Reputation in the Digital Age: Strategies of Online Redemption after Peer-Exposed Mistakes

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Article type: *Original Research* **How to cite this article:** Ahmmed, B., & Hakobyan, A. (2025). Reputation in the Digital Age: Strategies of Online Redemption after Peer-Exposed Mistakes. *Journal of Adolescent and Youth Psychological Studies, 6*(8), 1-10. http://dx.doi.org/10.61838/kman.jayps.4428 © 2025 the authors. Published by KMAN Publication Inc. (KMANPUB), Ontario, Canada. This is an open access article under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International (CC BY-NC 4.0) License.	**Objective:** This study investigates how individuals navigate reputational challenges after peer-exposed mistakes in digital environments, with a focus on strategies of online redemption and long-term adaptations. **Methods and Materials:** A qualitative research design was employed to capture lived experiences and interpretive meanings associated with reputational repair. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with 21 participants from Armenia, selected purposively to ensure diversity in gender, age, and professional background. Interviews lasted between 45 and 70 minutes, were audio-recorded with consent, and transcribed verbatim. Data collection continued until theoretical saturation was reached. Thematic analysis was conducted using NVivo 14 software, following iterative cycles of coding, categorization, and theme refinement. Reflexive memos and constant comparison techniques were used to enhance validity and minimize researcher bias. **Findings:** Three overarching themes were identified: (1) experiences of peer-exposed mistakes, including public humiliation, emotional distress, social identity erosion, digital permanence, cultural pressures, and peer power dynamics; (2) strategies of online redemption, encompassing apology, content management, humor, support-seeking, strategic silence, rebranding, and counter-narratives; and (3) long-term reflections and learning, which involved digital literacy growth, emotional resilience, restructured peer relations, ethical awareness, identity transformation, and future-oriented strategies. **Conclusion:** The study demonstrates that online redemption after peer-exposed mistakes is a dynamic and socially embedded process that combines discursive, relational, and strategic elements. Redemption strategies are influenced not only by digital tools but also by cultural contexts and peer dynamics. ***Keywords:*** *online reputation; peer exposure; mistake management; redemption strategies; digital literacy*

1.   Introduction

Reputation has long been a central construct in the study of human interaction, organizational behavior, and social life, but the emergence of digital platforms has transformed how reputation is created, monitored, and repaired. In earlier offline contexts, reputation was embedded in face-to-face communities and mediated by slower, more localized processes of rumor, gossip, or institutional record keeping. In contrast, today's online environments amplify the visibility of mistakes, making them instantly shareable and often permanently traceable across social networks. The consequences of peer-exposed errors in digital spaces are thus magnified, with individuals facing the dual challenge of immediate public humiliation and long-term reputational harm. Scholars have shown that in such environments, reputation is no longer a static asset but a dynamic construct shaped by continuous interaction, algorithmic mediation, and peer evaluation (Ranchordás, 2018; Watling, 2019).

The growing literature on online reputation emphasizes that the digital sphere intensifies both risks and opportunities for identity construction and maintenance. Proserpio and Zervas (Proserpio & Zervas, 2015) note that reputation has become a form of capital in digital markets, where reviews, ratings, and comments exert direct influence on economic and social outcomes. Polo and Eyzaguirre (Polo & Eyzaguirre, 2016) highlight the central role of prosumers—users who are both producers and consumers of digital content—in shaping organizational and individual reputations. This interactive structure means that mistakes are no longer contained events; rather, they are reinterpreted and recirculated by digital communities, sometimes taking on lives of their own through memes, reposts, or viral trends. Livan, Caccioli, and Aste (Livan et al., 2017) further demonstrate how excessive reciprocity in online networks can distort reputational signals, creating feedback loops that amplify either trust or mistrust.

A particular area of scholarly concern is the exposure of mistakes and the subsequent strategies of redemption. Borțun (Borțun, 2014) argues that credibility is fragile in digital spaces, where mistakes—whether small lapses or significant transgressions—can rapidly undermine accumulated reputation. Šontaitė-Petkevičienė (Šontaitė-Petkevičienė, 2014) underscores this fragility by examining how crises in retail chains in the Baltic countries quickly escalated into reputational threats, stressing the importance of immediate and coherent responses. Deciu (Deciu, 2018),

in the context of Romanian management practices, documents how frequent mistakes erode organizational legitimacy when left unaddressed, pointing to the universality of mistake management as a reputational challenge. These perspectives converge on the idea that exposure in the digital age requires not only acknowledgment but also the development of sophisticated strategies for repair.

