THE IMPRINT OF ZERO-CLICK PUBLIC RELATIONS PRACTICE ON CORPORATE CREDIBILITY IN NIGERIA

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Keywords

Algorithms, Corporate Credibility, Imprint, Public Relations, Zero-Click

Abstract

Research Problem
Most corporate brands in Nigeria today appear to depend on traditional digital metrics such as corporate online mentions, website traffic and social media engagements to determine their reputational performance. These factors may be unable to ascertain the significance of Zero-Click visibility, where organizational information is sourced from AI algorithms
Methods/Theory
The research took its theoretical leaning from the source credibility theory and the information processing theory. The research deployed the qualitative Netnography method
Results
The success of PR campaign is no longer determined by click-through rates (CTR) but by consistency of summarized imprints from AI sources. This means that if individuals discuss issues relating to a corporate organization using the exact words to search for such organizations on AI platforms, the PR campaign of such an organization would be assumed to have exacted an impact on such individuals even if the organization receives zero digital traffic on its website. This represents a shift in PR practice from online engagement to sentiment impression.
Conclusion

As the Nigerian digital community expresses a growing dependence on summarized AI information in lieu of traditional organizational websites, truth has now translated from information rich webpages to the hyper-immediacy of Artificial Intelligence algorithms

Contribution to Knowledge

The study provides a trajectory for the determination of corporate organizational source credibility on Artificial Intelligence driven platforms by enhancing a paradigm shift from traditional web traffic to a new method of digital trust.

Recommendation

The research recommends that Nigerian corporate organizations should jointly sponsor a netnographic research on how the imprint of social media can impact on AI algorithms. The research recommends that Nigerian corporate organizations should technically ascertain how organizational related keywords can be translated to Artificial Intelligence models

Introduction

The contemporary online environment in the digital world has advanced the practice of Public Relations (PR) and strategic communication anchored on referrals. This denotes the attraction of digital traffic on social media platforms and navigating attention on the trajectory that ends on organizational or institutional websites. This aforementioned practice has evolved in recent times according to Georgi (2025) via the emergence of Zero-Click PR. Over the years, click-through rates (CTR) were the primary sources and conduit for online engagements with a vast amount of search engine optimizations on digital platforms recording zero clicks by digital audiences. The significance of an organization is no longer dependent on the number of digital media audiences who visit the organizations' website but the quality of engagement that the organizations' websites elicits (Nisha, & Mugdha, 2022). This represents a paradoxical atmosphere in reputational management. Wang (2026) posits that the question remains; can an organization establish integrity and credibility when it cannot determine the end result of the information it dispatches to its target public? The era of Zero-Click PR infers a shift from attraction to authoritative engagement of online digital target audiences.

The new reality confronting PR practice on the digital ecosystem demands that organizational or institutional content should be tailored in a method that integrates easy accessibility to Answer Engine Optimization (AEO) on Artificial Intelligence driven algorithms that can be easily understood and which speaks to the niche and nuances of target online audiences (Aondo, & Gana, 2026). This will enable the signals emitted by social media and Artificial Intelligence algorithms to be authoritatively accurate and credible, which will further enhance the integrity of an organizations' online image. Naidoo (2025) suggested that managing the disruptive identity of an organization where selective perception and interpretation of such an organization is noticeable on several

distinctive social media platforms and Artificial Intelligence can present a conundrum on the credibility and integrity of an organization or institutions identity. This situation can serve to determine the level of engagement and extant reputational image to be conferred on an organization or institutions perception on the digital environment.

Consequently, the efficacy of PR practice was hitherto determined by the ability of an organizational information on social media to direct digital media audience to an organizations' or institutional website for more engagement, where an organizational narrative can effectively be controlled (Folarin, & Swiatek, 2025). However, the era of Zero-Click has now shifted the attention of digital target audiences to Artificial Intelligence platforms, devoid of any engagement on social media or organizational websites, where target audiences now depend on the immediacy of answers provided about an organization from AI driven algorithms (Reski, & Windi, 2025). This new reality has presented a dire need for a research investigation on how the credibility and integrity of corporate organizations can be maintained and provide strategic and authoritative narratives on the authority of organizational brands on Artificial Intelligence driven information on same.

