether this effort is conscious or unconscious (Mtshelwane, Nel & Brink, 2016). Additionally, research shows that people have employed impression management strategies to endear themselves to employers and potential employers or to advance in career and achieve greater success (Judge & Bretz, 1994; Ellis, West, Ryan & DeShon, 2002). Accordingly, impression management has to do with how actors present themselves in order to receive favorable perception in the eyes of their subjects (Hooghiemstra, 2000).

According to the Jones and Pittman taxonomy, there are five tactics of self-presentation (Jones and Pittman, 1982). These are ingratiation, intimidation, self-promotion, exemplification and supplicatory strategies. Jones and Pittman (1982) posit that these strategies can coexist and one individual can exhibit more than one strategy either concurrently or at different times. Tedeschi and Melburg (1984) explain

impression management using the 4x4 taxonomy. The taxonomy groups impression management tactics into two dichotomies: tactical/strategic or assertive/defensive.

The 4x4 taxonomy includes tactical-assertive strategies such as self-promotion and ingratiation, tactical-defensive strategies such as apologizing and giving excuses, strategic-assertive strategies such as being trustworthy and credible, and strategic-defensive strategies such as alcoholism and other drug abuse. The 4x4 taxonomy therefore adds to the taxonomy of attribution by providing a different framework of conceptualizing impression management tactics.

Ingratiation is “a class of strategic behaviors illicitly designed to influence a particular other person concerning the attractiveness of one’s personal qualities” (Jones and Wortman, 1973). It is accepted as the most common and pervasive impression management strategy (Jones and Pittman 1982). The strategy is labelled illicit due to the tendency for ingratiation actions to be focused toward an objective outside of the implied contract underlying social interaction (Jones and Pittman 1982). The actor deliberately hides his/her ‘ulterior’ impetus or the importance of his/her stake in being judged as likeable. Cognitive evasion as between the actor and his/her target is thus a usual feature of ingratiation.

The actor does not usually wish to view himself/herself as ingratiating; the target trusts that the actor is genuine in observing the implicit social contract (Jones and Pittman 1982). The social aspect of ingratiation has been highlighted in recent literature, which additionally redefine it as an individual’s effort to increase their likeability in the eyes of their audience particularly during social interactions (Cooper, 2005). Even though it is a common social phenomenon, scholars focus mostly on ingratiation at the workplace (Tsang, 2014).

Intimidation, in direct contrast to ingratiation, demonstrates the actor’s power over the target. The actor usually seeks to show the target that the actor is both capable and empowered to exact pain and suffering on the target, as well as the disposition to use that power particularly if he fails to get his way (Jones & Pittman, 1982). Rather than seeking to be loved, the actor induces fear in the target. Bolino & Turnley (2003) posit that intimidation can induce either favorable or unfavorable response from the subject. From the foregoing, intimidation is more common in situations where there is a direct involuntary relationship between the parties. It will therefore not be analyzed by this study, giving the willing buyer-willing seller nature of businesses.

Self-promotion is distinguished from ingratiation on the basis that the actor wants to augment their qualities of aptitude (whether as general competence or with reference to a particular skill) rather than

those of likeability (Jones, 1964; Jones and Pittman, 1982). Since the focus of the actor is to be seen as supremely competent, the actor may show attributes that characterize ingratiation or those that characterize intimidation (Jones and Pittman 1982). In any case, competence in and of itself may be intimidating. Carlson et al. (2011) list self-promotion as one of the impression management strategies that most lends itself to deception, especially through lying and faking. Self-promotion is the concept of a company presenting its brand, goods and services to the public within its own media, usually by way of advertisement. (Karstens and Schutte, 2015).

Exemplification, just like self-promotion, seeks esteem; unlike it, however, exemplification showcases integrity and moral worthiness as opposed to competence (Jones, 1990). The actor exemplifies virtues of morality, discipline and charity. Exemplification can therefore be defined as the categorization of impression management eliciting an ascription of moral worth and creating the environment for potential guilt in a target, who is in turn motivated to emulate or model the actor.

Supplication involves making an obligatory norm noticeable, which norm is binding on the subject, by stressing the actor's inability to fend for self (Berkowitz and Daniels, 1963; Jones and Pittman, 1982). As a strategy, therefore, the actors advertise their own dependence in order to solicit help. This may be in form of overemphasis of ineptitude in a job in order to obtain help or overplaying a dire financial condition to solicit funding (Chaubey and Kandpal, 2017). Supplication works best when there seems to be an arbitrary or inadvertent component in the power relationship (Schopler and Matthews, 1965).

1.1.2 Organizational Performance

Hubbard (2009) calls for an adoption of a broad definition of organizational performance, recognizing and addressing the extent to which work processes and outcomes are sustainable. Additionally, the effectiveness of meeting targets such as strategies and plans, is improved by an assessment of organizational performance that accounts for both internal and external factors (George, Walker and Monster, 2019).

According to Richard et al. (2009), managers should consider a wide range of factors while defining performance, particularly customers, employees, shareholders and other investors, temporal context, assets, and strategic choices.

Luo et al. (2012) posit that organizational performance should be assessed in operational as well as economic terms. Not only should organization performance be indicated by sales, profits, shares and other financial metrics, but it should also be measured based on observable indices such as customer satisfaction and loyalty, social capital wielded by the organization, and competitive advantage

stemming from the organization's capabilities and resources. In the context of this study, organizational performance extends to member subscription and engagement in the online profiles of the businesses under study.

1.1.3 Online Businesses in Kenya

Online businesses in Kenya operate either on the more formal fora such as company websites or the less formal fora such as social media. Since the online businesses still have to run physical logistics such as delivery and return of goods, they have physical premises and registered offices in addition to their internet accounts. This study focuses on online businesses whose physical premises are in Nairobi City County. Souter and Kerretts-Makau (2012) point to the difficulty in collecting accurate information on internet activities especially in developing countries.

This is also the case with reference to information on online businesses in Kenya. The official government records list online businesses based on their physical addresses without reference to their online activities. In addition to its objectives, this study will be able to create a tentative repository of online businesses in Nairobi city county.

