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Social Media and Crises

Lecture 4

DGM 730

Crisis Communication & crises management
(Approaches & Theories)

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Crisis Communication & crises management: (Approaches & Theories)

- **Crisis Communication and Crisis Management: Definitions**
 - Public Relations (PR)
 - Crisis Communication
 - Reputation
 - Crisis management
- **Social Media in Crisis Communication: opportunities and challenges**
- **PR Models:**
 - press agency/publicity,
 - public information,
 - two-way asymmetrical,
 - and two-way symmetrical
- **Crisis Communication Theories**
 - Image Restoration Theory
 - Situational Crisis Communication Theory
 - The Social-Mediated Crisis Communication (SMCC) model
 - The influencer impact on Social Media Crisis

Crisis Communication and Crisis Management Definitions



Public relations (PR) has been the backbone of corporate relationships in society so that both parties may benefit in some way, whether it involves community relations, media relations, issues management or crisis communication.

PR is “the management function that establishes and maintains mutually beneficial relationships between an organization and the publics on whom its success or failure depends”

Definition of Crisis Communication

Crisis communication research mainly deals with the interrelationships between crisis situations, communication strategies and crisis perceptions.

Crisis communication, when done successfully, can help mitigate negative media coverage and manage perceptions both during and after the crisis.

Crisis communication has been broadly **defined as** “the collection, processing, and dissemination of information required to address a crisis situation”.

Also, **crisis communication defined as** “the ongoing process of creating shared meaning among and between groups, communities, individuals and agencies, within the ecological context of a crisis, for the purpose of preparing for and reducing, limiting and responding to threats and harm”

Reputation is “a perceptual representation of a company’s past actions and future prospects that describe the firm’s appeal to all of its key constituents”.

Crises are harmful to organizations and their stakeholders who might have conflicting interests and needs.

Crisis management is the organizational actions and communication that are expected to lower the likelihood of a crisis, minimize the harm from a crisis, and re-establish orders after a crisis.

As a result, organizational research regarding crisis management usually addresses one or more of the event's three areas/stages: (a) pre-crisis preparedness, (b) proposal for handling midst crisis situations, and (c) post-crisis strategies to restore the corporate image.

Although reputation-attribution is a more straightforward psychological process, crisis communication strategies are more complicated but can influence cognitions and help lessen a crisis's negative impacts on an organization and its stakeholders

Social Media in Crisis Communication Opportunities and Challenges



Social media provides both **opportunities and challenges** for crisis communication. With more than three billion people around the globe using social media. By using social media effectively, crisis managers can ensure their communication is received by their intended audience at the time it needs to be received.

Opportunities and challenges of social media crisis communication

Opportunities	Challenges
Real-time communication	Little-to-no time to prepare
Greater ability to reach intended audiences	May not reach all audiences (offline audiences)
Increased credibility – can share information directly from official sources	Platform limitations (e.g., need to have good presence/# of followers)
Crowdsourcing and citizen journalism	Risk of misinformation spread
Tools are often for free	Risk of para-crisis
Enables two-way dialogue	Large quantity of data can cause cluttered networks
Can function as an alternative channel when traditional channels cannot be used	
Messages can be targeted	Dependent on connectivity
Can humanize the organization	Para can mean “like” something. A paracrisis is like a crisis. It can “look like” a crisis and does require action from the organization.
Event detection and monitoring	
Live reporting through photo and video	
Accessible anywhere an Internet connection exists (independent from electricity availability, thus can be used even if electrical supply is unavailable)	

PR Models

FOUR MODELS OF PUBLIC RELATIONS

01

PRESS AGENT/PUBLICITY

Categorized as one-way communication. Uses persuasion, half-truths, and manipulation to influence audiences to behave as the organization desires. Does not use formal research to guide communication tactics.

02

PUBLIC INFORMATION MODEL

Categorized as one-way communication. Uses press releases and other one-way communication techniques to distribute organizational information. The public relations practitioner is referred to as the in-house journalist. Does not use formal research to guide communication tactics.

03

TWO-WAY ASYMMETRICAL MODEL

Categorized as two-way communication. Referred to as "scientific persuasion." Uses persuasion to influence audiences to behave as the organization desires. Conducts formal research and incorporates audience feedback in communication tactics.

04

TWO-WAY SYMMETRICAL MODEL

Categorized as two-way communication. Uses communication to negotiate with the public. Seeks to resolve conflict and promote mutual benefits, understanding and respect between the organization and key publics/stakeholders. Conducts formal research and incorporates audience feedback in communication tactics. Open and honest communication is important.

Models developed to explain the behavior of PR practitioners in 1970s. **Asymmetrical communication** is unbalanced in that the organization tries to change the public and **symmetrical communication** is balanced in that there are adjustments by the organization and its stakeholders.