It is worthy of note to understand that the credibility of an organization is determined by expertise, trustworthiness, attractiveness and in recent times, contextual engagement. In the era of Zero-Click, these attributes are mediated by Answer Engine Optimization (AEO) on Artificial Intelligence algorithms (Vanny, 2025). This infers that the summarization of organizational performance by Artificial Intelligence can make or mar the integrity of organizational trust. Research on the Zero-Click practice is significant owing to the dire need to curate a heuristic reputational management paradigm that will serve to align with reputational integrity and credibility in order to enable PR practitioners to key into the 21st century challenges of reputational management.

Nigeria's contemporary digital environment is currently inundated by high activity and digital traffic on the country's digital ecosystem driven by individuals who access information via Artificial Intelligence driven platforms as their primary source of information. The research seeks to assess how Zero-Click PR activities infused into online search engine result pages (SERP) can serve to determine the efficacy of the integrity, credibility and reputational performance of Nigeria's corporate organizations and institutions'perceptions on Nigeria's digital ecosystem.

Statement of the Problem

The current reputational architecture of Nigeria is experiencing a trust deficit as depicted in the country's 2025 National Reputational Perception Index (NRPI) where Nigeria recorded a score of 35.2/100. The situation is further exacerbated by the fact that a lot of individuals within Nigeria's digital environment now depend on Artificial Intelligence tools to summarize information to them about most firms, organizations, and institutions. The problem is that some of these AI summaries are vulnerable to volatility and misinformation. Consequently, there appears to be no strategy in place to determine the accuracy of these AI algorithms. This could easily result to a dent in a corporation or organizational image, especially when these AI drive algorithms spew false narratives about organizational or institutional integrity from a summarized point of view devoid of the contextualization of same.

Most corporate brands in Nigeria today appear to depend on traditional digital metrics such as corporate online mentions, website traffic and social media engagements to determine their reputational performance. These factors may be unable to ascertain the significance of Zero-Click visibility, where organizational information is sourced from AI algorithms. This may create a false perception of organizational performance and eventually translate into a misrepresentation of Nigeria's global corporate identity on the digital ecosystem.

Research Objectives

The specific objective of the research is set to assess how Zero-Click PR activities infused into online search engine result pages (SERP) can serve to determine the efficacy of the integrity, credibility and reputational performance of Nigeria's corporate organizations and institutions' perceptions on Nigeria's digital ecosystem. This would be substantiated via the following:

1. To determine the performance of Zero-Click in managing corporate narratives in Nigeria's digital ecosystem.
2. To exact the correlation between Zero-Click PR and corporate performance.
3. To ascertain the metrics of trust over online engagements in the validation of organizational tradition in Nigeria.

Conceptual Framework

Zero-Click

In its most explanatory term, Zero-Click denotes a methodology that characterizes Answer Engine Optimization (AEO) on Artificial Intelligence driven algorithms where information is provided for digital media consumers immediately on Artificial Intelligence platforms without going through the hassle of visiting a website or clicking on a web link (Ismail, 2025).It serves to provide a generative summary of information for online media audiences who desire to get an information about an organization without searching for the organization on the internet or social media. The concept has emerged according to Dirassat (2025) as a result of the proliferation of AI on digital platforms where summarized information of an organizations corporate performance is provided from information generated by Artificial Intelligence algorithms and delivered on Artificial Intelligence soft wares such as Chat GPT, Gemini, Grok, Meta AI etc. The concept broaches upfront value on information devoid of a click ridden alternative for the digital public.

Corporate Credibility

The concept infers the conferment of trust by a target public in the ability of an organization to be able to deliver and perform in line with its mandate of operation and to do so with utmost sincerity and professionalism. The state of corporate credibility also alludes to the confidence that a target public confers on the expertise performance of an organization in terms of consistency, qualitative leadership and creativity that has been able to withstand the test of time (Ervina, 2026). The concept serves as a conduit that channels the perceptions of reputational management from stakeholders to corporate organizations and institutions in order to give same an opportunity for improvement and privilege for innovation that will serve to better frame the perception of organizational performance before its target public (Tatiana, & Sharifah, 2026).

Reputational Management

The term within the context of the research stipulates the energy that a corporate

organization puts into its structure and performance in order to assess the impact of same on the attitude and behavioural patterns of its target public. It can also be referred to as the method put in place to determine the alignment of organizational culture, principles and values with the perceptions of target public and in some cases, the general public conferred on an organization or institution (Hutaliuk, & Bondar, 2025). Reputational management is often seen as an all-encompassing process that is characterized by determination of public sentiment towards organizational products and services, crisis management skills and target public engagement. In the 21st century PR practice, reputational management is no longer limited to the PR departments of organizations; it serves as a collective management function that balances online engagements and emotional intelligence that is characterized by sincerity and determined by excellence (Amuso, 2025).