1.2 Research Problem

Impression management relates with performance of organizations in ways that have been of major interest to scholars and researchers all over the world. Over the years, the issues of situational application of appropriate impression management techniques in businesses has bothered many researchers and academicians and this interest seems to be growing in tandem with the expanding nature of organizational and commercial transactions. Employee-related activities such as recruitment, performance appraisals and promotions are commonly affected by the perception of both employees as well as the management (Ferris et al., 1999; Bolino et al., 2008). To the extent that impression management influences this perception of employees, it is crucial in determining the essence and distribution of human resources within an organization. This in turn influences the capability and/or capacity of the organization to subsist and/or flourish (Becker and Gerhart 1996; Bowen and Ostroff, 2004; Huselid, 1995).

Impression management in the organization has been researched from the organizational perspectives since the 1980's, and the scholarship has since then been expanding while studying impression management in the organization from various angles: gender, performance, reward and recruitment (Bolino, Long and Turnley, 2016). This shows that impression management is an aspect of organizational behavior that cannot be ignored. The drastic rise in access and affordability of the

internet has caused a corresponding increase in online business (Schultz, 2009). The businesses conduct most of their business online, but they also involve physical logistic systems. Accordingly, the online businesses have physical premises and registered offices, which this study used as criteria for determining whether the business is located in Nairobi. Online businesses in Kenya have been on a steady rise in tandem with growing accessibility to internet and electricity. They have taken a special importance with the significant rise in online shopping occasioned by adaptation to the Covid-19 challenges.

Several studies have been done both globally as well as locally. For instance, Wayne and Liden (1995) studied how self-presentation impacts performance evaluation in the United States of America. The deployment of impression management by a subordinate in the initial stages of interaction with a supervisor was found to bring fondness and feelings of similarity, and consequently impacts performance ratings later. However, this study did was not based on online businesses, nor was its unit of study the organization. On the other hand, Rao et al. (1995) conducted an empirical research of the backgrounds, processes, and impacts of influence strategies in bottom-up impression management. The study found that subordinates' strategies vary with their objectives in self-presentation. This study, however, focused on individuals as the unit of study, rather than the organization. Similarly, Ellis et al. (2003) conducted a study on impression management strategies used in structured interviews that contain experience-based as well as situational questions. It was found that the interviewees undertaking structured interviews used some form of impression management. Rozell and Gundersen (2003) studied how impression management by leaders impacts their team's feelings of cohesion, consensus and communication. Results indicated that impression management strategies employed by team leaders indeed influence the group's cohesion, consensus and communication.

Bolino et al. (2006) researched how self-presentation strategies impact assessments of citizenship conduct within the organization, by superiors. The study investigated how various strategies of self-presentation influence supervisors' ratings of organizational citizenship behavior (OCB). OCB ratings were found to mediate the connection between impression management strategies focused on the supervisor, as well as the supervisors' evaluations of employee likeability. Chen and Fang, 2008 carried out a study to establish how self-presentation moderates the connection between performance and organizational politics. The study found that employees whose impression management strategies were more job-focused, showed higher chances of achieving ratings that were better than those of their counterparts involved in low-level strategies when organizational politics were perceived at a less level.

Separately, these studies show strong links between impression management and various human resource functions. However, none of these studies investigates impression management as an organization-level phenomenon, or its relationship with clients and customers. Additionally, the studies are all conducted outside Kenya; therefore, their context is different from the focus of this study.

Locally, Twalib (2017) undertook a study to determine the role of trust, competence and ingratiation in the relationship between Leader-Member Exchange and Career Mobility in Kenya Breweries Ltd. The study indicated that ingratiation mediates the relationship between Leader-Member Exchange and Career Mobility. The study will use impression management, namely ingratiation, as a mediator. The current study will use impression management as an independent variable that affects performance.

These studies show that literature on self-presentation in relation to organization performance is deficient in the Kenyan context. Additionally, studies on impression management have largely focused on individual behavior rather than the behavior of the organization as an entity. Recent and ongoing developments in online business presence and practice have also necessitated a corresponding realignment of academic studies to respond to the new and emerging contexts. This research bridges the gap by determining how impression management strategies impact online business performance in Nairobi City County. It will be guided by the research question: What is the influence of impression management strategies on the performance of online businesses in Nairobi City County?

1.3 Research Objective

To determine the influence of impression management strategies on online business performance in Nairobi city county.

1.4 Value of the Study

This research addresses a knowledge gap in both impression management and its relationship to online business performance in Kenya. It will research impression management from an organizational level, which is a departure from the traditional individualized nature of the field. In addition, it will relate this with performance of online businesses in Nairobi, providing a focused attention to a sector that is rapidly developing.

The study will also provide valuable information to online businesses in Kenya, which can be used in developing practical online strategies. The online businesses will obtain insights into how certain self-presentation strategies impact performance and thus be able to make informed choices on their modes of operation. Finally the study provides policy makers with a better understanding of priority areas as

far as online businesses are concerned. This study will reveal deficiencies in policy and law thereby providing an opportunity for positive impact on online businesses under the country's laws and accompanying policies.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This section interrogates scholarly discourse in impression management strategies. Secondary resources constituting research work on the research area are discussed. The literature is vital in grounding the observations made during the research, as well as aligning those observations with the objectives of the study.

2.2 Theoretical Foundation

This research is grounded in the impression management and the social capital theories. The impression management theory is utilized for purposes of explaining the motivations directing human interactions and performances. The social capital theory explains relational norms and networks as facilitators of collective actions for mutual benefits among those involved in the relationship.

2.2.1 Impression Management Theory

This theory posits that people project certain images of themselves based on their imagined audience (Goffman, 1959). Presentations of self are negotiated and prepared in the backstage. The theory describes the different faces that individuals opt to present and elucidates the preparation process based on intersectionality of the client base and the volatile nature of social media. As such, online businesses need to be adaptable to these erratic situations that characterize the online space. In order to survive and thrive, the strategies that online businesses use to manage their online impression may frequently be required to adjust to circumstances. For this reason, the impression management theory is the grounding theory of this study.

The theory describes the motives underlying intricate social performances and interactions. It is an objective-oriented effort to affect others' impressions on an individual, group, or business (Goffman, 1959). The objective is usually to create a favorable first impression in the targeted subject. The perception that the target forms regarding the actor is considered beneficial to the actor and therefore the self-presentation is considered necessary.

