

The role of social networks in crisis communication – classic media trends

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Abstract: Crisis communications, presumably, have existed since the beginning of time, however, studying the subject and identifying it in practice (Fearn-Banks, 2007.1) started in the 80s of the last century, which is mainly caused by social with the increasing influence of the media in the direction of crisis management. Obviously, crises existed long before the Internet and some modern Geopolitical conflict is also a result of past mistakes and unresolved crises (Zamour & Gorpe, 2017). That's why in crisis communication the key issue is to identify and analyze cultural norms, which include not only the traditions, but also the art and peculiarities of the apology. In the process of analyzing the concept of apology, a question arises -

Why apology is so lacking in the process of solving crises? First of all, I would like to express my respect to all the researchers who perceived the challenge of apology in their scientific work, as sorry seems to

Be the hardest words in crisis communication. I have to admit, it doesn't matter which famous hit we like the version (although Blue Featuring Elton John is always on my playlist version), the main thing is that we are all well aware of how difficult it is to say sorry, not during a song, but during a crisis. Thus, the article discusses what what does the concept of apology mean and what is the importance of multicultural factors in crisis communication.

Keywords: Apology, Crisis Communication, Social Media, Culture, Resilience.

1. Introduction:

The definition of crisis communication is still a subject of differences of opinion among scientists and researchers, which creates certain difficulties. Since "the definition determines the approach to the subject" (Coombs, 2019), it is better to define the essence of crisis communication correctly from the beginning.

We can consider crisis communication as actions in accordance with certain instructions in a crisis situation in order to limit the damage that may be caused to the organization and stakeholders (Coombs, 2014), and we can explain the crisis as an atypical event that may be predictable but not expected (Zaremba, 2015. 33-34). Communication enables the intentional creation of certain results, that is, communication is a tool used by senders and receivers to achieve goals, solve problems, influence others, and coordinate actions (Sellnow&Seeger, 2013. 11).

With the growing influence of social media, each new crisis and communication error may reveal unexpected risks that may require updating existing strategies to manage them.

Obviously, media organizations use social networks to strengthen their positions in the virtual space and attract more audiences, especially young people, for whom the digital world is the main source of information. Social media is pushing media outlets to create multimedia products. The fast pace and two-way communication of social media has seemingly erased the line between traditional and online media.

Given this, it is logical to use the term "classical media" to describe modern media, which would include television, radio, magazines and online media. "Classic media" today competes with "new media", which has emerged as a result of the evolution of digital communication technologies emerging in virtual space.

Social media has created a communication context where crises are sparked by a single user and it is very difficult to manage, especially when the media not infrequently shares a fabricated scandal without checking the facts. Also visible are the trends that we got with the growing influence of social media: the transformation of clichéd media, data journalism, low media credibility.

In comparison: even a few decades ago, both brands and consumers depended on the quality and decisions of news reported by traditional media outlets. Today, anyone with access to the Internet has the ability to spread their story virally (Strawser, 2022). What is the reason? That social media capabilities have transformed the public from passive receivers of messages to active participants in crisis communication, where each user has a chance to influence crisis de-escalation and de-escalation.

Due to the influence of social media, classical media has lost its trust, which is confirmed by many studies. What was the cause of distrust in the media? - Use of unverified facts by the media in journalistic production and further sharing in the social space, due to the interactivity of which, it is difficult to return the spread misinformation, there is also a danger of the so-called echo chambers, closed chats and groups, which are fertile examples of the dissemination of unverified information. This is where most crises arise, which harms not only the direct addressees, but also the media itself, if it uses such information.

However, there are ways in which the media can maintain the position of public mediator through the principles of journalistic ethics - these are data journalism and media monitoring. Statistics and media monitoring - these are two of the most difficult challenges for the media, because it is in this way that it is possible to reduce the risks of social media.

Literature review

Crisis communication, as a new study discipline, is built on the case study method. Existing theories and strategies of crisis communication are evolving along with technological progress, which poses completely new challenges for companies and users of social networks. The article uses a number of important works and analysis of scientific articles, but the key literature is the following:

Thus, the article uses "Crisis Communication - THEORY AND PRACTICE" by Alan Jay Zaremba. The author offers a theoretical framework for myths and opinions related to crisis communication deficits and provides examples of successful and unsuccessful crisis communication.