Theoretical Framework

The research took its theoretical leaning from the source credibility theory and the information processing theory.

Source Credibility Theory

The theory seeks to comprehend why some media messages are more convincing than others. It suggests that the relevance of a message is anchored on the nature of the sender. The theory was created by Carl Hovland and Walter Weiss in 1951 as a result of the quest for the understanding of how media messages determine public opinion (Alam, et al. 2024). The theory assumes that the credibility of a media message does not determine the quality of the origin of the message. The theory also assumes that the relevance of author of a media message increases as the message resonates with the message recipients. The theory posits that the message of an author of a media message perceived as credible by media audience will have a higher chance of influencing behaviour and attitude of a media audience (Li, & Wang, 2024). The theory has been criticized as having a permanent credibility pedigree conferred of message encoders over and above how media messages have the propensity to evolve. The theory as also criticised for dwelling more on the logic of media messages other than the encoder of the message (Dominic, & Park, 2025).

The theory relates to the research in terms of the ability of the theory to confer consequence to organizations and institutions by media audience in a way that will encourage them to not depend solely on summarized Artificial Intelligence driven messages about corporate organizations, but that they will be compelled to visit corporate organizations' websites to authenticate information on such organizations.

Information Processing Theory

The theory seeks to determine how the human psyche is compared to the workings of computer systems. The theory perceives how information is fed to network algorithms and how such information is retrieved on digital platforms (Al-Jarrah, & Abu, 2025). The theory was developed by George A. Miller in 1950 following the aftereffect of the world war two due to the development of computer science and linguistic studies aimed at shifting from behavioural outcomes of media messages to how media messages resonates in the human psyche (Bourchrika, 2025). The theory assumes that the human mind has the ability to process media messages when such messages are fed to the human brain in a conducive atmosphere and that the human brain can multi-task by processing several media messages simultaneously. The theory has been criticised for the way it pays less attention to human emotions and the complexity

of the human brain (Husain, 2025). The theory has also been criticized for ignoring how individuals process media messages in the real world.

The theory aligns with the research in the sense that Zero-Click Public Relations dwells on how individuals process information when traditional means of relaying messages are bypassed. In the Zero-click era, the aim of Public Relations is to engender a logical imprint of messages devoid of the message recipients engaging in deep thought processes.

Methodology

The research deployed the qualitative Netnography method. Netnography otherwise referred to as digital community observation is a qualitative research method developed by Robert Kozinets in the late 1990's (Gambetti, & Kozinets, 2024). The method suggests the observation of corporate information from secondary data anchored on digital media algorithms. The method seeks to comprehend meanings and symbolisms hidden in digital platforms and how same interacts with human emotions and inculcates image development of corporate organizations within digital ecosystems from secondary empirical data (Lines, & Bellis, 2024).

Discussions of Reviewed Literature

The Performance of Zero-Click in Managing Corporate Narratives in Digital Ecosystems

The structure of the online community has experienced a drastic movement from the hyperlink syndrome to a field of answers. In this contemporary trend Baye, et al (2024) proffers that owing to the emergence of Zero-Click, internet users no longer depend on institutional websites to glean information. These individuals now opt for Search Engine Results (SERPs) via making recourse to summarized Artificial Intelligence generated answers. For corporate organizations, this presents a multi-faceted approach; an opportunity to leverage on diverse platforms, albeit an enormous challenge for reputational management and corporate credibility (Gretzel, & Kozinets, 2024). Internet users where hitherto, used to depending on hyperlinked sources that directs them to institutional websites to get credible information before forming an opinion about an organization or institution. In the Zero-Click era, information is automatic, and thereby represents a reduction on data usage. Karr, (2025) asserts that once information is summarized on AI platforms, media audience adopt such information as credible devoid of crosschecking of same from institutional websites. This new reality however comes with its attendant implications. These could range from the inability of digital media audience to engage with brands directly, instead, they rely on shallow narratives about corporate organizations eventually leading to the elimination of corporate identity source on the digital environment.