2.2.2 The Social Capital Theory

According to Woolcock (1998), social capital theory comprises "norms and networks facilitating collective actions for mutual benefits". The term is prone to various interpretations due to the broadness of description (Greeley, 1997; Portes, 1998). It is a concept based on the idea that social relationships potentially enable the accretion of advantages by participants (White, 2002). Conversely, it is

understood as being jointly inherent in associations rather than severally among individual participants. (Coleman, 1988b).

Since it depends on context, the theory is open to various interconnected constructions. These include duties, intergenerational closure, trust, customs, and penalties, assuming that the interpersonal relations are robust and individually experienced (Bourdieu, 1983). These relations constitute an intricate network of connections (Fukuyama, 1995; Fukuyama, 1999; Lin, 1999b; Putnam, 1993; White, 2002). This can be exemplified by the voluntary involvement of workers in a lunch break discussion on social and organizational aspects. In such a case, the discussion would presumably benefit all participants.

2.3 Impression Management Strategies and Performance of Online Businesses

The relationship between impression management and online businesses derives from the increased likelihood that customers will only interact with the business through the online platform, without any direct human interaction. As such, the business is the “actor” and the customer is the “subject”; the online platform presents the stage for the actor to induce likeability in the subject and subsequent favorable action, in this case a commercial transaction. These designations are based on three main pillars: Individuals respond to situations depending on the significances attributed to those situations, such significances arise from within social relations, and the interpretation method of those significances directs the conduct of individuals and often alters those significances (Scheff, 2005).

Numerous studies relating impression management to performance ratings of employees have been conducted over the years. People have used impression management strategies to endear themselves to employers and potential employers or to advance in career and achieve greater success (Judge and Bretz, 1994; Ellis, West, Ryan and DeShon, 2002). In the realm of employee performance appraisal, existing scholarly literature has explored how impression management strategies impact assessment of employees by their supervisors (Bolino and Turnley, 2003; Ferris, Judge, Rowland and Fitzgibbons, 1994; Wayne and Ferris, 1990; Wayne and Kacmar, 1991; Wayne and Liden, 1995). Zivnuska et al. (2004) also finds a correlation between self-presentation and organization-based politics, and supervisor evaluation of the performance of their employees. These various studies show that impression management strategies frequently contribute to an employee’s performance ratings and, even in the long run, how supervisors view their subordinates.

Similarly, there have been studies addressing performance of online businesses both locally and internationally. Donkor (2003) argues that while performance of offline businesses is closely tied to

financial metrics, the performance of online businesses is a multidimensional construct and is thus measured through various metrics. This argument is reinforced by subsequent scholars (Ghandour et al., 2011; Rossi, 2012). These studies call for a reconceptualization of performance measurement in the context of online businesses in various settings. While the scholars offer paradigms and metrics for this purpose, this study argues for an even more context-specific paradigm. Kabuba (2014) canvasses the challenges and benefits of online trading in Kenya, while establishing the relationship between various ecommerce models and performance. The study is relevant as it points to useful ways of measuring performance of online businesses especially in a Kenyan context. Consequently, this study adopts Ghandour's as modified by Kabuba (Ghandour et al., 2011; Kabuba, 2014). A further modification is made so that performance measurement considers the setting of impression management, namely, that the perception of the subject is as important as the image projected by the actor.

What seems to be insufficient is studies that approach organizations as the entities practicing impression management. Tata and Prasad (2015) take this approach and examine the disjuncture between corporate social responsibility image perceived by audiences and that of the organization's corporate social responsibility identity. They propose that this incongruence is bridged by way of organizational impression management. Rasmussen (2005) alludes to group impression management among a group of Tuareg performers from Mali called Tartit. The Tartit musicians misrepresent certain cultural aspects from their community typically when performing to an international audience. Advertisements of their performances often appeal to "Western" concepts of equality and social justice. The international performances are a marked departure from their local ones in terms of repertoire, instrumentation and gendered meanings. It is ironic that these acts of misrepresentation, whether consciously or otherwise, occur specifically during international performances meant to showcase the very culture that they misrepresent. From the foregoing, organizational impression management is a promising area as far as scholarly research is concerned and this study will further contribute to this area.

While organizational performance with respect to offline businesses is closely tied to financial metrics, the performance of online businesses has been presented as a multidimensional construct and is thus measured through various metrics (Donkor, 2003; Ghandour et al., 2011; Rossi, 2012). Metrics that align with online businesses are site usage and traffic, multidimensional scorecards and marketing metrics. This study adopts five indicators of performance for online businesses: online presence

(member subscription), online engagement (likes and comments) and customer satisfaction (public reviews and shares).

2.4 Empirical Studies in Impression Management

Self-presentation strategies and organizational performance have been the subject of empirical studies. Employee-related activities such as recruitment, performance appraisals, raises and promotions are commonly affected by the perception of fellow employees and the management (Bolino et al. 2008, Ferris et al., 1999)

Wayne and Liden (1995) undertook a study to establish how self-presentation impacts performance ratings. The study interrogated a model suggesting that the self-presentation tactics of subordinates impact their performance ratings by influencing the employees' likeability by their supervisors as well as the supervisor's feelings of likeness towards the employees. Measurements were taken for conduct related to self-presentation, fondness, and likeness forty-two days after the creation of pairings between employees and supervisors. Measurements of output evaluations were taken after twenty-five weeks. Findings supported the general model as well as numerous other relationships. In addition, impression management usage greatly impacted the performance ratings. Demographic likeness and self-presentation among subordinates impacted assessment by superiors due to the supervisors' feelings of likeness in relation to their juniors. Moreover, the study establishes that subordinates' usage of self-presentation in their initial interactions with a superior brings fondness and feelings of similarity, and consequently impacts performance ratings later.

Ellis et al. (2003) studied the employment of self-presentation structured in structured interviews that contain experience-based questions as well as situational ones. The research studied whether the type of interview question affected the deployment of impression management strategies by the applicants. Nearly all the interviewees undertaking structured interviews used some form of impression management. The impression management strategies used were mostly assertive rather than defensive. Notably, varying the type of questions impelled the deployment of different impression management strategies. Ingratiation was more frequently observed when the interviewees answered situational questions, while self-promotion was observed more often when answering experience-based questions. In addition, self-promotion and ingratiation strategies were found to positively affect evaluation by interviewers.

