How Nevs Companies Resolve Image Crises: A Case Study of Xiaomi Automobile

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Abstract. This study examines the Xiaomi SU7 high-speed combustion incident resulting in three fatalities as a representative case, integrating the 4R and 5S models to explore public relations crisis management strategies for new energy vehicle enterprises in the era of intelligent driving. Through case study methodology and public sentiment data analysis, it is revealed that traditional theoretical models, due to their neglect of the specificity of "techno-ethical crises," have led enterprises into a path dependency of "data justification priority." Although Xiaomi promptly initiated an investigation, the lack of emotional communication and insufficient technical transparency resulted in the failure of public trust restoration. Based on these findings, this study proposes the "T-RISE" optimization model, integrating five dimensions to address the guidance blind spots of traditional models in intelligent public sentiment management. The research fills the academic gap in systematic crisis public relations studies within the intelligent driving domain, providing enterprises with practical tools such as dynamic monitoring and cross-brand collaboration, offering empirical evidence for government enhancement of safety standards and regulatory frameworks, and enhancing consumer risk awareness through the popularization of technical boundaries. Future research should further explore the impact of cross-cultural differences on strategy effectiveness and quantitatively assess the long-term effects of the model on brand value.

Keywords: new energy vehicle, intelligent driving,"T-RISE" optimization model, crisis public relations.

1. Introduction

In the context of the rapid development of new energy vehicles, the popularization of intelligent driving (ID) functions and technological innovation have become the core focus of industry competition. However, as the complexity of ID systems increases, their potential technological defects and safety hazards have become increasingly prominent, leading to frequent related accidents. The difficulty of public relations crisis management faced by enterprises has significantly escalated. Typical cases represented by the explosion of the Xiaomi SU7 and Tesla's ID accidents have revealed the complex challenges under the intertwining of technological risks and public trust crises, forcing enterprises to reconstruct their crisis public relations strategy systems. First, the promotion of ID functions has blurred the understanding of technological boundaries and user responsibilities. For example, when the Xiaomi SU7 was using NOA (Navigation on Autopilot), a high - speed collision accident occurred due to a night vision recognition defect. Although the system gave a 2 - second early warning, the user's 1 - second takeover time window exposed the limitations of human - machine collaboration. Similarly, Tesla's Autopilot system over - promoted its "autonomous driving" capabilities, leading users to misjudge the system's boundaries and intensifying the dispute over liability attribution in the brake failure incident. Such accidents not only test the reliability of technology but also cause the public to lose trust in safety commitments because car companies blur the line between "assistance" and "automation" in their promotions. Second, information transparency and emotional communication during accident handling are the keys to the success or failure of public relations. In the Xiaomi SU7 accident, although the enterprise quickly established a special task force and submitted driving data, it did not promptly disclose the cause of the fire and the technical details of the door locking mechanism, leading to the spread of public opinion speculation. The family members' complaint that they "had not been contacted proactively for four days" further intensified the public's negative impression of the "corporate indifference". In contrast, in Tesla's "brake gate" incident, its initial avoidance of core issues and the "uncompromising" attitude towards consumer

rights protection further intensified the conflict, highlighting the imbalance between rational data justification and emotional resonance. Such cases indicate that the traditional technology - oriented response model can no longer meet the public's dual expectations of humanistic care and substantial actions. Third, the dissemination characteristics of intelligent public opinion force public relations means to transform towards real - time and systematic approaches. New energy vehicle accidents often spread in a fission - style manner through social media. For example, the full - network spread of the explosion video of the Xiaomi SU7 triggered a nationwide suspicion of battery safety and escape mechanisms in a short period. At the same time, the online black - gray industry chain uses AI technology to generate rumors in batches, increasing the complexity of public opinion control. This requires enterprises to establish a dynamic public opinion monitoring mechanism and cooperate with third - party institutions to enhance the credibility of data. Enterprises need to build a crisis management system that is both agile and systematic within the multi - dimensional framework of technological transparency, emotional resonance, and industry collaboration to reshape brand trust while balancing technological advancement and respect for life.