The key part of the article is the works of W. Timothy Coombs: Ongoing Crisis communication, which discusses the dangers and challenges of crisis communication, as well as the role and influence of social media on crisis management, and Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT), which presents the problem in reverse, from within. SCCT provides a mechanism for predicting how stakeholders and consumers will react to a crisis, crisis reputation threats and crisis response strategies.

The article also uses Theorizing Crisis Communication, Timothy L. Sellnow and Matthew (W. Seeger. 2021) - a guide reviews adaptive and new models of social media and crisis communication, Social Information Processing Theory, Warranting Theory, The MAIN Mode, Dialogic Theory of Public Relations ; Social-Mediated Crisis Communication Model; Emerging Theories of Social Media in Crisis Communication.

The article uses Karen Freberg's work Crisis Communication. The guide reviews the basics of crisis communication, including crisis definition, crisis perception, and crisis communication strategies.

Data Journalism by Ivan Valchanov. Essence, Technology, Development (University of National World Economy, Sofia. The book BIG DATA Digital Marketing and Trendwatching, p. 83) is a good buy for the article. The author describes the digital technologies, communication media and software products that are causing a number of transformations in media. One of them is data journalism.

Research methodology

Crisis communication became the subject of extensive research in the US in the 1980s. A major challenge for early researchers was to find, evaluate, and synthesize knowledge about crisis communication (Coombs, 2014). Most of the research available to date is based on the American and European experience and may not be applicable to other countries' cultures. That is why it is important to conduct new studies in countries where crisis communication is developing, including Georgia.

In the current article, I present the results of my quantitative research. The survey, which was conducted anonymously on January 9-13, 2023, includes answers from 50 respondents. Among them: 48% work as a media manager, 52% are working journalists, 72% of the interviewed respondents represent the central media organization, 16% - regional media, 12% - international media.

In addition, the article uses the components of two in-depth interviews, the interviews were recorded with Khatuna Bakradze, the head of the Georgian marketing company IPM, and Malkhaz Rekhviashvili, the editor-in-chief of Factgheck.ge.

The final part of the article uses an excerpt from my scientific article - "Crisis communication and challenges of social media", which was published in the journal "Moambe" of the National Academy of Sciences of Georgia (MOAMBE, Issue: Vol. 1 No. 1 (2023): ARTICLES, Publication Date: Apr 21, 2023).

1. Discussion

4.1 The basis of crisis communication theories

Against the background of the strong influence of social media in crisis communication, new theories are being created and communication theories are being adapted in order to make more clear the definition of the influence and role of social media in crisis communication, to focus on communication variables that are an integral part of new media (Sellnow&Seeger, 2021).

How big is the role of social media in the direction of adaptation of crisis communication theories, we can judge on the example of Social-Mediated Crisis Communication Model (SMCC).

It is noteworthy that the basis of SMCC became the Blog-Mediated Crisis Model, which focused on how bloggers informed users about an organization in crisis. to emphasize the potential impact of social media on society in times of crisis (Matthew&Seeger, 2021. 208).The SMCC model provides an opportunity to illustrate the spread of information during a crisis and reflects the influence of social media on the interaction of new media, classic media and verbal communication and the

credibility of messages. More importantly, it is a model that has the potential to replace Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) "to help organizations communicate with the most effective message strategies" (Matthew&Seeger,2021).4.2. Data JournalismSocial media was created from digital tools of communication and quickly became a source of multi-profile information not only for ordinary users, but also for journalists. Reality shows that journalists use social media tools without any criticism, filter or verification (Szews P. 2014. 96), while data journalism opens completely new horizons, and properly selected tools allow researchers not only to collect data, but also to Observe the reaction in real time (Valchanov, 2018). Analyzing data using technology and then transforming it into a media product is a phenomenon characteristic of online media of the 21st century. Therefore, the generation of vast amounts of information in the digital space has presented media researchers with a challenge, as it is difficult to collect and synthesize data. However, with the use of scientific and commercial digital applications, it has become possible to simplify the research process.

4.3. Decline in media credibility

Analyzing data is the future for journalists - this is the prediction of English computer scientist Tim Berners-Lee. The man who created the World Wide Web and invented the Internet Resource Addressing System says, "If that sounds like a daunting prospect, it's worth considering that almost none of today's journalism courses teach any kind of data analysis, even in its simplest form—statistics." Guardian. 2010).

