

**CRISIS IN THE COMMENT SECTION: EXAMINING NIGERIAN
BRANDS' ACTIVE LISTENING AND RESPONSE STRATEGIES ON
SOCIAL MEDIA**

BY

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Abstract

Social media comment sections have evolved into critical arenas where brand reputation can be rapidly shaped or undermined. In Nigeria, the widespread use of platforms such as Facebook, Twitter/X, Instagram, TikTok, and WhatsApp has amplified the speed and intensity of consumer discourse. This study investigates how Nigerian brands operationalize active listening and response strategies to manage reputational crises originating in comment threads. Using a mixed-methods approach — including qualitative content analysis, illustrative case studies, and review of industry practices — the research identifies common response typologies, governance structures, and early warning indicators. Findings highlight that rapid acknowledgement, empathetic engagement, and transparent communication are most effective in mitigating escalation, while deflection or silence often exacerbate crises. The paper contributes practical playbooks and measurement frameworks for practitioners, while situating Nigerian practices within global crisis communication theory. Ultimately, the study underscores the dual nature of comment sections as both opportunities for engagement and volatile spaces of reputational risk, offering actionable insights for brands navigating Nigeria's dynamic digital ecosystem.

Keywords

Social media comment sections; Nigerian brands; Active listening; Responsive engagement; Crisis communication; Digital reputation management

Introduction

Social media comment sections have become today's open marketplace, where customers, critics, influencers, and workers meet to develop discussions over firms. Unlike traditional advertising, these conditions are instant, dramatic, and highly appealing. In Nigeria, platforms such as Facebook, Twitter/X, Instagram, TikTok, and WhatsApp groups are highly widespread, holding conversations that represent culture norms, political issues, and the realities of digital infrastructure (Olofinniyi, 2025). For Nigerian brands, comment sections offer both possibility and danger. On one side, they provide possibility for profound contact, real-time reaction, and marketing amplification. A single pleasant engagement can fast spread across channels, improving corporate loyalty and visibility (Rishcon Digital Agency, 2025). On the flip side, negative remarks or viral complaints can snowball into reputational disasters within hours. The interconnected structure of Nigeria's digital ecosystem demonstrates that a post on TikTok can go to Twitter/X, be shared in WhatsApp groups, and start conversations on Facebook pretty fast (ConnectNigeria, 2025). This quickness and emotional intensity make silence or delayed reactions perilous. Consumers often interpret delayed replies as lack of interest, which could create frustration. As a result, active observation and responsive engagement have become important skills. Active listening includes monitoring discussions and spotting developing obstacles before they emerge, whereas responsive engagement needs rapid, compassionate, and clear communication. Scholars and practitioners stress that good crisis management in comment sections is not merely reactive but proactive, requiring organizations to recognize flashpoints and prepare tactics in advance (Rishcon Digital Agency, 2025; ConnectNigeria, 2025). This study, *Crisis in the Comment Section: Examining Nigerian businesses' Active Listening and Response Strategies on Social Media*, explores how Nigerian corporations manage these digital interactions. It underlines the dual character of comment sections as forums for interaction and places of reputational risk, stating that competent

management of these conversations is now important to brand resilience in Nigeria's digital age.

Literature Review

Research on social media crisis management emphasizes the growing importance of comment sections as areas of reputational risk and opportunity. Globally, experts claim that the participatory nature of social media transforms brand communication from one-way messages into complicated conversations where consumer attitude can swiftly shift (Coombs & Holladay, 2019). In Nigeria, this dynamic is intensified by the country's vibrant digital culture, where platforms such as Twitter/X and WhatsApp groups amplify comments across different networks virtually quickly (Olofinniyi, 2025).

Studies on Nigerian brands show that comment sections often act as the initial point of reputational issue. Gbamwuana, Igyuve, and Kentec (2024) discovered that unfavorable comments on telecommunications companies' social media pages strongly influenced public perceptions of brand credibility. Similarly, ConnectNigeria (2025) states that Nigerian consumers demand rapid responses to internet complaints, with delays generally viewed as indifference. This expectation places pressure on brands to adopt active listening techniques that monitor and evaluate consumer feedback in real time.

Practitioners also stress the significance of compassionate and truthful involvement. Rishcon Digital Agency (2025) says that Nigerian brands who accept consumer concerns publicly, rather than deleting or disregarding them, are more likely to regain trust after crises. This accords with larger crisis communication theory, which emphasizes the significance of responsiveness and accountability in minimizing reputational damage (Coombs, 2021).

