

The Use of Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn etc. as Strategic Tools for Crisis Communication

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Abstract

A crisis is a corporate or administrative delinquent that garners public reaction and unanticipated media scrutiny which intimidates an enterprise's standing as far as its goodwill among the consumers in particular and the society at large is concerned. Crisis can be in the forms of labor unrest, ecological tumbles, conspicuous sexual harassment, natural or man-made adversities, illegal actions, fire or major safety issues, family separations, merchandise tinkering or recalls and even government led investigations. In order to overcome these predicaments, an organization's ability to frame prudently verified crisis communication strategies can not only provide aid in the up gradation of disaster management mechanisms, but may also decrease prices of cataclysm and develop pellucidity of resolutions. Nevertheless in recent years, time and again it has been detected during organizational crisis that conventional administrative practices are proving to be inadequate and backdated.

Hence, presently software developers are busy building newfangled communication applications and segments that make use of diverse social media in answering to all types crisis situation in the organization. This paper thus, discusses the situations under which the crisis communications stratagems can be modified so that it reconnoiters the use of popular social media like Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn in addressing today's contemporary organizational catastrophe. It proposes an outline for organizations in tackling any type of crisis situations by the widespread use of social media to conduct out-of-the-box awareness, and even to catalyze action and withstand discourses and reactions amongst community establishments. The paper finally tries to provide a self-assessment tool

to monitor and track progress of the implemented methodologies in the likelihood of an emergency that threatens the integrity or reputation of an organization.

Keywords: Crisis; Organization; Social-media; Communication; Tool

1. Introduction

Crisis communication is a premeditated proclamation intended to avert or minimize the harm caused by a debacle on any organization. Taking into cognizance the mammoth cost-effective price of any business, a critical incident or a crisis is basically an unexpected event that poses an institutional menace suggesting the need for rapid, high-level decision-making (Paschall, 1992). As soon as the trouble occurs, organizations can lend a hand in alleviating the situation by formulating a well-knit crisis communication stratagem by efficiently involving the social media. With the inclusion of social media in vogue, such as blogs, social networking sites, Really Simply Syndication (RSS) feeds etc., which endeavors to engage a social community in exchanging ideas virtually, the rigorousness of the crisis can be abridged to a momentous degree.

Hence, the aim of the research paper is to investigate the uncharted doctrine of this very crisis communication, and thereby arguing to stipulate the use of social media as a tactical instrument in imperative situation.

1.1 Background

Every research on crisis communication demonstrates that efficient preparation for any catastrophe assists the business houses to tackle any problem quickly. Taylor and Kent's (2007) study finds that designing a crisis web site, prior to the predicament is the most excellent practice for using an Internet during an unanticipated emergency. This necessitates foreseeing the varieties of disaster an organization can face and the kinds of information desirable for the web site. Further, it has been found through investigation that crisis is an occasion that conveys, or has the probability for bringing, an organization into disgrace and jeopardizes its future lucrativeness (Lerbinger, 1997). Hence, by espousing a volatile yet tactical communication blueprint by managing the social-media appropriately, any redundant crisis can be meritoriously addressed. While the significance for using social media as a crisis management gizmo had already been acknowledged, no doubt, it is still in a nascent stage.

1.2 Objectives

- i. To comprehend the true meaning of crisis while taking into cognizance the kaleidoscopic concerns of the organizations in solving them.
- ii. Explain measures to communicate during a disaster by citing some real –life examples from the business sector.
- iii. To highlight the role of social media as a strategic tool for resolving any type of catastrophe in the corporate world.

- iv. To address the challenges being faced by the organization in using social media as a tactical contrivance for crisis communiqué.

1.3 What is Crisis?

A crisis is a substantial menace to maneuvers that can have harmful consequences if not controlled suitably. An upset in equipoise at the fiasco of one's traditional problem-solving approach which results in ineptitude, hopelessness, sadness, confusion, and panic (Lilli bridge and Klukken, 1978), a crisis is an unexpected emergency inviting a volatile approach. A key, impulsive occurrence that impends to damage the organization and its investors, Burnett opined that a crisis is composed of, "A continuum, beginning with an incident, followed by a conflict, and ending with a crisis, the most serious form of disruption" (476). A crisis, when neglected, can endanger the survival of the company to a considerable extent.

1.4 Crisis Communication

Crisis communication in an organization is an interaction, discourse, or tête-à-tête between an organization and its public and stakeholders that includes the government too, before, during, and after the occurrence of the adversity (Benoit, 1995). Moreover, crisis communication is a part of the disaster management procedure, which details a premeditated plan of action and technique for recovery for an organization that has suffered a negative impact as a result of a crisis and helps the organization to control the damaging situation (Coombs, 1999). Preceding the 1980s, crisis communication was assumed to be part of the process of organizational reputation retrieval after the catastrophe (Gottschalk, 1993); nonetheless, modern-day crisis communication is viewed as an ongoing process rather than a just the once strategic retort (Fearn-Banks, 2006).

2. The Advent of the Social Media

Social media is actually a societal device of communiqué. Andreas Kaplan and Michael Haenlein define social media as "a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0 and that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content." Apart from enduring discussions or sharing notions, as technology advances, social media like Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and various virtual blogs etc. are all the time more used in sending cautions, to conduct situational wakefulness, and even to initiate actions.