Research shows that trust in the media is gradually decreasing. For example, according to the 2017 Edelman Trust Barometer, a global communications holding company, 64% of the US population found leaked information more believable than media reports.

Holding considers this trend as a threat to crisis communications, and in an extensive assessment (What the 2017 Edelman Trust Barometer Insights Mean for Crisis Communications) emphasizes an alarming trend - the absolute lack of faith in the system. According to the Trust Barometer, the media has the lowest trust among the four institutional pillars - government, business, media and civil society - so the Edelman Trust Barometer asked a key question: If people trust organizations less in the ordinary course of business, how will they trust them when What about a crisis, that is, when "something goes wrong"? (Dockins, Digital practice, March 24, 2017).

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Edelman Trust Barometer-ob According to the data of 2023, as a result of a survey conducted in 26 countries, the media (50%) is distrusted in 15, including Germany (47%), the USA (43%), Australia (38%) and South Korea (27%).).

4.4. Echo chambers

Notably, social media (44%) remains the least trusted sector among sectors such as technology (75%), education (71%), food and beverage (71%) and healthcare (70%). The reason for the decrease in trust in social media is in turn related to echo chambers, which is the result of the media sharing information from closed chats and groups. The shared media environment has given way to echo chambers, making it difficult to solve problems collaboratively. (ECONOMIC OPTIMISM SUFFERS

A MASSIVE COLLAPSE GLOBALLY, [https://www.edelman.com/news-awards/2023-edelman-trust-barometer 2023](https://www.edelman.com/news-awards/2023-edelman-trust-barometer-2023), January 15).

Echo chambers in social media are a significant problem as they relate to conspiracy theories, political polarization, and the spread of misinformation. An echo chamber is a network in which users broadcast opinions to them that discredit other views (A Survey on Echo Chambers on Social Media: Description, Detection and Mitigation <https://arxiv.org/abs/2112.05084>, Submitted on 9 Dec 2021].

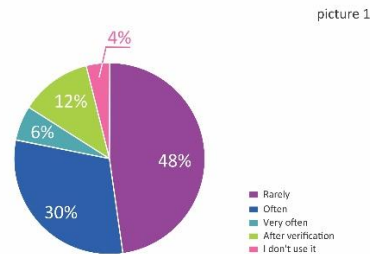
According to Malkhaz Rekhviashvili, the editor-in-chief of Factmeter, the number of people for whom social media is the primary source of information is constantly increasing. If we look at it, as Facebook and other big digital media have begun to sort of regulate hate speech and incitement to violence, we'll see a flow of people into small chats where information is hard to control. Thus, it is in small groups that a comfortable environment is created for ultra-right and violent groups and, accordingly, a fertile space for the creation of crises.

4.5 Results of empirical research - Georgia

As for the results of the empirical research, the purpose of the survey conducted in January 2023 was to determine the role of social media in the professional activities of Georgian media organizations and to assess their attitude towards crisis communication.

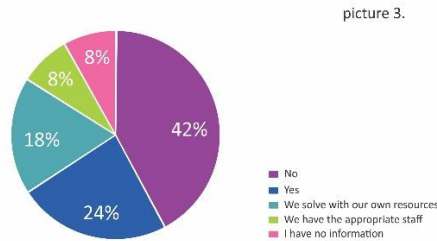
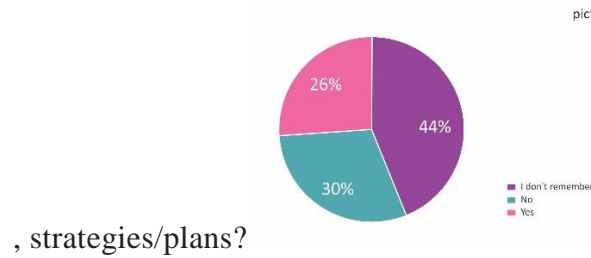
Research has shown that the media largely benefit from information spread on social media. To the question - "How often do you use the information spread on social media as a primary source for preparing journalistic material?" - the answers were distributed as follows: 48% rarely use the information spread on social media as a primary source, often - 30%, not at all - 4%, very often - 6%, verification then uses - 12%. Overall, 96% of traditional media primarily use social media information, albeit with varying frequency (Figure 1).

Figure 1: "How often do you use information spread on social media as a primary source for preparing journalistic material?"