The individual level of reputation management has attracted increasing scholarly attention as well. While much of the earlier literature focused on corporate or organizational crisis management, recent studies have shifted to the experiences of individuals navigating online environments. Li et al. (Li et al., 2019) demonstrate the role of social media in shaping user attitudes during crises, showing that apologies can be powerful in shifting perceptions when delivered with sincerity and contextual sensitivity. Similarly, Waxer et al. (Waxer et al., 2018) reveal that professionals such as physicians are increasingly aware of their online reputations and actively monitor digital spaces for inaccuracies, recognizing that a single negative account can damage years of credibility. These findings suggest that online redemption after peer-exposed mistakes is not merely about damage control but involves proactive reputation building and ongoing vigilance.

Reputation is also deeply intertwined with social trust and peer relations. Keijzer and Corten (Keijzer & Corten, 2022) provide evidence that socioeconomic status shapes trust in peer-to-peer markets, demonstrating how reputation functions as a mediator of interpersonal exchange. Lei and Chen (Lei & Chen, 2012), focusing on recommendation-based trust models, highlight how digital peer-to-peer systems rely heavily on reputational cues to facilitate collaboration and reduce uncertainty. In peer-based learning environments, Hennis, Lukosch, and Veen (Hennis et al., 2012) observe that reputational systems shape participation and motivation, reinforcing the importance of credibility for sustaining engagement. These insights reveal that online reputation is not only a private matter but also a relational phenomenon, where trust, reciprocity, and shared norms intersect.

One of the unique features of online environments is the role of discourse in reputational processes. Ran and Hu (Ran & Hu, 2025) argue that public discourse functions to restore moral orders after reputational damage, illustrating how individuals and groups negotiate forgiveness, justification, and blame in the aftermath of mistakes. D'Arbelles, Berry, and Theyyil (D'Arbelles et al., 2020), in their analysis of

electronic word-of-mouth on Amazon, similarly highlight the discursive dynamics by which reviews influence consumer perceptions and sales, with both positive and negative narratives carrying weight. These studies underline the discursive and performative nature of redemption strategies, showing that reputation is not simply repaired through silent corrections but through visible and persuasive narratives.

The halo effect further complicates online reputational dynamics. Park and colleagues (Park et al., 2020a; Park et al., 2020b) show that disclosing offline social status, such as academic credentials, creates a propensity for trust in online communities regardless of the actual quality of contributions. This suggests that redemption strategies may be mediated not only by actions taken after mistakes but also by the broader social identity and perceived authority of the individual. Such findings resonate with Susilo, Chow, and Wiangsripanawan (Susilo et al., 2012), who propose formalized reputation systems for detecting cheating in online games, illustrating the broader ecosystem of digital accountability mechanisms.

At the same time, scholars have emphasized the strategic dimension of online reputation management. Peco-Torres, Peña, and Jamilena (Peco-Torres et al., 2023) explore how online tools moderate the effectiveness of reputation management strategies, noting that the choice of platform and communication mode can significantly alter outcomes. Ratnayaka et al. (Ratnayaka et al., 2023) extend this line of research by examining the moderating impact of reputation management on firm-created content in Sri Lanka's tourism sector, showing that proactive strategies amplify the positive outcomes of digital communication. These studies emphasize that redemption is not a one-size-fits-all process but is highly context-dependent, influenced by tools, platforms, and audience expectations.

Digital reputation also has implications beyond immediate peer relations. Ranchordás (Ranchordás, 2018) highlights how online reputation functions as a regulatory mechanism in the platform economy, reducing information asymmetries and shaping user behavior. Similarly, Susilo et al. (Susilo et al., 2012) show that reputational cues are essential for maintaining integrity in massively multiplayer online games, where cheating detection systems depend on peer evaluations. These studies collectively underscore the governance role of reputation, extending beyond personal image to institutional trust and systemic regulation.