In order to further comprehend this new reality, the netnography method enables researchers to observe the digital public and how such publics disengage from information sources and depend on summarized information from AI (Luo, & Jiang, 2024). Within this context, the success of PR campaign is no longer determined by click-through rates (CTR) but by consistency of summarized imprints from AI sources. According to Pang, & Yan, (2025), this means that if individuals discuss issues relating to a corporate organization using the exact words to search for such organizations on AI platforms, the PR campaign of such an organization would be assumed to have exacted an impact on such individuals even if the organization receives

zero digital traffic on its website. This represents a shift in PR practice from online engagement to sentiment impression. For a corporate organization to manage its reputation in the Zero-Click era, the organization must structure their data algorithms in order to ensure contextual search narratives (Wang, & Tchernev, 2024). In addition, the harmonization of such an organizations' brand name with significant key words that have the probability of matching the first fifty words of AI answer engine optimization (AEO) must be considered in put into place.

The Correlation between Zero-Click Public Relations and Corporate Performance

The evolution of search engines into answer engines that eventually led to the emergence of Zero-Click Public Relations practice has given a new perspective to how corporate performance is being determined. Almohammed, and Al-Tait (2025) indicate that while this reality has witnessed the plummeting of click through rates, there appears to be a consequential correlation between corporate performance factors such as brand social equity, organizational culture, corporate innovation, corporate communication and corporate credibility.This apparent correlation appears to be exacerbated by the gross reduction of digital traffic on organizational websites. This was further revealed in a 2025 research by Bain and Company (2025) whichshows that search parameters on digital platforms have grown to 13 billion, while zero-click rates have experienced a 60% hike on computers and a 77% hike on mobile phones. Despite these revelations, findings from contemporary research shows that corporate organizations' appearances on Artificial Intelligence summaries have experiences surge of 28% (Frimpong, 2025). In terms of the financial implications for corporate organizations, a significant reduction in website traffic represents a lower digital income on website hits from click through rates (CTR) and engagement rates.

However, when a corporate organizations' AI driven summary denotes a positive perception and opinion of such an organization, there is a high probability that such perceptions could be transmitted via social sharing to other digital media audience who might want to patronize the products or services of such organizations or institutions (Innermedia, 2025). This however, is highly dependent of the cross-matching of organizational performance to credibility of information about same. Conversely, Pang, and Yan, (2025) believe that in the Zero-Click era, citations from Artificial Intelligence generated summaries serves as an indirect endorsement of company and organizational performance, which will eventually lead to appreciable reviews of organizational products and services. This cannot be achieved from digital traffic, but from a velocity of trust. In order to inundate the Zero-Click community, it is essential to orchestrate a digital signpost that will serve to propel corporate familiarity and trust (Subrahmanyam, 2025). While the movement from web traffic to Artificial Intelligence summaries may prove to be painful for most corporate organizations, the brands that deliberately imprint their performance indices by the proliferation of same via strategic proliferation of traditional digital platform engagements that will eventually translate to AI summaries would experience a robust brand image reputation.

The Metrics of Trust over Online Engagements in the Validation of Organizational Tradition

Organizational tradition represents the principles of values, practices and communication patterns that distinguishes an institution from other

similar ones especially on organizational websites. Consequently, these standpoints have been eroded on AI driven algorithms where trust is highly dependent on the nature of narratives provided by AI (Mangnello, & Baldacci, 2024). This infers that trust metrics have been recalibrated via the perspective of cognitive comprehension and source credibility. This according to Abiodun and Adeyeye (2024)brings to bear the argument proffered by the source credibility theory which denotes that the validation of corporate identity in terms of organizational tradition is highly dependent on AI reviews from Answer Engine Optimizations (AEO). Digital media audiences now ascribe trust to AI algorithms over industrial websites (Galioto, et al, 2025). This also suggests that organizational principles and values relates to how same is effectively encoded in machine readable formats for visibility by AI algorithms. Recent research reveals that organizational traditions displayed in authoritative narratives have a better potential of resonating with media audiences. Adebola and Olufemi (2025) proffer that instead of depending of social listening strategies for sentiment analysis of target publics, organizational imprints on digital platforms are now measured via third party narratives on AI algorithms and validated by the digital community.