Therefore, this study aims to bridge the "timeliness gap" between academic marketing theories and corporate crisis public relations practices in the context of the rapid development of new energy vehicles and intelligent driving (ID) technologies. Currently, academic research on crisis management in the field of intelligent mobility mostly focuses on traditional technological defects or product quality issues. However, the systematic theoretical framework for emerging challenges such as the complexity of ID technologies, the ambiguity of human - machine liability boundaries, and the dissemination characteristics of intelligent public opinion has not been perfected. As seen in the typical cases of the Xiaomi SU7 explosion incident and Tesla's ID accidents, enterprises show traditional path dependencies such as "prioritizing legal compliance" and "dominated by data justification" when dealing with technological trust crises. However, such strategies have become ineffective under the dual pressures of the fission - style spread on social media and the escalating emotional demands of the public. Therefore, this study attempts to break through the following three academic and practical bottlenecks:

1. Correcting theoretical lag.
2. Strengthening the timeliness of strategies.
3. Upgrading the practicality of guidance.

In terms of the research topic, this study focuses on the latest crisis public relations strategies of new energy vehicle enterprises. Starting from the rapid iteration of ID technologies and the frequent occurrence of safety accidents, it uses the case - study method to deeply analyze the enterprises' response paths in typical events such as the Xiaomi SU7 explosion and Tesla's ID accidents. It also combines authoritative media reports, social media public opinion data, and official corporate statements to systematically track the full - cycle dynamics of crisis outbreak, spread, and recovery. In terms of research methods, by horizontally comparing the theoretical frameworks of the 4R model (Reduction, Readiness, Response, Recovery) and the 5S model (Speed, Sincerity, System, Shoulder, Standardization), it reveals the core contradictions in the current crisis public relations practices of vehicle enterprises. There are mainly two aspects of measures for handling crisis public relations: preventive measures and solution measures (Chen, 2020). The study finds that the 5S model is more suitable for post - crisis solutions, while the 4R model provides constructive guidance for pre - crisis defense. Therefore, this study combines the two theoretical models, aiming to explore a practical public relations crisis management guide and brand maintenance strategy for enterprises that can provide full - cycle guidance before and after a crisis.

2. Crisis Review

At 22:44 on March 29, 2025, a standard - version Xiaomi SU7 carrying three young female passengers was involved in a serious accident while traveling on the Dezhou - Shangrao Expressway in Anhui. The vehicle was in the NOA (Navigate on Autopilot) intelligent assisted - driving mode

and was traveling at a speed of 116 km/h at night. When passing through a construction section, the system detected roadblocks ahead and issued a warning 4 seconds in advance. Subsequently, the vehicle decelerated to 97 km/h. However, within 2 seconds after the driver took over, the vehicle still crashed into the median strip at high speed. The collision damaged the battery compartment structure, and the leakage of electrolyte triggered a chain reaction. The vehicle burst into a fireball within 120 seconds. The doors were locked due to the failure of the electronic system, preventing the passengers inside from escaping. Eventually, all three passengers died. After the accident, the complaints from the families of the victims against Xiaomi Auto and the doubts from public opinion on the Internet about the product quality of Xiaomi Auto began to increase. Especially after learning that the EU regulations require a 10 - second reaction time for drivers in Level 3 autonomous driving, the dissatisfaction with Xiaomi Auto's three - second "life - and - death line" multiplied (Xiao, 2025). Ultimately, it led to the stigmatization of the brand and the evaporation of Xiaomi Auto's market value.

3. Analysis of Xiaomi Auto's Crisis Public Relations Strategy Based on the 4R and 5S Theories

3.1. Strategy evaluation under the 4R model

3.1.1 Reduction: insufficient risk anticipation and passive defense

The lack of transparency in Xiaomi's automotive technology and the avoidance of core safety defects, such as the battery structure protection and the redundant design of the electronic system, violate the basic principle of "reduction" of risks in the 4R model. Moreover, Xiaomi failed to establish a grading certification mechanism for intelligent driving functions or a user ability testing mechanism before the accident, resulting in the failure to effectively identify and reduce technical risks. After the accident, Xiaomi selectively disclosed data. For example, it emphasized the warning timeline but avoided the mechanism of battery thermal runaway, which failed to substantially reduce public anxiety about safety. Instead, the information asymmetry exacerbated the trust deficit.

3.1.2 Readiness: the formalization of crisis pre - plans disconnected from practical operations

Although Xiaomi claims to conduct regular crisis drills, in actual response, it has exposed problems such as inefficient cross - departmental collaboration. For example, there is a disconnection of information between the technical department and the public relations team, and the public opinion monitoring system lags behind, failing to anticipate the fission - style spread of topics like "car doors being locked".

3.1.3 Response: imbalance between data justification and emotional repair

Xiaomi quickly initiated legal procedures and submitted data, and promptly established a special task force to cooperate with the police investigation. These actions meet the "response" requirements in the 4R model. However, it overly relies on the "data visualization" strategy, such as publishing the change in the opening degree of the brake pedal, while neglecting the necessity of emotional repair. This leads to a misalignment between the rational response and public expectations. Moreover, the slow release of the statement seriously violates the speed principle of brand maintenance.