Rozell and Gundersen (2003) studied how impression management by leaders impacts their team's feelings of cohesion, consensus and communication. Leaders in a small team setup were studied to empirically evaluate the effectiveness of using the leader's self-presentation as a predictor of team satisfaction. Using a sample of over a hundred participants from a midwestern university, this study interrogated impression management among leaders as a predictor of their teams' unity, harmony, and communication. The results showed that the self-presentation strategies employed by team leaders indeed influence the group's cohesion, consensus and communication. Exemplification was found to be a predictor of team cohesion, perceptions around relationships between team members and decision processes, and perceptions concerning team decision results. Ingratiation was found to affect team unity positively while supplication was found to affect perceptions around relationships between team members and decision processes negatively. Feelings regarding individual effectiveness could not be predicted from any impression management strategies. In summary, therefore, the impression management strategies employed by team leaders influence the group's cohesion, consensus and communication.

Rao et al. (1995) researched the backgrounds, processes, and impacts of influence strategies in bottom-up impression management. The study found that employees have multiple objectives as well as multiple strategies. Subordinates' impression management strategies were found to vary with their goals. The subjects additionally employed a wider range of strategies to meet their objectives, than are usually ascribed to impression management. Performance evaluations were also founded on the supervisors' impressions of the employees, as well as feelings of their mode of influence. Although employees were found to trust that ingratiation would lead to more favorable evaluations, the use of teamwork led to more advantageous impressions, ergo evaluations. Employees who were assertive, on the other hand, created unfavorable impressions and received lower performance appraisals.

Bolino et al. (2006) researched how self-presentation strategies impact evaluations of organizational citizenship conduct by superiors. The study investigated the ways in which various self-presentation tactics influence supervisors' ratings of organizational citizenship behavior (OCB). More than a hundred supervisor-subordinate pairs were sampled. Supervisor-focused self-presentation tactics affected OCB ratings positively, while job-oriented ones tend to affect the OCB ratings negatively. In addition, it was found that employee likeability and overall performance ratings are positively linked to citizenship behaviors. OCB ratings were also found to mediate the connection between supervisor-

focused impression management strategies as well as the supervisors' evaluations of employee likeability.

Another empirical study established that self-presentation moderates the connection between performance and political affairs of the organization (Chen & Fang, 2008). By using expectancy theory, the research examined the intricacies in the link between feelings of organizational politics and performance ratings by observing the moderating effect of impression management on that connection. The research suggested that two kinds of impression management happened, that is, supervisor-oriented ones and job-oriented ones. A hypothesis was formed that a higher deployment of impression management strategies would alleviate the adverse effects of perceptions of organizational politics and performance ratings. Two hundred and ninety employees from ten Taiwanese enterprises were sampled. It was found that the impression management strategies focused on the job exerted a more substantial effect on the relationship between perceptions of organizational politics and performance ratings than those focused on the supervisor. The study found that employees engaging in job-oriented self-presentation strategies gained higher evaluations than their counterparts involved in low-level strategies where feelings of organizational politics were low.

Twalib (2017) undertook a study to determine the role of trust, competence and ingratiation in the relationship between Leader-Member Exchange and Career Mobility in Kenya Breweries Ltd. Using a population of 169 leader-subordinate dyads, the study indicated that ingratiation mediates the relationship between Leader-Member Exchange and Career Mobility. In the study, impression management, namely ingratiation, was researched as a moderator.

While all these studies point to a significant relationship between impression management and various human resource functions, and therefore justify further interest in impression management strategies in organizations, the connection between self-presentation and performance on the organizational level in the Kenyan context is deficient in literature. Additionally, studies on impression management have largely focused on individual behavior rather than the behavior of the organization as an entity. Rapid recent developments in online business presence and practice have further necessitated an updating of academic studies to respond to the new and emerging contexts. This study addresses the knowledge gap and provides a basis for policy enhancement.

CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter addresses the research design, the target population, sampling design, data collection and data analysis.

3.2 Research Design

This study employed a descriptive cross-sectional survey design since data was collected at one point in time. A cross-sectional survey design was used in order to minimize any mediating or moderating factors that arise from the online environment. These factors are time of access, internet charges, and prevailing online conversations, also called trending topics; The factors are so capable of affecting the direction of internet traffic as to affect the data collected from the online businesses. It was therefore more prudent to adopt a cross-sectional survey design so that all online businesses could be accessed at about the same period of time (Mutua, Oteyo, & Njeru, 2013; Imenda, 2014).

3.3 Target Population

The target population for this study was online businesses with registered offices in Nairobi County. In order to obtain uniform parameters, the study limited these online businesses to their presence on Facebook, which is one of the main social media platforms. This was made even more necessary since there existed no official records of online businesses in Nairobi, as all businesses are officially registered based on their physical addresses (Kabuba, 2014).

Based on the relatively small population of online businesses, this study conducted a census of online businesses in Nairobi city county. The census was composed of 30 online businesses that met the following criteria: have an official Facebook account, employ a business-customer e-commerce model, and have registered offices within Nairobi. This was to minimize mediating and moderating variables based on business model or social media platform.

3.5 Data Collection

Secondary data was obtained from official online sources. Data was collected from the public social media accounts of the online businesses. The target accounts were the official social handles of the online business. For purposes of consistency, this study focused on the Facebook accounts of online businesses, even if those same businesses had additional accounts on other social media. The data that was collected is: account profile and postings, which indicated impression management strategies; and member subscription, likes and comments, and public reviews and shares, which indicated performance

of online business. Impression management indicators were measured using the classical taxonomy of organizational impression management, which was used as data capture form (Mohamed, Gardner & Paolillo, 1999).

3.6 Data Analysis

The study sought to establish how the impression management strategies impacted this online presence. Specifically, intimidation, self-promotion and supplication were compared to corresponding public engagement with regard to positive and negative feedback. Likes as well as positive comments constituted positive feedback while dislikes and negative comments constituted negative feedback.

Descriptive statistics such as measures of central tendencies, frequencies, mean and deviations were utilized. Inferential statistics were applied in order to establish the correlations among the study variables. Specifically, multiple linear regression were applied, establishing the correlation between self-presentation tactics (x) and performance of online businesses (y). These relationships were then discussed, and inferences made accordingly.

CHAPTER FOUR: DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF RESULTS

4.1 Introduction

This chapter analyses the data collected from the study. The research objective was to determine how impression management strategies impact online business performance in Nairobi city county. Public Facebook profiles of thirty businesses domiciled in Nairobi were analyzed. The online presence was taken as the matrix of business performance as it reflects the pervasiveness of the business among the public.