Despite the breadth of existing research, gaps remain in understanding how individuals specifically navigate reputational crises triggered by peer exposure of mistakes in everyday digital contexts. Much of the scholarship has examined corporations, professionals, or platform-based systems, leaving fewer studies centered on ordinary individuals, particularly in cultural contexts where community honor and peer surveillance are highly salient. Armenia, with its tightly knit social networks and high levels of digital connectivity, offers a particularly relevant setting for exploring these dynamics. The interplay between online exposure, cultural expectations, and individual strategies of redemption provides a valuable opportunity to extend current theories of digital reputation.

This study addresses this gap by investigating the experiences of young adults in Armenia who have undergone reputational challenges due to peer-exposed mistakes in digital spaces.

2. Methods and Materials

2.1. Study Design and Participants

This study employed a qualitative research design to explore strategies of online redemption following peer-exposed mistakes in the digital age. A purposive sampling approach was used to recruit participants who had experienced reputational challenges in digital environments and had engaged in processes of self-presentation, repair, or image management. A total of 21 participants from Armenia were included in the study. Diversity in age, gender, and professional background was sought to ensure a range of perspectives. Recruitment continued until theoretical saturation was achieved, at which point no new codes or themes were emerging from the data.

2.2. Measures

Data were collected through semi-structured, in-depth interviews, which allowed participants to share their experiences in their own words while enabling the researcher to probe deeper into emerging issues. An interview guide was developed based on the research objectives and relevant theoretical frameworks of reputation management and digital communication. Key areas covered included participants' experiences of reputational damage, perceived consequences, strategies employed to mitigate harm, and reflections on the role of peers in online redemption. Each interview lasted between 45 and 70 minutes and was conducted in a private and confidential setting, either in person or via secure online platforms. With participants'

consent, all interviews were audio-recorded and subsequently transcribed verbatim.

2.3. Data Analysis

Data analysis followed an inductive thematic approach, supported by NVivo software version 14 to facilitate systematic coding and theme development. Transcripts were first read multiple times to achieve familiarity with the content. Initial open coding was performed to identify significant statements, concepts, and patterns. Codes were then compared, grouped, and refined into broader categories and themes. Constant comparison techniques were employed to ensure consistency and validity throughout the analysis process. Memo writing and reflexive notes were maintained during the process to capture analytic insights and reduce researcher bias. The process continued iteratively until theoretical saturation was reached, ensuring that the final set of themes accurately reflected the range of participant experiences.

3. Findings and Results

The study included 21 participants from Armenia, comprising 12 females (57%) and 9 males (43%). The age of participants ranged from 19 to 34 years, with the majority (n = 10; 48%) between 20 and 24 years old, 7 participants (33%) between 25 and 29, and 4 participants (19%) between 30 and 34. In terms of educational background, 9 participants (43%) were undergraduate students, 8 participants (38%) were postgraduate students, and 4 participants (19%) were young professionals working in various sectors. Regarding online activity, 14 participants (67%) reported spending more than four hours daily on social media, while the remaining 7 participants (33%) indicated two to four hours of daily usage. This demographic distribution highlights that the majority of the sample were young adults in higher education or early career stages, with high engagement in digital platforms, making them well-suited to provide insight into experiences of peer-exposed mistakes and strategies of online redemption.

Table 1

Thematic Structure of Findings

Category (Theme)	Subcategory (Subtheme)	Concepts (Open Codes)
1. Experiences of Peer-Exposed Mistakes	Public Humiliation	online shaming, exposure in group chats, loss of privacy, screenshot sharing, gossip circulation
	Emotional Reactions	anxiety, shame, anger, loss of confidence, fear of judgment, isolation
	Impact on Social Identity	damaged reputation, stigma from peers, labeling, exclusion from groups
	Digital Permanence	traces of mistakes online, viral spread, lack of control, re-sharing by others
	Cultural Context in Armenia	community closeness, sensitivity to honor, peer surveillance, family pressure, social conservatism
	Power Dynamics	peer bullying, influence of popular students, online peer hierarchies, manipulation
2. Strategies of Online Redemption	Apology and Justification	public apology posts, private messages, explaining context, shifting blame, emotional expression
	Content Management	deleting posts, untagging, privacy settings, reporting harmful content, account suspension
	Humor and Irony	self-deprecating jokes, memes about the mistake, playful comments, reframing narratives
	Support-Seeking	asking friends for defense, family reassurance, peer allies, mobilizing networks
	Strategic Silence	avoiding response, waiting for attention shift, disappearing temporarily
	Rebranding Self-Image	posting positive achievements, new hobbies, professional activities, community involvement, academic success
	Counter-Narratives	highlighting inconsistencies in exposure, exposing hypocrisy of peers, reclaiming narrative
3. Long-Term Reflections and Learning	Digital Literacy Growth	awareness of privacy settings, careful posting, critical view of social media, selective self-disclosure
	Emotional Resilience	coping mechanisms, mindfulness, rebuilding confidence, emotional regulation
	Changed Peer Relations	trusting fewer people, smaller friendship circles, stronger bonds with supportive peers
	Ethical Awareness	responsibility in online speech, empathy for others' mistakes, anti-bullying stance
	Identity Transformation	stronger self-awareness, redefining values, balancing online/offline self, maturity
	Future-Oriented Strategies	career considerations, cautious networking, professional identity building, digital footprint management