3.1.4 Recovery: disconnect between short - term repair and long - term trust reconstruction

Xiaomi promised to optimize the algorithm but did not propose a recall plan or a schedule for safety design improvement. Its recovery strategy remains at the level of verbal commitment, lacking verifiable milestones. Referring to Tesla's approach of offering free chassis armor upgrades and making public crash test data after the Model S fire incident, Xiaomi needs to take transparent actions, such as jointly releasing a comprehensive accident report with a third - party, to rebuild its technical credibility.

3.2. Strategic analysis from the perspective of the 5S model

3.2.1 Speed: the superficial advantages and deep - seated contradictions of rapid response

Xiaomi activated its emergency response mechanism within 48 hours after the accident, established a special investigation team, and submitted the driving data to the police. Lei Jun stated on Weibo that "Xiaomi will not shirk its responsibility", which initially met the "Speed" principle in the 5S model and avoided the loss of control of public opinion during the information vacuum period. However, its speed only remained at the level of procedural actions. The technical briefing was not released until 72 hours later, and no explanations were provided for the door - locking mechanism and battery protection defects. As a result, the public's perception of "Speed" was only on the form rather than the substance. In contrast, Tesla publicly released EDR data and initiated third - party testing simultaneously in a similar accident, ensuring both speed and transparency. In today's online social environment, some scholars have also proposed setting up a 6 - minute response system. Since the average time from the first online release of an event to its secondary spread is 18 minutes, according to the 30 - 70 rule, research has inferred that responding to emergencies within 6 minutes can minimize the negative impact. Based on this characteristic, Xiaomi Auto should also establish a 6 - minute response system (Liao, 2022).

3.2.2 Sincerity: lack of emotional repair mechanism

The delayed communication and insufficient humanistic care from Xiaomi Auto towards the family members of the victims led to the complete failure of the "Sincerity" principle in the 5S model, exacerbating the collapse of brand trust. Although Xiaomi expressed condolences in its statement, the family members complained that they "hadn't been contacted proactively for four days", which exposed a serious lack of emotional resonance and violated the "Sincerity" principle in the 5S model. In contrast, Yu Chengdong's candid communication in the accident of Huawei AITO M7, saying "even gods can't do it in extreme scenarios", made Lei Jun's "procedural apology" be regarded by the public opinion as a "long - overdue show", intensifying the public's doubts about the brand's values. Moreover, Xiaomi didn't set up a special compensation fund or a long - term care mechanism, further weakening the effectiveness of emotional repair.

3.2.3 System: fragmented responses and collaborative failures

Xiaomi Auto's responses are credible as they are supported by data. By releasing technical parameters such as the NOA warning timeline, it has partially curbed the spread of rumors, which reflects the "System" principle in the 5S model. However, although Xiaomi has adopted a phased strategy (establishing a special task force → releasing technical briefings → introducing third - party data hosting), there is still a lack of systematic connection among various links. For example, the technical briefing only emphasizes the functional boundaries of NOA but fails to address the recognition defects in the night vision solution. As a result, public doubts have shifted to deeper - level technical ethics issues.

3.2.4 Shoulder: tendency to shift responsibility under the shield of law

Xiaomi cited the user agreement to emphasize the "driver's obligation to take over." Although this is legally compliant, it creates a cognitive conflict with the excessive promise of being the "safest" in its promotion, revealing the fragmentation in taking responsibility. This strategy is similar to the trust crisis caused by Tesla's "excessive promotion of autopilot." Both have triggered public backlash due to the neglect of "technical inducement responsibility."

3.2.5 Standardization: breaking through alone without industry collaboration

Xiaomi has proposed to optimize the NOA algorithm and the data hosting mechanism. However, it has not promoted the formulation of intelligent driving safety standards or cross - brand data sharing, resulting in a lag in standardization construction.