4.2. The Nature of Businesses

The businesses that were researched varied in nature as shown in Table 4.1. The highest frequency was clothing businesses at 20%, followed by electronics businesses at 16.7%. Businesses exclusive to phones were considered separately from those dealing with electronics in general, and therefore it is noteworthy that all electronics businesses would aggregate 36.7%.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Bedding	1	3.3	3.3	3.3
	Clothing	6	20.0	20.0	23.3
	Electronics	5	16.7	16.7	40.0
	Footwear	4	13.3	13.3	53.3
	Furniture	2	6.7	6.7	60.0
	Hair	2	6.7	6.7	66.7
	Home Appliances	1	3.3	3.3	70.0
	Online Market	3	10.0	10.0	80.0
	Online Shop	1	3.3	3.3	83.3
	Online Shopping	2	6.7	6.7	90.0
	Phones	3	10.0	10.0	100.0
	Total	30	100.0	100.0	

Table 4.1: Nature of Business

4.3 Online Presence

In terms of existing online presence, the businesses had weekly interactions averaging 19.10, with a standard deviation of 28.33. Member subscriptions averaged 91,543.23 members, with a standard deviation of 2196.249. These are shown in Table 4.2. The disparity in online presence is important as it becomes an important consideration when assessing member feedback.

		Weekly Interactions	Number of Member Subscriptions
N	Valid	30	30
	Missing	0	0
Mean		19.10	91543.23
Median		11.00	23938.00
Std. Deviation		28.331	2196.249
Minimum		2	636
Maximum		142	926752
Percentiles	25	6.00	7709.50
	50	11.00	23938.00
	75	15.50	50840.75

Table 4.1: Online Presence

4.4 Self-Promotion Strategies

The data obtained from the businesses indicates a weak correlation between self-promotion and positive feedback. This is shown in Table 4.3. As a result, the data does not fit in a linear regression model, as shown in Figure 4.1.

		Positive Feedback	Self- Promotion Posts by the Business
Pearson Correlation	Positive Feedback	1.000	.347
	Self- Promotion Posts by the Business	.347	1.000
Sig. (1-tailed)	Positive Feedback	.	.030
	Self- Promotion Posts by the Business	.030	.
N	Positive Feedback	30	30
	Self- Promotion Posts by the Business	30	30

Table 4.3: Correlation between Self Promotion and Positive Feedback in Online Businesses

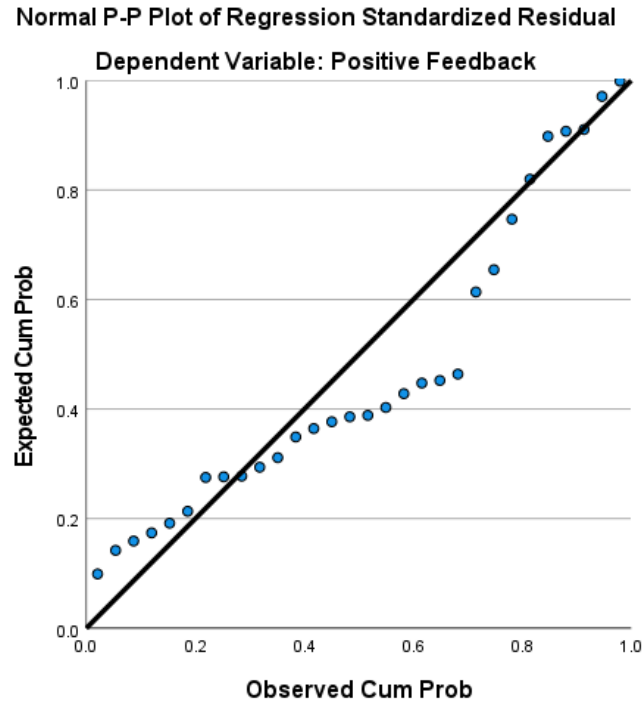


Figure 4.1: Regression model of Self-Promotion Posts and Positive Feedback

Similar findings were made with respect to negative feedback in response to self-promotion posts by online businesses. The correlation is weak and consequently a linear regression model does not fit the dataset. This is shown in Table 4.4 and Figure 4.2.

Table 4.4: Correlations between Self-Promotion Posts and Negative Feedback in online Businesses

		Negative Feedback	Self- Promotion Posts by the Business
Pearson Correlation	Negative Feedback	1.000	.278
	Self- Promotion Posts by the Business	.278	1.000
Sig. (1-tailed)	Negative Feedback	.	.068
	Self- Promotion Posts by the Business	.068	.
N	Negative Feedback	30	30
	Self- Promotion Posts by the Business	30	30

Table 4.4.: Correlations between Self-Promotion Posts and Negative Feedback in online Businesses

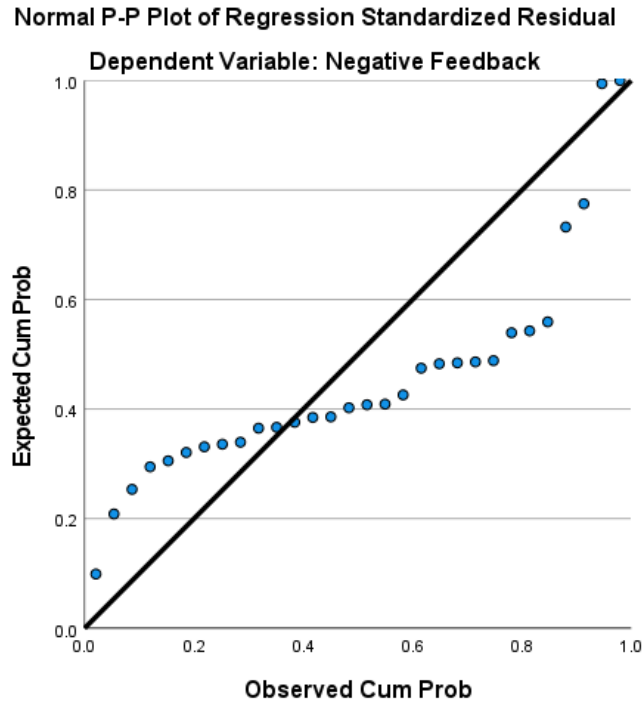


Figure 4.2: Regression model of Self-Promotion Posts and Negative Feedback

4.5 Intimidation Strategies

The correlation between intimidatory posts and positive feedback is also weak. However, this correlation is found to be stronger than that suggested by self-promotion posts. The regression model shows closer residuals than those displayed by self-promotion datasets. Table 4.5 and Figure 4.3 illustrate this finding.