1. Experiences of Peer-Exposed Mistakes

Public Humiliation. Participants emphasized that peer exposure often led to experiences of public humiliation. Mistakes that might have remained private became amplified through digital spaces, particularly via group chats and screenshot sharing. Several respondents described this as a form of "online shaming" that stripped them of personal privacy. One participant explained, *"It was not just that I made a mistake, but that everyone knew within minutes because someone took a screenshot and spread it in our class group"* (Participant 7). The circulation of gossip created a sense of helplessness and intensified the humiliation.

Emotional Reactions. Interviewees consistently highlighted the intense emotional consequences of these exposures. Feelings of shame, anxiety, anger, and loss of confidence were dominant in their narratives. Many reported isolating themselves from peers to avoid further embarrassment. As one participant reflected, *"I couldn't sleep for days. I kept replaying the mistake in my head and felt everyone was secretly laughing at me"* (Participant 11). Such responses illustrate the deep psychological toll of peer-driven exposure.

Impact on Social Identity. Exposed mistakes often had implications beyond the immediate incident, leading to stigma and labeling by peers. Some participants spoke of being excluded from friendship circles or being treated as "the person who messed up." A respondent remarked, *"After that post went viral, I felt like I had a label stamped on me—I was no longer just myself, but the mistake I made"* (Participant 3). This erosion of social identity highlighted the long-lasting damage of digital exposure.

Digital Permanence. Another recurring theme was the permanence of mistakes in online environments. Even when content was deleted, participants described the feeling that traces remained, whether through re-shares or screenshots. The viral nature of digital platforms created a sense of lost control. One interviewee noted, *"Even after I deleted it, someone else had already reposted it. I realized I can never fully erase it"* (Participant 15). This persistence reinforced their feelings of vulnerability.

Cultural Context in Armenia. Cultural norms in Armenia played a significant role in shaping participants' experiences. Respondents emphasized the close-knit nature of communities and heightened sensitivity to personal honor, particularly in family contexts. Mistakes, once exposed online, quickly spread offline, creating additional pressures. As one participant stated, *"In Armenia, it is not only your friends who judge you—your relatives, neighbors, even your parents hear about it"* (Participant 18). These dynamics amplified the consequences of digital exposure.

Power Dynamics. Finally, several participants underlined the role of peer hierarchies and power relations in the exposure of mistakes. Popular peers or those with more online influence often determined how narratives developed, sometimes using mistakes to bully or manipulate others. A participant recounted, *"The people with more followers had the power to frame the story. If they laughed, everyone laughed"* (Participant 12). Such dynamics highlighted the asymmetry of online reputational struggles.

2. Strategies of Online Redemption

Apology and Justification. One of the most common redemption strategies was issuing apologies or providing justifications, either publicly or privately. Some participants posted open apologies, while others sent private messages to explain context or shift blame. Emotional expression was also used to soften responses. A participant reflected, *"I wrote a post to say I was sorry and that I didn't mean to hurt anyone. It helped calm things down"* (Participant 9).

Content Management. Many respondents engaged in active content management as a means of minimizing harm. Actions included deleting posts, untagging themselves, tightening privacy settings, and reporting offensive content. In some cases, accounts were temporarily suspended to halt exposure. One participant explained, *"The first thing I did was delete everything connected to that mistake, even photos where people had tagged me"* (Participant 2). Such practices reflect defensive digital literacy.