There are **four models** of public relations which includes press agency/publicity, public information, two-way asymmetrical, and two-way symmetrical.

1) The press agency/publicity model is characterized as a one-way asymmetrical model of communication, traveling from the organization to the public primarily through the mass media, used as a way of persuading and manipulating a desired audience to act as the organization wishes. (Pure Propaganda)

2)The public information model, developed as a reaction to attacks on large corporations and government agencies by journalists. Leaders of these organizations realized they needed more than the propaganda of press agents to counter the attacks in the media. The public information model is also a one-way asymmetrical model of communication, traveling from the organization to the audience, with mass media as its primary channel.

3) The two-way asymmetrical model some public relations practitioners began to base their work on the behavioral and social sciences, and, as a result, to give more credence to examining audience behavior: PR practitioners both sought information from and gave information to the public. Here, the key is to persuade publics to accept an organization's point of view. Unlike the first two models, feedback was generated through scientific research to advance and secure the interests and needs of the organization ahead of its publics.

4)The two-way symmetrical model is to use communication to create and maintain a mutual understanding and respect between an organization and its publics. The two-way symmetrical model of public relations focuses on a balanced dialogue, where the organization listens to the concerns of the public to encourage an open and honest, mutually beneficial relationship.

This model is based on a free exchange of information that is used to alter attitudes in both the organization and its public rather than the public changing to suit the organization. Given that communication is a balance between senders and receivers, both the public and the organization can, in theory, be persuaded to shift their thinking and/or practice.

Crisis Communication Theories



William Benoit (1995; 1997) developed a **theory of image restoration** to understand how corporations recover from crises. The process of image repair is most often **framed as apologia**, or a genre of public apologetic discourse.

Image restoration theory is based on the assumption that image and reputation have both **symbolic and economic value**, that threats to an organization's image can occur (sometimes frequently), and that communication can help repair the damage.

An attack on one's image has two components: 1) an offensive act and 2) an accusation of responsibility for the act. If there is no offensive act or no accusations of responsibility for the act, there is no reputational threat.

Benoit's theory is founded on two key assumptions:

- 1) communication is a goal-directed activity; and**
- 2) maintaining a positive reputation is one of the central goals of communication.**

In his theory of image restoration, Benoit organizes strategies into five distinct categories:

**denial,
evading responsibility,
reducing offensiveness,
corrective action, and
mortification.**

These strategies are grounded in a belief that communication (words and actions) affects how stakeholders perceive the organization in crisis.

Coombs (2014) summarized 10 SCCT communication strategies under four crisis response strategy clusters as shown in the Table.

Organizations usually adopt different types of SCCT communication strategies, depending on their belongingness to the victim, accidental, or preventable clusters.

For example, organizations may choose the strategies in the 1) **denial posture** to avoid any connections with a crisis. They may also use the strategies in the 2) **diminishment cluster** to lower a crisis's negative effects. 3) **Rebuilding posture** allows organizations to re-establish relationships with the stakeholder through apologies or compensations. Strategies in the 4) **bolstering posture** enable organizations to build a positive relationship with the stakeholders.

SCCT: Situational Crisis Communication Theory

Situational Crisis Communication Theory Crisis Response Strategies.