Despite these insights, gaps exist in knowing how Nigerian brands systematically control comment areas. Much of the extant literature focuses on isolated case studies or broad crisis communication frameworks, leaving scant study of proactive techniques customized

to Nigeria's socio-cultural and infrastructural circumstances. This research contributes to filling that gap by examining how Nigerian brands actively listen, respond, and handle comment section crises, positioning these practices within both local and global discourses on digital reputation management.

Research Questions and Objectives

Primary Research Question

How can Nigerian firms operationalize active listening and reaction methods in social media comment sections to prevent, mitigate, or resolve reputational crises?

This research tries to identify the real strategies by which Nigerian brands observe, comprehend, and participate with customer discourse in digital domains. It focuses both proactive and reactive parts of crisis communication, seeing comment sections as crucial venues of reputational risk and opportunity.

Secondary Objectives

To settle the basic question, the study pursues the following special objectives:

- Identify and define reaction typologies
- Examine the breadth of strategies Nigerian firms utilize in comment sections (e.g., apologetic, corrective, defensive, empathic, or promotional remarks).
- Assess the relative efficiency of these typologies in shaping customer attitude and reducing reputational harm.
- Map organizational structures and governance frameworks for social listening
- Investigate how Nigerian firms build their communication teams, allocate duties, and incorporate social listening into larger corporate governance.
- Explore the role of technology, regulatory demands, and leadership control in generating these habits.
- Develop practical playbooks for speedy and measured reaction

- Derive best practices from case studies and industry examples to develop adaptive response frameworks.
- Highlight the balance between quickness, empathy, and accuracy in responding emergencies inside comment spaces.
- Propose metrics for measuring reaction performance and lessons learnt
- Establish quantitative measures (e.g., reaction time, sentiment change, engagement quality, reputational recovery) to examine the impact of brand actions.
- Recommend feedback loops that allow organizations to learn from problems and always improve their strategy.

Methodology

This study adopts a **mixed-methods design** to explore how Nigerian brands operationalize active listening and response strategies in social media comment sections. The approach integrates qualitative content analysis, illustrative case studies, and secondary data review to ensure both depth and contextual relevance.

1. Data Sources

- **Comment Threads:** Publicly available comment sections from major platforms (Facebook, Twitter/X, Instagram, TikTok, WhatsApp groups) were sampled to capture diverse consumer interactions.
- **Secondary Materials:** Industry reports, practitioner guidelines, and academic literature provided contextual grounding.
- **Case Studies:** Synthetic, non-attributive examples were constructed from observed patterns to illustrate typical crisis scenarios without compromising confidentiality.

2. Sampling and Coding

- A purposive sampling strategy was employed to select threads with high engagement and visible brand responses.
- Coding categories included:
 - **Tone** (positive, neutral, negative, sarcastic, angry).

- **Source** (customer, influencer, competitor, troll, employee).
- **Escalation markers** (e.g., boycott calls, legal threats, viral amplification).
- **Response type** (acknowledgement, apology, correction, deflection, humor, silence).
- Inter-coder reliability was ensured through pilot coding and iterative refinement of the coding scheme.

3. Analytical Techniques

- **Qualitative Content Analysis:** Identified recurring themes in brand responses and consumer reactions.
- **Comparative Case Analysis:** Examined crisis trajectories across illustrative scenarios (service outage, misconduct allegations, content backlash).
- **Framework Development:** Synthesized findings into typologies, escalation paths, and recommended playbooks.

4. Limitations

- The study relies on illustrative case studies rather than proprietary brand data, which may limit generalizability.
- WhatsApp group data was observed indirectly due to privacy restrictions.
- Future empirical work should incorporate interviews with communication professionals and quantitative sentiment analysis for validation.

Results and Findings

A. Active Listening: Concepts and Tools

Active listening in social media has three layers:

1. **Detection** — continuous monitoring for mentions, sentiment shifts, and emerging topics.
2. **Triage** — classifying cases by urgency and impact.
3. **Response/Action** — routing to the right team (customer care, legal, product) and replying in channel (public reply, DM) or offline.

Tools and capabilities:

- Native platform tools (reply, hide comment, pin, block).

- Social listening platforms and dashboards (enterprise SMM tools, sentiment analytics).
- Keyword watchlists (product names, executive names, campaign hashtags).
- Automated systems (chatbots, auto-replies) vs human moderation.

Best practices: define listening windows (24/7 for crisis-prone accounts), set alert thresholds, and maintain multilingual capability.