Humor and Irony. Interestingly, humor emerged as a redemptive tool. Some participants defused tension by reframing their mistake through self-deprecating jokes, memes, or ironic comments. This often shifted peer perceptions from mockery to camaraderie. As one respondent put it, *"I made a meme about myself. People laughed with me instead of at me, and that changed the whole mood"* (Participant 6). Humor served as both a coping mechanism and a strategy for regaining agency.

Support-Seeking. Several interviewees sought external support to rebuild their reputations. This included asking close friends to defend them, seeking reassurance from family, or mobilizing peer allies. Such networks helped counteract negative narratives. One participant explained, *"I asked my best friend to comment and say it wasn't true. When others supported me, the pressure was less"* (Participant 19). The presence of social allies proved crucial for online redemption.

Strategic Silence. Conversely, some participants opted for silence and withdrawal, believing that avoiding a response would allow the controversy to fade. Temporary disengagement from digital platforms helped them escape scrutiny. *"I just disappeared from Instagram for a month. When I came back, people had already moved on"* (Participant 8). This strategy relied on the rapid turnover of online attention.

Rebranding Self-Image. Another notable approach was rebranding through the projection of positive content. Participants intentionally highlighted achievements, new hobbies, or academic success to shift focus away from mistakes. As one interviewee stated, *"I started posting about my volunteer work and studies. Slowly people forgot about the stupid video"* (Participant 13). This proactive strategy reflected efforts at reputational reconstruction.

Counter-Narratives. A few participants resisted by constructing counter-narratives, such as exposing hypocrisy among peers or questioning the validity of the exposure. In doing so, they reclaimed control of the situation. *"I pointed out that the same people mocking me had made similar mistakes before. That stopped some of the attacks"* (Participant 5). This strategy showed how individuals actively contested negative labeling.

3. Long-Term Reflections and Learning

Digital Literacy Growth. Many participants described becoming more digitally literate after their experiences. They learned to manage privacy settings, carefully curate posts, and disclose less personal information online. A participant explained, *"Now I think twice before posting. I ask myself, will this look bad later?"* (Participant 14). This illustrates how reputational crises can promote critical awareness of digital behaviors.

Emotional Resilience. Repeated references were made to the emotional resilience participants developed. Through coping mechanisms such as mindfulness, self-reflection, and emotional regulation, they rebuilt their confidence. *"At first, I cried every day. Later I realized I am stronger than I thought, and I could handle criticism better"* (Participant 4). This resilience became part of their personal growth.

Changed Peer Relations. Several respondents restructured their social relationships following exposure. They reported trusting fewer people, limiting friendship circles, and deepening bonds with supportive peers. One noted, *"I don't share things with everyone anymore. I only keep a small circle who I know won't betray me"* (Participant 1). Such shifts highlight how reputational events reshape social dynamics.

Ethical Awareness. Experiences also heightened ethical awareness, particularly regarding online behavior toward others. Participants developed empathy for peers' mistakes and became more cautious about engaging in gossip. *"I used to laugh when others were exposed, but now I know how it feels. I don't do it anymore"* (Participant 16). This moral shift reflects the transformative potential of exposure.

Identity Transformation. For some, the experience became a turning point for identity transformation. They spoke of stronger self-awareness, maturity, and a redefined set of values. As one participant shared, *"Before, I wanted to be popular online. After everything, I realized being real matters more"* (Participant 20). These reflections underscore the developmental outcomes of digital adversity.

Future-Oriented Strategies. Finally, participants reported adopting forward-looking strategies, particularly with regard to career prospects and professional identity. They became more cautious about their digital footprint and focused on presenting themselves as responsible individuals. *"Now I post things that I know will look professional in the future. I think about jobs, not just likes"* (Participant 10). Such strategies represent long-term adaptations to digital life.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

The findings of this study reveal the multi-layered ways in which individuals in Armenia experienced, interpreted, and responded to reputational threats caused by peer-exposed mistakes in digital spaces. Participants described the intense emotional burden of public humiliation, the stigmatizing consequences for social identity, and the enduring permanence of digital traces. At the same time, they employed a range of redemption strategies, from apology and humor to content management, silence, and rebranding, while reflecting on long-term growth in digital literacy, resilience, and identity transformation. In situating these findings within existing scholarship, several important alignments, extensions, and contributions emerge.