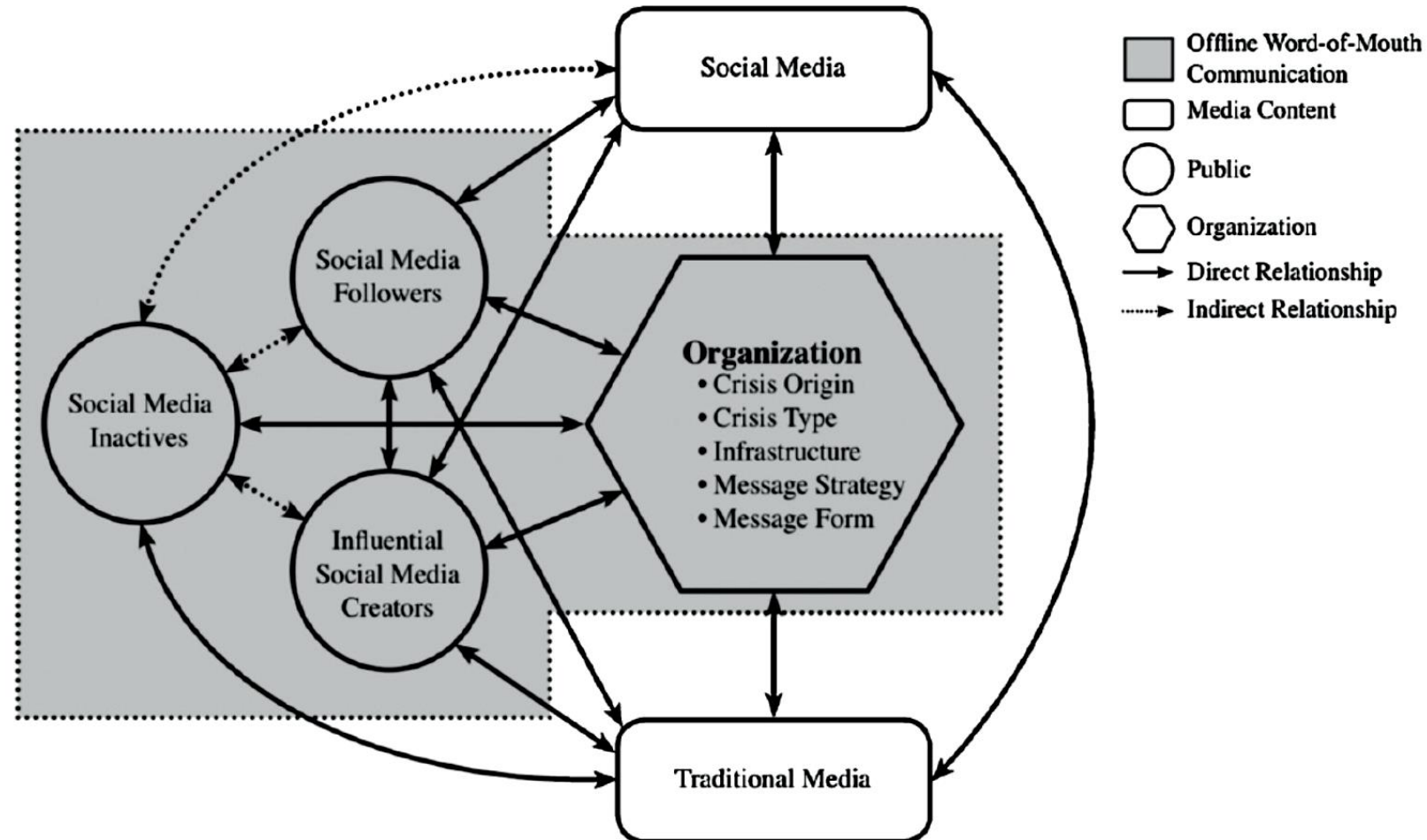
Crisis Response Cluster	Purpose/Description
Denial posture (cluster)	
1. Attack the accuser	To confront those claiming that the crisis exists
2. Denial	To deny the existence of the crisis
3. Scapegoating	To blame someone outside the organization for the crisis
Diminishment posture	
1. Excusing	To minimize the organization's responsibility for the crisis
2. Justification	To minimize the perceived damage associated with the crisis
Rebuilding posture	
1. Compensation	To compensate the victims
2. Apology	To apologize for the crisis
Bolstering posture	
1. Reminding	To remind stakeholders about the organization's past good work
2. Ingratiation	To praise the stakeholders
3. Victimage	To explain how the organization is a victim of the crisis

Source. Adopted from Coombs (2014) and Roshan et al. (2016).

Social-mediated crisis management (SMCM)

Social media has the potential to one day contribute to agenda building for public relations practitioners so they must learn to adopt it into their practices.

Social-mediated Crisis Communication Model



The Social-Mediated Crisis Communication (SMCC) model is also known as the “**social-mediated dialogue**” between organizations and publics during crises.

This model is considered to be the first theoretical model to focus on relationships between online and offline audiences, organizations, social media platforms, and traditional media, before, during and after the crises.

In Social-Mediated Crisis Communication model, both the direct and indirect exchange of information on social media, as well as between traditional media and social media are significant .

Social-mediated crisis management (SMCM)

This model is quite useful for communication in emergency situations for defining the at-risk population and how to reach these people in an effective way and timely manner.

Today's world is deeply connected via social media networks and the information circulated through social media platforms during emergencies has the potential to engage with multiple types of public audiences according to SMCC model.

It is to be noted that, social media platforms can facilitate organizations to monitor crisis issues, cultivate critical relationships, and create transparency.

On the other hand, misinformation is being circulated on social media managers and crisis managers may lose control of correct flow of messages under some circumstances.

The influencer impact on Social Media Crisis



How influencers can help you manage a social media PR crisis

Outlining **a dialogic public relations theory**, Kent and Taylor (2002) presented that public relations could enhance dialogue by creating channels for dialogic communication to occur.

They specifically identified online communication as an ideal opportunity for promoting dialogue.

They recommended that organizations have an opportunity to establish dialogic relationships with stakeholders through strategically designed websites.

How influencers can help you manage a social media PR crisis

So, let's now go through the five ways you can use influencers to help in a PR crisis on social media.

1. Move conversations away from the crisis

Negative comments or news stories about your brand can dominate the headlines during a PR crisis. This tends to happen when you take too long to respond or don't take accountability and address the issue in good time.