Another strategy for exacting trust from online engagements is the transfer of narratives on digital platforms by long term organizational stakeholders who have the propensity to defend organizational brands against summarized misinformation and fake news that may arise from wrong AI driven algorithms (Dema, et al, 2025). This is highly dependent on how often organizational brands, products and services are mentioned in online discussions and the speed at which digital media audiences cite positive organizational antecedents in online engagements. This according to Ibrahim and Bello (2025) could be resolved by the utilization of what is referred to as a "Trust Dashboard" which places significant importance on heavily entrenched positive sentiments expressed on digital platforms and positive outcomes of scanned Click through Rates (CTR)on organizational websites before making recourse to Artificial Intelligence applications. This new algorithmic reality depicts that trust is something that is no longer personalized by corporate organizations. Trust however, in the Zero-Click era represents a metric that is realized via the merger of organizational antecedents and algorithmic repetition (Okon, & Bassey 2024). By comprehending this new wave of transition, corporate organizations can be able to swim through the tide of the AI-integrated ecosystem.

Discussion of Findings

The first objective of the research was set to determine the performance of Zero-Click in managing corporate narratives in Nigeria's digital ecosystem. Findings reveal that individuals now opt for Search Engine Results (SERPs) via making recourse to summarized Artificial Intelligence generated answers. For corporate organizations, this presents a multi-faceted approach; an opportunity to leverage on diverse platforms, albeit an enormous challenge for reputational management and corporate credibility. Internet users where hitherto, used to depending on hyperlinked sources that directs them to institutional websites to get credible information before forming an opinion about an organization or institution. In the Zero-Click era, information is automatic, and thereby represents a reduction on data usage. This aligns with the Source Credibility theory which assumes that the credibility of a media message does not determine the quality of the origin of the message. The theory also assumes that the relevance of author of a media message

increases as the message resonates with the message recipients.

The second objective of the study was set to exact the correlation between Zero-Click PR and corporate performance. Findings reveal thatthere appears to be a consequential correlation between corporate performance factors such as brand social equity, organizational culture, corporate innovation, corporate communication and corporate credibility. This apparent correlation appears to be exacerbated by the gross reduction of digital traffic on organizational websites. This was further revealed in a 2025 research which shows that search parameters on digital platforms have grown to 13 billion, while zero-click rates have experienced a 60% hike on computers and a 77% hike on mobile phones. Despite these revelations, findings from contemporary research shows that corporate organizations' appearances on Artificial Intelligence summaries have experiences surge of 28%. This aligns with the Information Processing theory which assumes that the human mind has the ability to process media messages when such messages are fed to the human brain in a conducive atmosphere and that the human brain can multi-task by processing several media messages simultaneously.

The third objective of the research was set to ascertain the metrics of trust over online engagements in the validation of organizational tradition in Nigeria. Findings reveal that the strategy for exacting trust from online engagements is the transfer of narratives on digital platforms by long term organizational stakeholders who have the propensity to defend organizational brands against summarized misinformation and fake news that may arise from wrong AI driven algorithms. This is highly dependent on how often organizational brands, products and services are mentioned in online discussions and the speed at which digital media audiences cite positive organizational antecedents in online engagements. This aligns with the Source Credibility theory which posits that the message of an author of a media message perceived as credible by media audience will have a higher chance of influencing behaviour and attitude of a media audience

Conclusion

The evolution of Zero-Click Public Relations practice signifies an explosive paradigm shift on how corporate organizations in Nigeria should adopt and maintain credibility. As the Nigerian digital community expresses a growing dependence on summarized AI information in lieu of traditional organizational websites, truth has now translated from information rich webpages to the hyper-immediacy of Artificial Intelligence algorithms. When organizational principles are culled from Zero-Click sources, they evolve into a nature of conferment of objectivity by digital media audiences that corporate branding on traditional websites cannot invalidate. This brings to bear the need to confer importance on how organizational values are depicted by Artificial Intelligence algorithms and how the determination of Public Relations campaigns and strategies can remain relevant in the absence of hyperlinked sources.

Recommendations

The research proposes the following recommendations:

1. The research recommends that Nigerian corporate organizations should jointly sponsor a netnographic research on how the imprint of social media can impact on AI algorithms.

2. The research recommends that Nigerian corporate organizations should technically ascertain how organizational related keywords can be translated to Artificial Intelligence models to enhance organizational visibility on Zero-Click.

3. The research recommends that Nigerian corporate organizations should adopt Artificial Intelligence applications that fits into the niche of their organizational values in order to feed into the broader context of Zero-Click organizational mentions.

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