The participants' accounts underscore the profound psychological and social toll of peer-exposed mistakes. Feelings of shame, anxiety, and exclusion confirm Borţun's assertion that credibility and reputation are fragile and easily undermined in digital spaces (Borţun, 2014). Once a mistake is made visible, it becomes a collective event rather than an individual misstep, amplifying its effects through social networks. This aligns with Šontaitė-Petkevičienė's work on crisis management in the Baltic region, where reputational

threats escalated rapidly because of the interconnected nature of digital publics (Šontaitė-Petkevičienė, 2014).

Participants also highlighted the permanence of mistakes, emphasizing how deleted posts or apologies could not erase the digital traces that peers had already captured and redistributed. Livan, Caccioli, and Aste (Livan et al., 2017) similarly argue that reciprocity and re-sharing mechanisms distort and extend the life of reputational signals online, creating self-reinforcing cycles of mistrust or ridicule. In Armenia, the cultural dimension added another layer: reputational threats were not only digital but also transferred to offline family and community spheres, where honor and respect are tightly guarded. Such findings resonate with Ranchordás's argument that online reputation is deeply embedded in broader social and cultural regulation systems, shaping not only individual identity but also community norms (Ranchordás, 2018).

The role of peer hierarchies in exposure was another key feature of our data. Participants noted that individuals with more online influence could shape the framing of reputational events. This echoes Park and colleagues' findings on the halo effect of disclosing offline social status: individuals perceived as more authoritative or popular command greater trust and control within online environments (Park et al., 2020a; Park et al., 2020b). Thus, reputational struggles are not fought on equal ground but are mediated by the structural imbalances of digital peer cultures.

The strategies participants adopted for redemption illustrate both defensive and proactive approaches. Public apologies, explanations, and emotional expressions were among the most common responses, confirming Li et al.'s conclusion that apologies in online crises can effectively shift user attitudes when they appear authentic and context-sensitive (Li et al., 2019). Similarly, Ran and Hu argue that public discourse plays a central role in restoring moral order after transgressions, underscoring that reputation repair is not only a matter of action but also of language (Ran & Hu, 2025).

Other participants relied on content management, such as deleting posts or tightening privacy settings. These actions align with Proserpio and Zervas's observation that online reputation management increasingly depends on monitoring and controlling digital footprints (Proserpio & Zervas, 2015). Waxer et al.'s study on medical professionals further supports this finding, showing that even highly credentialed individuals recognize the need to actively curate and protect

their digital identities against reputational threats (Waxer et al., 2018).

Humor emerged in our study as a powerful redemptive tool, with participants reframing their mistakes through self-deprecation or memes. This finding extends prior work by highlighting how informal discursive strategies can shift ridicule into shared amusement, thereby reducing hostility. In this sense, humor functions similarly to D'Arbelles, Berry, and Theyyil's analysis of electronic word-of-mouth, where narratives and framing significantly affect audience responses (D'Arbelles et al., 2020).

Support-seeking was another recurring theme, as individuals relied on close friends or family to defend them publicly. This dynamic resonates with Keijzer and Corten's findings on interpersonal trust in peer-to-peer markets, where socioeconomic or relational capital mediates reputational outcomes (Keijzer & Corten, 2022). Similarly, Lei and Chen's recommendation-based trust models demonstrate how social networks play a decisive role in mitigating uncertainty and reinforcing credibility (Lei & Chen, 2012). In the Armenian context, participants mobilized peer networks to counteract reputational harm, illustrating how redemption is socially distributed rather than purely individual.

Some participants, however, chose strategic silence, preferring to let time dissipate attention. This strategy reflects Peco-Torres, Peña, and Jamilena's argument that reputation management is moderated by online tools and contexts: sometimes disengagement and non-response can be as effective as proactive interventions (Peco-Torres et al., 2023). Others rebranded themselves by posting achievements, new hobbies, or professional content to shift focus away from mistakes. This echoes Ratnayaka and colleagues' findings in the Sri Lankan tourism industry, where proactive reputation strategies amplified the effectiveness of firm-created content and reshaped online narratives (Ratnayaka et al., 2023).