B. Typology of Brand Responses in Comment Sections

From analysis, brand responses cluster into the following types. Each has strengths and risks.

1. **Rapid Acknowledgement** — quick, short reply acknowledging receipt and promising follow-up. Strength: calms immediate emotions; Risk: may be perceived as evasive if not followed up.
2. **Informational Correction** — provides factual corrections when misinformation is present. Strength: establishes authority; Risk: perceived as lecturing without empathy.
3. **Empathetic Apology** — accepts responsibility and offers remediation. Strength: rebuilds trust; Risk: legal exposure if admission is later contested.
4. **Transactional Resolution** — moves the conversation to DM or provides a ticket number. Strength: resolves customer-level issues; Risk: leaves public comment thread unanswered, which may look like avoidance.
5. **Humorous/Playful Reply** — uses wit or memes to defuse tension. Strength: can humanize the brand; Risk: may be tone-deaf in serious situations.
6. **Deflection or Silent Moderation** — hiding/deleting comments or blocking users. Strength: removes abusive content; Risk: fuels narratives about censorship.
7. **Amplification of Positive Voices** — pinning helpful answers, elevating satisfied customers or clarifying posts. Strength: shapes narrative; Risk: could be seen as preferential treatment.
8. **Legal/Authoritative Response** — issuing cease-and-desist, or escalated legal language. Strength: deters libel; Risk: escalates confrontation and attracts negative attention.

Case Study Analyses (Illustrative, non-attributive)

Case Study A: Service Outage

Situation: A payment app experiences a nationwide outage. The comment thread fills with irate users.

Effective response elements observed:

- A clear public acknowledgement within 30–60 minutes.
- Frequent updates on the outage status (every 30–60 minutes) to reduce friction.
- A dedicated hashtag used to funnel updates.
- Clear instruction for affected customers on timelines for refunds or fixes.

Lessons: Speed, frequency, and transparency reduce rumor and third-party speculation.

Case Study B: Accusation of Unethical Sourcing

Situation: An NGO posts allegations alleging a brand sourced materials unethically, sparking heated comments.

Effective response elements observed:

- Immediate acknowledgement and commitment to an independent review.
- Proactive outreach to concerned stakeholders.
- Publication of sourcing policies and a timeline for investigation results.

Lessons: Proactive transparency and independent verification are valuable when credibility is at stake.

Case Study C: Viral Meme Backlash

Situation: A promotional post is interpreted as tone-deaf; memes form and spread.

Effective response elements:

- A short sincere apology from the brand account.
- Removal of the promotional post (if necessary) and a statement about lessons learned.
- Engagement with influencers to explain corrective steps.

Lessons: When content offends, humility and corrective action often mitigate escalation.

Organizational Structures & Governance for Social Listening

Effective active listening requires coordination across at least these functions:

- **Social Media Team:** frontline responders and community managers.

- **Customer Care/Support:** for transactional and remediation flows.
- **Legal & Compliance:** for risk assessment and statements with legal exposure.
- **PR & Corporate Communications:** for official statements and press engagement.
- **Product/Operations:** for technical fixes and root-cause analysis.
- **Executive Leadership:** for strategic escalation and high-stakes decisions.

Governance elements:

- A clear escalation matrix (who must be notified at which impact thresholds).
- Pre-approved crisis messages and decision trees.
- RACI (Responsible, Accountable, Consulted, Informed) charts for social incidents.
- Regular cross-functional drills and after-action reviews.

Crisis Escalation Paths and Early Warning Indicators

Early warning indicators to monitor:

- Sudden spike in volume of comments (x times baseline within y minutes).
- Sharp negative sentiment swing measured by sentiment analytics.
- Emergence of influencer amplification or mainstream media pickup.
- Specific trigger words ("boycott," "scam," "lawsuit") trending in context.

Escalation path example:

1. Community manager flags an emerging issue (alert threshold met).
2. Social lead assesses severity and classifies (low / medium / high).
3. If medium, notify customer care & PR; if high, add legal + exec.
4. Decide public response type: acknowledgement, apology, corrective action, or no comment (with justification).
5. Implement response and monitor metrics.

Measuring Effectiveness: KPIs and Analytics

Suggested KPIs for comment-section response performance:

- **Response Time:** median initial reply time.
- **Resolution Time:** time from first complaint to claimed resolution.
- **Public Sentiment Change:** sentiment score before vs after intervention.
- **Escalation Rate:** percentage of incidents that require legal/executive escalation.

- **Amplification/Containment Ratio:** volume of negative mentions that die down vs those that spread beyond platform.
- **Customer Satisfaction (CSAT):** follow-up surveys for users who interacted in the thread.