By generating positive commentary about your brand and engaging your target audience, influencers can help shift conversations.

How influencers can help you manage a social media PR crisis

1. Move conversations away from the crisis

Influencers can help shift the attention and conversations. But that's not to say you shouldn't own up to your mistakes. Before recruiting influencers to change the conversation, address the issue and show your commitment to fixing it. Then, you can bring in influencers to add positive vibes.

How influencers can help you manage a social media PR crisis

2. Improve the search results for your brand

Even with an excellent website, good landing pages and a user-friendly app, you still need a way to drive positive traffic to your most relevant web resources in times of crisis.

That's because when you search for a particular term, Google will sometimes provide a "top stories" segment near the very top of their search results. If your brand has been on the news and is trending on social media for all the wrong reasons, those negative remarks are likely to appear here. You don't want that.

How influencers can help you manage a social media PR crisis

2. Improve the search results for your brand

A timely and well-executed influencer marketing strategy can improve positive mentions and remarks about your brand. This increases social momentum as the influencer's audience engages with the positive content.

How influencers can help you manage a social media PR crisis

3. Boost your engagement

Writing better content for your brand and telling your stories organically is a key advantage of combining PR with influencer marketing. This, in turn, improves your brand engagement rate.

An influencer campaign effectively connects you with specific audiences on social media platforms during a PR crisis. Influencers can increase your brand's likes, shares, reposts, comments, DMs, link clicks, hashtag engagements – pretty much everything.

How influencers can help you manage a social media PR crisis

3. Boost your engagement

High audience engagement rates generally mean that folks are interested in and interacting with your content. This is precisely what you want during a PR crisis; an engaged audience that's open to getting clarification on what's going on and provide feedback.

How influencers can help you manage a social media PR crisis

4. Improve brand awareness

When a public relations crisis hits, naturally, more people will look up your brand. And some of these people might not know anything about you. It's therefore possible that they'll view your brand negatively due to the PR crisis you're facing. Any misinformation or negative press coming from the crisis will affect their attitude towards your brand.

Influencers can help you counteract that. A good influencer marketing campaign will help shed some light on what your brand is all about. Besides showing the good work of your brand, influencers may also help people who have never heard about you discover what your company does.

How influencers can help you manage a social media PR crisis

5. Build brand trust

Influencers will not make a bad product good. However, influencer relationships can help rebuild trust with people amid a bad PR outlay.

Influencers can help you rebuild trust and brand sentiment, generate positive search traffic and social signals, earn potential customers, and improve engagement. This is achieved through sharing positive content and directing conversations.

How influencers can help you manage a social media PR crisis

Influencers of social media usage

Interactive digital media platforms are changing the marketing scene.

These platforms have empowered consumers to connect, share, and collaborate, creating spheres of influence that have deeply distorted the way marketers engage in influencing activities.

How influencers can help you manage a social media PR crisis

Influencers of social media usage

Social network advertising offers an online marketing opportunity that narrowing the gap between sales and advertising activities, which are obtained from tracing consumer reactions.

Therefore, nearly every business is planning social media marketing activities.

How influencers can help you manage a social media PR crisis

Social Media Usage Benefits:

- Perform integrated marketing activities with much less effort and cost than before
- Enhance brand's reputation,
- Improve value,
- Improve relationship and brand equity,
- digital advertising and promotion,

How influencers can help you manage a social media PR crisis

Social Media Usage Benefits:

- handle customer service issues,
- mine innovation ideas
- build and improve customer relations
- cost reduction in terms of marketing,
- enhance communication and customer service,
- improve brand image.

How influencers can help you manage a social media PR crisis

Influencer marketing presents one of the best ways to reach out to and engage with consumers in real time during a crisis. Influencers are trusted, and research has shown the power of influencers over vital purchase decisions.

But influencer marketing isn't just about **going viral on social platforms**. It's about building an authentic relationship with your customers, connecting with a target audience, and telling your brand story. The PR and influencer marketing approach has also become an important part of most brands' **crisis management** planning, and it's proving to be quite effective.

How influencers can help you manage a social media PR crisis

A good response to a crisis can show your brand's commitment to looking after its community. It can turn a bad situation into good PR, helping you solidify your bond with your existing fans by showing your brand's true colors.

But for that to happen, you'll need to have a solid PR crisis management plan in place.

And as it happens, influencers can play a critical role in that plan.

How influencers can help you manage a social media PR crisis

As PR crises are an almost inevitable part of business operations, staying one step ahead of the curve is crucial. Influencer strategies can turn the tide for your business or brand when facing a public relations crisis.

Social influencers are favorable due to their instant access and connection to audiences. The trust afforded to them and their ability to speak in a voice that resonates with both customers and brands make them extremely valuable comms assets.

Conclusion:

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Thank You