Counter-narratives also played an important role in some cases, as participants resisted reputational damage by pointing out the hypocrisy of peers or reframing events. This strategy is consistent with Ran and Hu's emphasis on discourse in moral order restoration (Ran & Hu, 2025) and underscores the agency individuals exercise in negotiating reputation rather than passively absorbing stigma.

One of the most significant contributions of this study lies in the long-term lessons participants described. Many reported developing greater digital literacy, becoming more cautious about what they posted and more aware of privacy

tools. This aligns with Watling's assertion that reputation management is now a necessary competence in the digital age, requiring individuals to anticipate risks and actively monitor their online identities (Watling, 2019).

Participants also described increased emotional resilience, learning to cope with criticism and rebuild confidence. Such findings resonate with Deciu's emphasis on mistake management as a learning process in organizational contexts (Deciu, 2018), extending it to personal and cultural domains. Moreover, several participants reported restructuring their peer networks, developing smaller circles of trust, and deepening relationships with supportive individuals. These dynamics parallel Hennis, Lukosch, and Veen's observations about reputation in peer-based learning environments, where credibility directly influences participation and engagement (Hennis et al., 2012).

Ethical awareness was another long-term outcome, with participants expressing empathy for others who faced reputational challenges and a stronger commitment to avoiding online bullying or gossip. This moral development highlights the transformative potential of reputational crises, echoing Šontaitė-Petkevičienė's findings that crisis management can foster greater organizational responsibility (Šontaitė-Petkevičienė, 2014). Finally, participants reflected on identity transformation and future-oriented strategies, such as presenting professional images online and considering the implications of digital footprints for careers. Liu, Lai, and He's study on online host–guest interactions illustrates how reputational cues influence popularity and long-term outcomes in peer-to-peer markets (Liu et al., 2023), providing a parallel to how individual reputations shape opportunities beyond immediate peer circles.

Taken together, these findings highlight the dynamic and discursive nature of online redemption after peer-exposed mistakes. Reputation is not simply repaired through technical fixes but through complex social processes that involve discourse, trust networks, and long-term adaptations. This study confirms and extends existing scholarship by showing how apology (Li et al., 2019), discourse (Ran & Hu, 2025), monitoring (Proserpio & Zervas, 2015), and trust (Keijzer & Corten, 2022; Lei & Chen, 2012) function as essential components of reputation repair. It also contributes new insights into the cultural specificity of redemption strategies in Armenia, where online and offline reputations intersect in powerful ways.

5.   Limitations & Suggestions

While this study provides valuable insights, several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the sample size was limited to 21 participants from Armenia, which restricts the generalizability of the findings to other cultural or national contexts. The strong influence of Armenian cultural norms on honor and community surveillance may not be as pronounced in more individualistic societies. Second, the study relied exclusively on self-reported data through interviews, which may be subject to recall bias or selective self-presentation. Observational or longitudinal methods could provide a more robust understanding of how redemption strategies evolve over time. Third, while NVivo software facilitated systematic coding, the interpretive nature of thematic analysis means that researcher bias cannot be entirely eliminated.

Future research could expand on this study in several directions. Cross-cultural comparative studies would help assess the extent to which redemption strategies are culturally specific or globally shared. For example, examining how peer-exposed mistakes are handled in collectivist versus individualist societies could enrich theoretical understandings of digital reputation. Additionally, future studies could employ mixed-methods designs, combining interviews with digital trace data or experiments, to capture both subjective experiences and observable online behaviors. Longitudinal research would also be valuable in tracking the persistence of reputational damage and the effectiveness of different redemption strategies over time. Finally, investigating the role of emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence in shaping reputational narratives—for example, through algorithmic content moderation or automated reputation scoring—could provide important insights into the future of online reputation management.

Practitioners, educators, and policymakers can draw several lessons from this study. Individuals need to be equipped with digital literacy skills not only for technical navigation but also for reputational resilience, including strategies for apology, narrative framing, and long-term identity management. Schools and universities could integrate reputation management training into curricula, helping young people navigate the challenges of digital life. Organizations might also provide resources for employees to protect and repair reputations in professional contexts, recognizing that online mistakes can have significant career implications. Finally, social media platforms should consider building more supportive mechanisms for users

facing reputational crises, such as enhanced privacy controls or channels for contextual explanations.

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