Quantitative analytics should be paired with qualitative after-action reviews to capture nuance.

Recommended Playbooks and Templates

Below are modular playbooks to be adapted to organizational context.

Playbook A — Service Outage (Rapid Acknowledgement + Updates)

1. **First 15–60 mins:** Post public acknowledgement. Example: "We're aware some customers are experiencing issues with [service]. We're investigating and will update every 30 minutes. Thank you for your patience."
2. **Triage:** Assign ops owner; gather logs and initial scope.
3. **Ongoing updates:** Short updates pinned in comment thread and posted as an update.
4. **Resolution:** Post a summary of cause, remedial steps, and compensation if applicable.
5. **After-action:** Publish internal post-mortem and public summary.

Playbook B — Accusation of Misconduct (Transparency + Investigation)

1. **Immediate:** Acknowledge and confirm an independent review.
2. **Short-term:** Share existing policies and interim steps.
3. **Medium-term:** Share investigation outcomes.
4. **Remediation:** Outline corrective actions and timelines.
5. **Follow-up:** Share audits, third-party verification, or policy changes.

Playbook C — Offensive Content Backlash (Apology + Repair)

1. **Immediate:** Issue a genuine apology acknowledging harm.
2. **Repair:** Remove the content if appropriate, and explain why.
3. **Education:** Describe internal changes (training, review processes).
4. **Engagement:** Invite dialogue with affected communities.

Templates

Acknowledgement (quick)

"Thanks for flagging this — we're looking into it and will update you shortly. Can you DM us with your [order ID / phone number] so we can investigate?"

Apology (sincere)

"We're sorry. We got this wrong. We take this very seriously and are taking steps to [action]. We'll share more details by [date/time]."

Investigation update

"Update: Our team has found [summary of finding]. We're fixing it by [actions & timelines]. If you were affected, please DM us with [info]."

Ethical, Legal, and Cultural Considerations

Ethical considerations:

- Avoid deceptive editing or selective censorship of comments — transparency is essential for trust.
- Balance privacy with public accountability: do not disclose personal customer data in public replies.

Legal considerations:

- Apologies can carry legal admissions; coordinate with legal teams.
- Deleting comments may have consequences if regulators or courts later request records — retain internal logs.

Cultural considerations:

- Use appropriate language registers and code-switching where needed.
- Recognize that humor and sarcasm may not translate across regional or demographic lines.

Conclusion

Social media comment sections are now central to how Nigerian brands are seen and judged. They can build trust in minutes or spark crises just as quickly. This study shows that listening actively and responding with speed, empathy, and transparency makes the difference between reputational damage and resilience.

By mapping response types, governance structures, and practical playbooks, the research offers brands clear tools to manage these volatile spaces. The message is simple: silence or delay fuels frustration, while timely and thoughtful engagement restores confidence. Looking ahead, brands that invest in training, clear escalation processes, and measurable response strategies will be better prepared to turn comment sections from battlegrounds into opportunities for stronger relationships using the templates and comprehensive framework provided in this study.

Organizations that invest in governance, training, and measurement are better positioned to prevent minor complaints from ballooning into full-blown crises therefore, the next step for practitioners is to operationalize these templates with real-case drills, integrate tools that match their scale, and maintain cultural sensitivity in tone and language.

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Appendices

Appendix A — Suggested Interview Guide (for communications professionals)

1. Describe your brand's social listening architecture.
2. What is your average response time to high-priority comments?
3. Give one example of a crisis that originated in comment threads and how it was handled.
4. Describe your escalation matrix and decision-making protocols.

5. Which tools do you use for social listening? What are their strengths and limitations?

Appendix B — Coding Scheme for Content Analysis

- **Source:** Customer, influencer, competitor, employee, bot.
- **Tone:** Positive, neutral, negative (angry/sarcastic/sad).
- **Urgency:** Low/Medium/High.
- **Action:** Resolved, escalated, ignored, deleted.

Appendix C — Sample Monitoring Checklist

- Set baseline volumes and typical sentiment.
- Configure alerts for 3x volume spikes and severe sentiment drops.
- Maintain list of high-priority handles and influencers.
- Keep pre-approved messaging templates accessible.

Appendix D — Training Module Outline for Community Managers

- Module 1: Introduction to Active Listening
- Module 2: Tools & Dashboards
- Module 3: Tone, Language, and Cultural Sensitivity
- Module 4: Escalation and RACI
- Module 5: Simulations & Role Play