4. Suggestion

4.1. Establish a dual - track response mechanism of technical transparency and emotional resonance

From the above analysis, it can be concluded that the "sincerity" principle in the 5S model emphasizes the importance of emotional resonance, while the "reduction" in the 4R model requires reducing public risk perception through technical transparency. For example, Tesla publicly released EDR data and initiated third - party testing simultaneously during the braking system incident, successfully turning the accident into an opportunity to enhance technical credibility, which verifies the effectiveness of the dual - track mechanism. Therefore, this study recommends implementing technical transparency. Within 24 hours after an accident occurs, the enterprise should cooperate with third - party authoritative institutions, such as China Automotive Technology and Research Center, to release a complete technical analysis report covering core data such as the mechanism of battery thermal runaway and the emergency mechanism of vehicle doors. For instance, Xiaomi can refer to CATL's practice of disclosing the technical principle of the inverted cell in the Qilin battery accident to eliminate public doubts about the technical black box. In addition, scholar Luan (2022) also proposed that if Xiaomi wants to strengthen user loyalty to the brand, it needs to establish a perfect product quality supervision system and a complete after - sales service system. It should maintain pre - sales and after - sales contact with consumers through the Xiaomi Community, so that consumers can feel the considerate service from the Xiaomi brand. Consumers should feel that they are not just buying a single product but a whole set of service systems, which can strengthen the quality image of the Xiaomi brand in consumers' minds. Therefore, the study suggests that the enterprise should also improve the emotional repair system. It should set up a special compensation fund and establish a long - term care mechanism for the families of the victims. The senior management should complete the condolence visits to the families within 48 hours after the accident to strengthen the brand's quality image in consumers' minds.

4.2. Establish a dynamic public opinion monitoring and graded response system

This study recommends that enterprises deploy AI - based public opinion monitoring technology. By implementing natural language processing technology, keywords such as "car door locked" and "battery explosion" on social media, forums and other platforms can be captured in real - time. Combined with sentiment analysis models, high - risk topics can be identified. In the Xiaomi SU7 accident, the topic of "not contacting the families for four days" had millions of views, highlighting the necessity of this system. In addition, a crisis graded response mechanism should be established to initiate differentiated contingency plans according to the intensity of public opinion. For a first - level crisis (such as casualties), the CEO should get personally involved. For a second - level crisis (technical failure), the technical team should take the lead in responding.

4.3. Promote innovation in industry safety standards and liability allocation mechanisms

The "readiness" principle in the 4R model mentioned in the above research requires reducing systematic risks through industry collaboration. For example, standardizing the terminology of L2 - level assisted driving has reduced consumers' misunderstanding rate, which proves the value of standardization in risk prediction. One implementation method is to establish an intelligent driving safety alliance. By joining hands with leading automobile manufacturers and battery suppliers such as CATL and BYD Fudi Battery, the alliance can formulate the "Standards for Take - over Response of Intelligent Driving Systems", specifying technical indicators such as a warning time of at least 5 seconds and redundant design for human - machine interaction. Referring to the data - sharing mechanism of black boxes in the aviation industry, a cross - brand driving data pool can be established to enhance the credibility of liability determination. In addition, He (2024) also proposed that in a crisis, enterprises should pay more attention to their own and social responsibility awareness, comprehensively improve their sense of social responsibility, and actively fulfill their social

responsibility actions. Enterprises should contribute to society to win public trust and support, and further enhance brand value and competitiveness. Therefore, this study suggests that enterprises with a solid foundation and a desire to demonstrate their social responsibility can implement a user education program. By developing a risk simulator for intelligent driving systems, users can be required to complete training on dealing with extreme scenarios before purchasing a vehicle. This can significantly improve users' safety awareness and reduce the accident rate.

4.4. Reconstructing brand narrative: upgrade the value from technology worship to reverence for life

The "Value Ranking" theory in marketing suggests that enterprises should prioritize safety ethics over commercial interests. For example, after the Model S fires, Tesla offered free upgrades to the chassis armor and made the "Safety White Paper" the core of its brand narrative. As a result, the order volume increased against the odds after the accident. This strategy well demonstrates the goal of public - relations crisis management, which is to turn a crisis into an opportunity. Therefore, this study proposes that automobile companies like Xiaomi should strategically increase safety redundancy designs. They should shift the focus of their publicity from "peak computing power" and "recognition speed" to the redundancy of escape mechanisms. For instance, Xiaomi SU7 should disclose the failure probability of the emergency door pull - locks and the improvement plans. Enterprises can also encourage user participation in governance by establishing a "User Safety Committee" composed of technical experts and car - owner representatives, and regularly publish the "Safety Transparency Report".

4.5. Improving legal compliance and global crisis response framework

Based on the above research, the "Recovery" in the 4R model requires the reconstruction of long - term trust through legal means. For example, the EU's "Artificial Intelligence Act" requires automobile companies to disclose the logic of algorithmic decision - making. Violators will face a fine of 4% of their global revenue, which forces enterprises to build a compliance system. Therefore, this study also suggests that enterprises aiming for globalization should attach importance to data sovereignty compliance. They should store driving data locally in key markets such as Germany and Southeast Asia, and hire third - party law firms to review data usage agreements. Additionally, they should establish a global public - opinion database to predict public - opinion risks caused by cultural differences.