2.1 Social Media as an Adroit Tool for Crisis Communication

The propinquity of social media, its networking abilities and the promise of a user-generated content makes it an appropriate tool for resolving crisis communication. The most popular social networking site of the present moment, Facebook is having a high level of self-presentation and a medium level of social presence and media richness (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Therefore, Facebook has great potential for resolving crisis communication because the high level of self-presentation offers chances to

control the impressions of others as it permits aural, visual and psychosomatic contact to stakeholders and the diffusion of an enormous amount of information. Again, Twitter is connected with open and dialogic communication that indicates ingenuousness for concern and keenness to solve the problem. The same applies for LinkedIn, a professional networking site, where sharing affirmative as well as downbeat knowledge regarding a crisis generates sagacity for empathy and exhilaration.

In March, 2014, General Motors CEO, Mary Barra used social media efficiently as she dealt with the crisis that has resulted in the recall of 1.6 million small cars to fix defective ignition switches linked to multiple deadly crashes. When Barra acknowledged something is wrong, and pledged to find out what went wrong and unconditionally apologized in Facebook and Twitter, it helped her regain the faith of her consumers. Again, the Southwest Flight- 345 that landed nose first at LaGuardia is another recent example of a big brand who knew exactly how to handle a crisis through social media. On July 23, 2013, the nose gear on Southwest Flight 345 collapsed and caused a rough, uncontrolled landing at LaGuardia Airport. Ten passengers were hurt, six of them needing hospital treatment for minor injuries. Barely half an hour after the incident, Southwest was actively communicating with the public, issuing an official hashtag and reassuring interested parties.

Back in 2009, before Domino's Pizza ever had a social media presence, they found themselves launched into a viral attack when two employees in their Conover, North Carolina franchise uploaded a video to YouTube of themselves doing filthy things to a sandwich before it went out on delivery. The video instantly went viral and Domino's Pizza was straightaway launched into a full-fledged crisis. Hence, realizing the need of the hour, they set up with a Twitter account, hurriedly posted a regret to their website, before their official statement was released. They then asked their Twitter followers to help them spread the word by retweeting the link. This immensely helped to calm the storm. In another instance of adroit crisis communication, during the "BL 5C battery crisis" in 2007, Nokia India quickly sent out an advisory to customers articulating the exact nature of the problem. Though roughly 45 million batteries across the world were affected, there were only 100 cases of overheating reported. Nokia went that extra mile to win back public confidence by the appropriate use of social media.

The functions of social media can provide opportunities during crisis communication due to the ability of sharing thoughts which can be responded to by others which in turn covers emotional needs of stakeholders. These technologies have the potential to prevent communication breakdown through reliance on just one platform and thereby to reinforce the diffusion of warning messages.

2.2 Challenges in Front of Social Media as a Tool for Crisis Communication

Kerkhof, Schultz and Utz (2011) observe that social media is both a medium for and an armament against crises. Since everyone is able to publish information they are faster than broadcasted news and are in some cases seen as more credible than traditional media. Again, this very speed and credibility of messages on social media

can be a menace because negative information travels fast as well and rumors can easily be regarded credible.

On July 6, 2013, Asiana Airlines Flight-214 crashed on final approach to *San Francisco International Airport*, the first fatal passenger airliner crash in the US. In the immediate aftermath of the tragedy, Asiana was silent for more than four hours, finally reopening communication channels with a plain tweet. Asiana's tweet fell largely on deaf ears, because by then, the story had already been told and public opinion was extensively molded. Authenticity was mixed with gossips, and in the process Asiana suffered a distressing, largely self-inflicted blow to its marque. Another example of social media proving failure to solve crisis communication took place three- and- a - half month back. Malaysia Airlines flight MH-370 vanished en- route to Beijing from Kuala Lumpur on March 8, with 227 passengers and 12 crew on-board. While the airline jumped into action through public relations and social media, many of its statements have been cryptic and confusing. No doubt, Malaysia Airlines' response to the MH370 crisis will greatly impact its long-term future.

It is for these aforementioned examples, that notwithstanding their practicality, governments take social media in a nonchalant manner, due to the cost that could be incurred by trying to keep pace with growing expectations of people. The trustworthiness of social media content is sometimes questioned, though purifying apparatuses have been developed that may be used to lessen time spent reading immaterial messages and untrustworthy sources. Inaccuracies can occur such as the endowment of imprecise or inconceivable info leading to maladministration of delicate evidence. Hence at the moment, extenuating these blunders is the foremost task.

3. Conclusion

We can see that the use of social media in risk and crisis communication is still in its embryonic stage. Public guidelines are required to endure and device open data schemes, which can control proliferation of precarious rumors and evaluate the influence of the social media accurately. It should allow methodical national arrangement to have long term storage capacity to incrementally learn from past crisis. Wide-ranging outfits are being developed to amass ever more records, so that meaning can be drawn from the flow of information exchange via the Web 2.0 during a crisis. Social media allow for people to gather and create networks within few minutes, either with you or against you, and it is thus important to pay close attention and react quickly. Birgfeld (2010) assures that while social media has become the weapon of choice for net-savvy masses, it is also the very best asset for crisis management. A growing number of emergency officers, volunteer establishments, etc. are vigorous online to augment the springiness of their societies when a disaster attacks. The public at large should be proficiently briefed by the emergency facilities that what they can expect to receive through social media in terms of crisis communiqué.

4. Suggestions

The use of social media could improve transparency and trust in public authorities. With reliable and updated public safety and emergency notification via Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn or various micro-blogging sites, they could work on augmenting the level of limpidity. Some websites can help keep record, archives, on tweets, or associate them with a timeline to have a visual charting of the crisis enwrapping. Many applications for recording or engaging tweets on timelines are available for free, which can be an inducement for a grander number of researchers to use these resources. Crisis –communication experts could be placed in dissimilar proficient assemblages to take lessons from previous catastrophes and cultivate novel techniques for effectively using the social media in resolving the organizational crisis.

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