		Positive Feedback	Intimidatory Posts by Business
Pearson Correlation	Positive Feedback	1.000	.585
	Intimidatory Posts by Business	.585	1.000
Sig. (1-tailed)	Positive Feedback	.	.000
	Intimidatory Posts by Business	.000	.
N	Positive Feedback	30	30
	Intimidatory Posts by Business	30	30

Table 4.5: Correlations between Intimidatory Posts and Positive Feedback

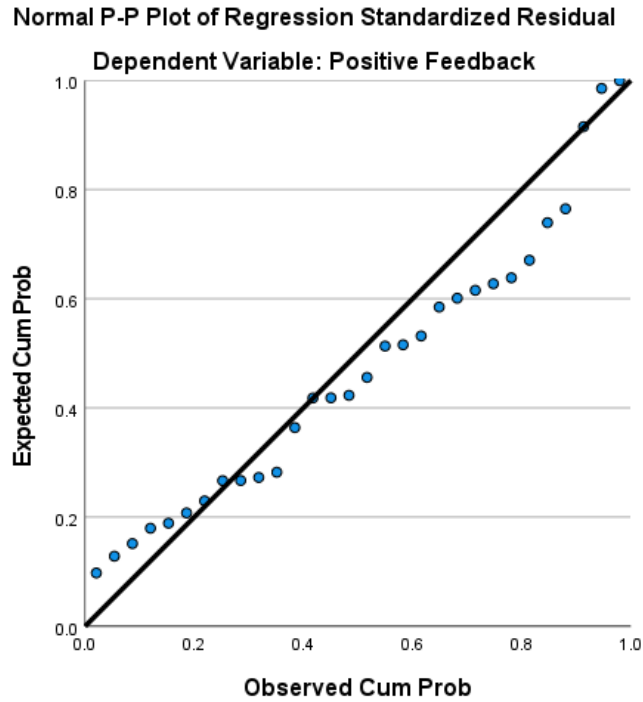


Figure 4.3: Regression model of Intimidatory Posts and Positive Feedback

In terms of negative feedback, the correlation with intimidatory posts is very weak ($R = .274$). Accordingly, the regression model does not fit the dataset. Table 4.6 and Figure 4.4 detail this finding.

		Negative Feedback	Intimidatory Posts by Business
Pearson Correlation	Negative Feedback	1.000	.275
	Intimidatory Posts by Business	.275	1.000
Sig. (1-tailed)	Negative Feedback	.	.071
	Intimidatory Posts by Business	.071	.
N	Negative Feedback	30	30
	Intimidatory Posts by Business	30	30

Table 4.6: Correlations between Intimidatory Posts and Negative Feedback

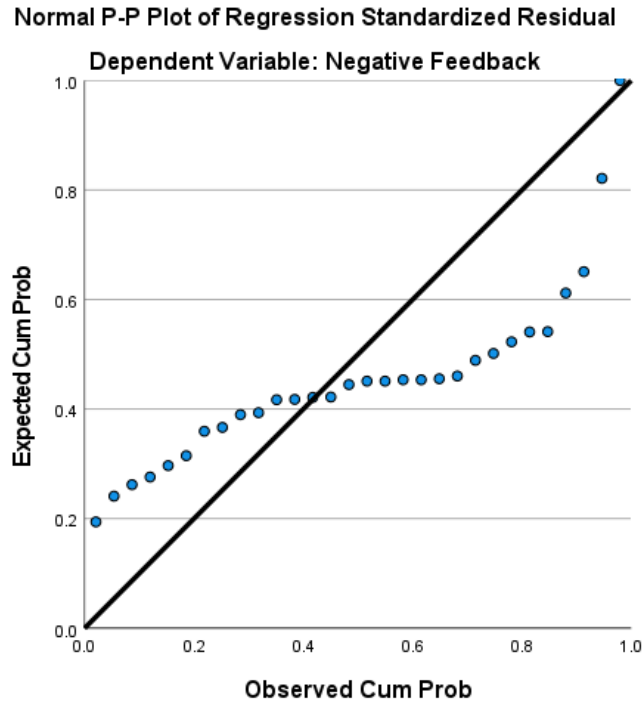


Figure 4.4: Regression model of Intimidatory Posts and Negative Feedback

4.6 Supplicatory Strategies

The correlation between supplicatory posts and positive feedback is weak, clocking at 43.4%. This is stronger than the correlation between self-promotion posts and positive feedback, but weaker than the correlation elicited by intimidatory posts. The regression model reflects the weakness of this correlation. Illustration of this dataset is shown in Table 4.7 and Figure 4.5.

		Positive Feedback	Supplicatory Posts by Business
Pearson Correlation	Positive Feedback	1.000	.434
	Supplicatory Posts by Business	.434	1.000
Sig. (1-tailed)	Positive Feedback	.	.008
	Supplicatory Posts by Business	.008	.
N	Positive Feedback	30	30
	Supplicatory Posts by Business	30	30

Table 4.7: Correlations between Supplicatory posts and positive feedback in online businesses

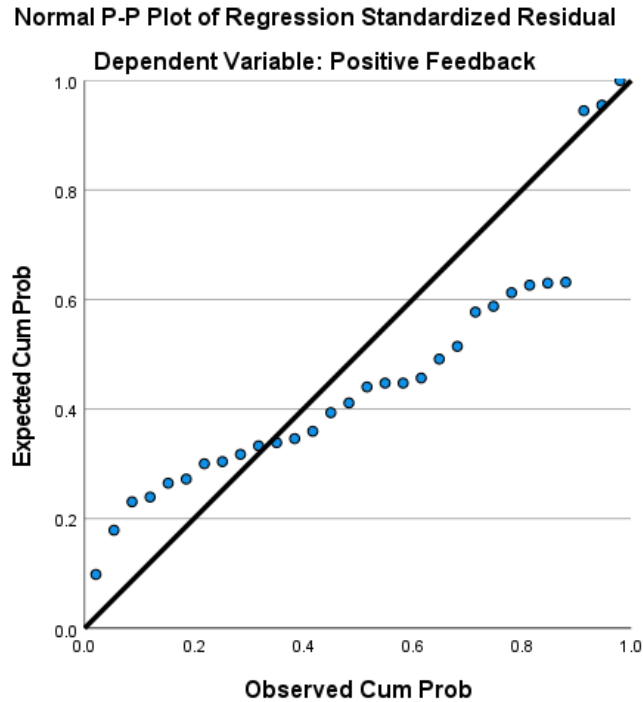


Figure 4.5: Regression model of Supplicatory Posts and Positive Feedback

Regarding negative feedback, the correlation with supplicatory posts is much weaker ($R = 11.5\%$). Accordingly, the regression model does not fit the dataset. Table 4.8 and Figure 4.6 illustrate this finding.