4.6. Applying new theoretical models in the intelligent era

The public - relations response to the Xiaomi SU7 accident reveals the limitations of traditional theories in the intelligent era: the 5S model has blind spots in guiding "technological ethics", and the 4R model fails to adequately cover "cross - border collaboration". Therefore, this study points out that in the future, enterprises need to integrate the advantages of the two models and proposes the construction of a "T - RISE" model to optimize the crisis public - relations strategy:

1. Transparency: Collaborate with third - parties to release full - chain data of the accident, such as the mechanism of battery thermal runaway and the design defects of emergency door systems.

2. Real - time Response: Establish an AI - driven public - opinion monitoring system to achieve dynamic crisis early - warning and intervention. Moreover, a dedicated team should be set up in advance, and public - relations plans should be formulated. Different styles of statements should be used for different platforms and user groups. For example, as the main users of Bilibili and Weibo are young people who like to make sarcastic remarks, authoritative statements should be issued on these platforms. Since short - video social media are prone to spreading rumors, clarification videos should be posted on such platforms.

3. Industry Synergy: Promote the establishment of an intelligent driving safety alliance and formulate standards for the takeover response of Level 3 autonomous driving systems (e.g., warning time $\geq$ 5 seconds).

4. Sympathy: Set up a special compensation fund and establish a long - term care mechanism for the families of the victims to repair emotional trust.

5. Ecosystem Resilience: Build a long - term governance system through the establishment of a user safety committee and the release of the "Safety White Paper". This study proposes that only within the multi - dimensional framework of technological transparency, emotional resonance, and industry collaboration can enterprises reshape brand trust in the ethical dilemma of intelligent driving and truly fulfill the value commitment of "safety first".

5. Conclusion

This study analyzes the crisis public relations practice of the Xiaomi SU7 explosion accident and finds that against the backdrop of the rapid iteration of intelligent driving technology, the limitations of traditional public relations theoretical models (such as 4R and 5S) are becoming increasingly prominent. Although Xiaomi quickly launched an investigation and submitted data (in line with the "Response" principle of 4R and the "Speed" principle of 5S), the lack of emotional communication and technical transparency (violating the "Sincerity" principle of 5S and the "Reduction" principle of 4R) led to the failure of restoring public trust. The case analysis further reveals that crisis management in the intelligent era needs to break through the path - dependence on "prioritizing technical justifications" and shift towards a comprehensive governance that integrates technical ethics, emotional resonance, and industry collaboration. New - energy vehicle enterprises need to construct a two - dimensional "technology - society" response framework for public relations crisis management. Enterprises should promote technical transparency simultaneously during accident response, such as third - party data hosting, and establish emotional repair mechanisms, such as family care funds. They should also establish standardized safety guidelines through industry alliances, for example, the takeover response time should be ≥5 seconds. This study proposes the "T - RISE" model (Technical Transparency, Real - time Response, Industry Collaboration, Emotional Resonance, and Ecological Resilience), which injects elements suitable for the intelligent era into traditional theories and promotes the transformation of crisis public relations from passive defense to active ecological governance. This study also fills the gap in the academic community's systematic research on crisis public relations in the field of intelligent driving. It is the first to incorporate dimensions such as "human - factor risks" and "technical ethics" into the theoretical analysis framework. The research results provide three practical references for automobile enterprises: first, a toolkit for dynamic public opinion monitoring and hierarchical response; second, a design guide for cross - brand safety cooperation mechanisms; third, templates for global compliance and local communication strategies. For the government, the study provides empirical evidence for improving intelligent driving safety regulations, such as standardizing promotional terms and managing data sovereignty. For consumers, the study enhances their risk awareness and rights - protection ability by popularizing the boundaries of intelligent driving technology and the logic of responsibility division. However, this study still has three limitations. First, the cases are concentrated in the Chinese market, and the impact of cross - cultural differences on crisis strategies has not been thoroughly explored. Second, the public opinion data analysis relies on public reports, lacking the tracking of the enterprise's internal decision - making process. Third, the long - term impact of strategy optimization on brand value has not been quantitatively evaluated. Future research can explore the following directions: first, construct a cross - national multi - case database to analyze the restrictive effects of policies such as the EU's "Artificial Intelligence Act" on automobile enterprises' crisis strategies. Second, develop an evaluation index for crisis management effectiveness and verify the practical effectiveness of the theoretical model by combining indicators such as stock price fluctuations and user retention rates. Finally, this study advocates that only by continuously deepening theoretical research and practical verification can the crisis public relations system in the era of intelligent travel achieve a balance between scientific and human - centered approaches.

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