		Negative Feedback	Supplicatory Posts by Business
Pearson Correlation	Negative Feedback	1.000	.115
	Supplicatory Posts by Business	.115	1.000
Sig. (1-tailed)	Negative Feedback	.	.272
	Supplicatory Posts by Business	.272	.
N	Negative Feedback	30	30
	Supplicatory Posts by Business	30	30

Table 4.8: Correlations between Supplicatory posts and Negative Feedback in online businesses

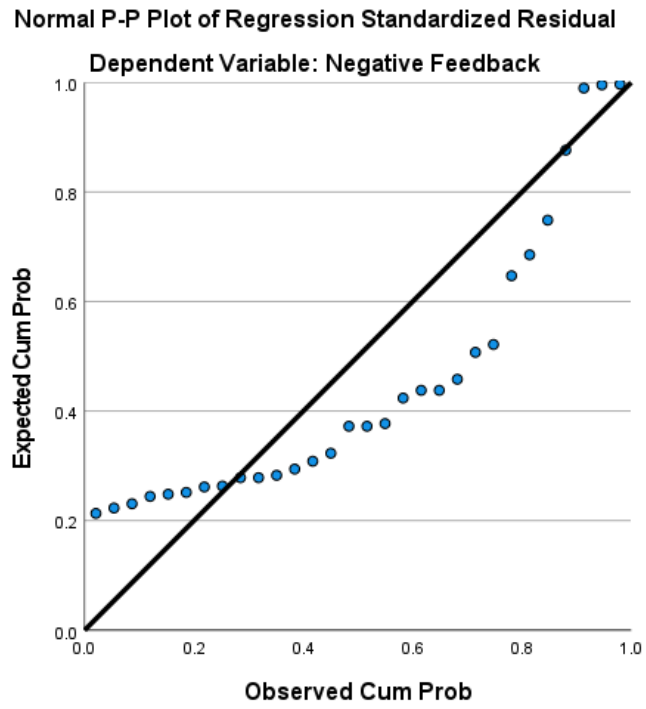


Figure 4.6: Regression model of Supplicatory Posts and Negative Feedback

CHAPTER FIVE: SUMMARY, CONCLUSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

This chapter summarizes the findings of the study and makes a conclusion from those findings. The chapter also presents recommendations of the study and areas for further research.

5.2. Summary

This research found very weak correlation between impression management strategies used by online businesses and the resultant feedback and business performance. The businesses investigated in the study were diverse in terms of existing member subscription and interaction with their public profiles. Additionally, the nature of businesses explored in this study was diverse, with a total of 11 different kinds of businesses forming the subjects of this study. This necessitated the inference that these findings are pervasive across the online business spectrum.

The study also shows that the impression management strategies under investigation, namely self-promotion, intimidation, and supplication, have weak correlation to business performance. While this correlation is different across the three impression management strategies, the overall finding is that none of the strategies display a strong correlation to performance of online business. In other words, online businesses did not seem to gain any advantage by using one impression management strategy as opposed to other, or at all. Conversely, the online businesses did not suffer any disadvantage by dint of using any one impression management strategy over another, or at all.

5.3 Conclusion

This research concludes that impression management strategies by online businesses have no influence on the performance of online businesses. Accordingly, there appears to be no significant benefit in employing any specific impression management strategy for purposes of online engagement. Similarly, there also appears to be no significant setbacks in using any impression management strategy in eliciting positive performance of online businesses.

5.4 Limitations of the Study

The study was limited by the number of registered online businesses in Nairobi. A wider pool of subjects would have provided more options in research design, data analysis and generalization. However, currently registered businesses were too few for a survey research design.

The research also did not fully delve into how COVID-19 impacted performance of online businesses, more than just acknowledging that such an impact may exist. As such, the findings of the research are

more usefully interpreted as a comparison among the businesses forming the target population, since data was collected contemporaneously.

5.5 Recommendations

The study recommends further research in the correlations between various variables in online businesses. Particularly, there is need to explore the relationship between member subscriptions and both positive and negative feedback to business posts. This was beyond the scope of this study, but it is a worthwhile area of discovery.

Additionally, the study recommends an exploration of different metrics of performance of online businesses, which would incorporate the traditional metrics related to profitability. When these are deployed in research in addition to the metrics that have been employed in this study, then a more holistic outcome is more likely.

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APPENDIX I: Taxonomy of Organizational Impression Management

Direct and Assertive Organizational Impression Management Tactics

Behavior	Definition/Description	Example
Ingratiation	Behaviors that are used by organizational actors to make the organization appear more attractive to others.	Promotional campaigns by the armed services which portray their branch of the military as providing attractive career opportunities.
Intimidation	Behaviors that present the organization as a powerful and dangerous entity which is able and willing to inflict harm on those that frustrate its efforts and objectives.	A large manufacturer that threatens a small supplier with a reduction of orders unless it terminates its relationship with one of the firm's competitors.
Organizational Promotion	Behaviors that present the organization as being highly competent, effective, and successful.	An organization that attributes the phenomenal sales of a new product to its savvy marketing campaign.
Exemplification	Behaviors that are used by the organization to project images of integrity, social responsibility, and moral worthiness; this tactic may also have a goal of seeking imitation by other entities.	Fund-raising campaigns by the United Way which highlight the moral worthiness and social benefits that accrue from the charitable causes the organization supports.
Supplication	Behaviors by the organization that portray an image of dependency and vulnerability for the purpose of soliciting assistance from others.	Domestic firms that emphasize their vulnerability to foreign competition while lobbying for tariffs and other forms of trade protection.

Direct and Defensive Organizational Impression Management Tactics

Behavior	Definition/Description	Example
Accounts	Explanations of a predicament-creating event which seek to minimize the apparent severity of the predicament.	Top management downplays the severity of their firm's bankruptcy, stating that Chapter 11 really means, "There's still hope."
Disclaimers	Explanations given prior to a potentially embarrassing action in order to ward off any negative repercussions for the actor's image.	Notices by brokerage firms which warn performance is no guarantee for the future.

Organization Handicapping	Efforts by an organization to make task success appear unlikely in order to provide a ready-made excuse for failure.	Remarks by an aerospace manufacturer's CEO that it is unlikely to outbid a French firm for a foreign contract because it is subsidized by the French government.
Apologies	Admissions of blameworthiness for a negative event, which include expressions of remorse and requests for a pardon.	A manager tells a customer, "We're sorry for the delay in shipping your order. We pride ourselves on timely deliveries, but we slipped up this time. Please forgive us."
Restitution	Offers of compensation, which are extended by the organization to the offended, injured, or otherwise, harmed an audience.	Airline passengers who are bumped from a flight due to overbooking are provided with vouchers for free round-trip tickets to any domestic destination of their choice.
Pro-social Behavior	Engaging in pro-social actions to atone for an apparent transgression and convince an audience that the actor merits a positive identity.	A southern university that attempts to atone for past racial discrimination by offering extensive array of minority scholarships and aggressively hiring minority faculty and administrators.

Indirect Organizational Impression Management Tactics

Behavior	Definition/Description	Example
Assertive Tactics		
<u>Connection Focused Tactics</u>		
Boasting	Proclaiming a positive link to a favorable other.	An advertising campaign that portrays a firm as an "Official" sponsor of the U.S. Olympic team.
Blaring	Proclaiming a negative link to an unfavorable other.	7-Up ads which inform customers that the "UnCola" is caffeine-free ("Never had it, Never will")
<u>Other-Focused Tactics</u>		
Burnishing	Enhancing the favorable features of a positively linked other	A business that extols that virtues of a local sports team.

Blasting	Exaggerating the unfavorable features of a negatively liked other	FedEx advertisements which humorously portray rival express mail delivery firms, as slow, unreliable, and grossly inept.
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Defensive Tactics

Connection-Focused Tactics

Burying	Disclaiming or obscuring a positive link to an unfavorable other.	Saturn Corporation’s decision not to display GM’s logo on its automobiles or literature.
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Blurring	Disclaiming or obscuring a negative link to a favorable other.	A university’s administration downplays its past opposition to a popular faculty union.
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Other-Focused Tactics

Boosting	Minimizing the unfavorable features of a positively linked other.	A corporation which downplays the sexual and violent content of a TV show that it sponsors.
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Belittling	Minimizing the favorable traits of a negatively linked other.	An economy hotel chain that describes the luxurious accommodation of an upscale rival as unnecessary frills that produces inflated rate
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APPENDIX II: Data Capture Form

GENERAL INFORMATION

1. Name of Business _____
2. Nature of Business _____

ONLINE TRAFFIC

1. Number of member subscriptions _____
2. Weekly interactions _____
3. Response Rate _____

IMPRESSION MANAGEMENT

a. Self-Promotion

1. Number of posts that present the business as competent in its area _____
2. Cumulative number of likes on these posts _____
3. Number of positive comments on these posts _____
4. Cumulative number of dislikes on these posts _____
5. Number of negative comments on these posts _____

b. Intimidation

1. Number of posts that present the business as a fierce and aggressive competitor _____
2. Cumulative number of likes on these posts _____
3. Number of positive comments on these posts _____
4. Cumulative number of dislikes on these posts _____
5. Number of negative comments on these posts _____

c. Supplication

1. Number of posts that present the business as vulnerable to competition _____
2. Cumulative number of likes on these posts _____
3. Number of positive comments on these posts _____
4. Cumulative number of dislikes on these posts _____
5. Number of negative comments on these posts _____

APPENDIX III: List of Online Businesses in Nairobi

	<u>Business Name</u>	<u>Physical Address</u>	<u>Nature of Business</u>
1	Kilimall Kenya	HXJ2+M95, Nairobi	Online Shopping
2	Phone Place	Bazaar Plaza, Moi Avenue	Phones and Accessories
3	Electronics Centre Kenya	Munyu rd junction, Luthuli Avenue	Electronics
4	Dee's Children Clothing	RNG Plaza, Ronald Ngala street	Clothing
5	Zuri Electronics	RNG Plaza, Ronald Ngala street	Electronics
6	Phones and Tablets Kenya	Kimathi House, Kimathi Street	Phones and Accessories
7	Jiji Kenya	Westlands Avenue, Westlands	Online Marketplace
8	Nairobi Online Shopping	Nairobi	Fragrance
9	LiveMall	Ronald Ngala Street	Audiovisual
10	La Belle Fashions	Imenti House	Clothing
11	Hillcrest Clothing	Tom Mboya Street	Clothing
12	Shoe World Kenya	Moi Avenue	Footwear
13	Cecel Online Shop	Nairobi	Footwear
14	Jessy Collection	Nairobi	Footwear
15	Kaybe Collections	Arcade Discount Mall, Ngong Rd	Footwear
16	Gifted Electronics	Nairobi	Electronics
17	Best Price Electronic Deals	Luthuli Avenue, Nairobi	Electronics
18	Jumia Kenya	Maua Cl, Nairobi	Online Shopping
19	Vitron Electroni Kenya	Nairobi	Electronics
20	Combine Kenya	Moi Avenue, Nairobi	Electronics
21	Technix Kenya	Nairobi	Phones
22	Zuri Home Furniture	Nairobi	Furniture
23	Adams Fashions Factory	Nairobi	Clothing
24	Ankara Fashion	Imenti House, Nairobi	Clothing
25	Mwesh Collections	Moi Avenue, Nairobi	Clothing
26	Moko Home	Factory St, Nairobi	Home and Living
27	Home Appliances Kenya	Nairobi	Home Appliances
28	Abbey's Lacewig	Nairobi	Hair
29	Kenneth Furniture	Ngara, Nairobi	Furniture
30	Sally Super Store	StanBank House, Nairobi CBD	Hair