An interesting trend has emerged regarding threats related to social media. To the question - has the influence of social media created a crisis situation for your media outlet? - Only 26% of respondents answer positively, 30% - negatively, and the majority - 44% cannot recall such facts. In total, more than a quarter of the surveyed respondents confirm the existence of crisis cases related to social networks in Georgian media organizations (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Influenced by social media, has a crisis situation created for your media outlet?



To the question - does your media organization have any crisis management/prevention documents, strategies/plans? - The answers are distributed as follows: 24% confirm the existence of an organizational document, 18% state that they are already solving crises by their own efforts, 22% say that they do not have such a document, according to 20%, they do not have a strategy yet, but they need it. 8% do not have information on this issue, and in the case of 8%, the media organization has a relevant staff/office (Figure 3).

Figure 3. Does your media organization have any crisis management/prevention documents

If we summarize the results of the research, we will see that the media mainly relies on the social media narrative, and only single organizations have created a strategic communication document to manage crisis situations. Does the media use any form of monitoring and analysis? This question was answered by a leading company in the field of marketing research in the field of communication. Khatuna Bakradze, director of IPM, says in an in-depth interview that the company has been operating in the market since 1995 and currently has more than 150 clients, although there are no media organizations among them, that is, Georgian media organizations have never approached the marketing research company with a request for media monitoring or social network analysis.

What should classical media take into account in order to oppose the challenges of new media and avoid crisis communication? In addition to processing data, it is about developing the right messages for digital media.

4.6. Social media messages

In the process of managing crisis situations, communication messages have changed in the 21st century, following the development of technologies. Social media provides many opportunities for public relations and crisis communication, but also creates challenges and barriers, including the so-called "Reputation killers" - the risk of cyber-attacks, rumours, misinformation and various intentional actions. Social media, on the other hand, is two-way, not only allowing organizations to communicate with their audiences, but also providing audiences with a forum for communication (Freberg, 2011.15).

Thus, it is important to correctly choose crisis messages, the purpose of which is to reduce the reputational, financial, emotional damage caused by the crisis, and at the same time to convince the audience to maintain a positive attitude towards the subject affected by the crisis (Freberg, 2011. 6).

It is important to look at social media as a mixture of different platforms, the selection and use of which depends on the nature of the crisis, the target audience, the stakeholders and the message of the crisis response. An aspect to consider when using social media is who is at risk. A crisis can put stakeholders and the organization at risk. However, stakeholder safety is the number one priority in a crisis (Coombs, 2019. 140). Taking into account these priorities should be mandatory for the classical media, because there is an institutional or organizational memory, which will always remind us of the mistakes made in the crisis. Does the crisis end when the problem seems to be overcome? Every crisis eventually comes to some resolution. There comes a time when the organization returns to normal activities. However, even after the end of the crisis, it is necessary for the media, like any other organization, to assess the lessons of crisis management, which is important for institutional or organizational memory.

1. Conclusion:

Crisis communication is still a developing field among the social sciences. Its thorough study began in the 80s of the 20th century and, therefore, it is accompanied by difficulties, including different opinions about the definition, a lack of empirical studies, and the undefined possibilities of social media, which is why even a single user of a social network can plan and instigate a crisis in the virtual space. !

Virtual space itself creates new crises and dictates new, unusual standards of crisis communications, with which there is virtually no precedent for dealing with.

Crisis communication, as a new study discipline, is built on the case study method. Existing theories and strategies of crisis communication are evolving along with technological progress, which poses completely new challenges for companies and users of social networks.

However, social media has a great opportunity to influence not only the course of crisis communication, but also the future perspective of companies and the formation of public opinion (mamiashvili, P, 2023).

Media outlets have transformed into multimedia platforms, and they have to account to users who do not act as they did in traditional media environments where communication was unanimous. Digital media users today have transformed from passive audiences to active users and have the opportunity to be not only observers but also direct participants in crisis management.

The credibility of the media is declining in the wake of the influence of social media, as anyone with a mobile device today can compete with journalists in terms of the speed of information dissemination. For this reason, the media does not have time to verify the information and sort and monitor the information accumulated in social networks, which further increases the risks of crisis communication.

It is noteworthy the tendency according to which the users of the social network flow into uncontrollable closed groups, which is a fertile ground for the creation of crises and organized attacks; This is the main reason why trust in social media is also decreasing.

Is there a solution? - It is important to carry out media monitoring, at any stage of the crisis it is necessary to carry out media monitoring and investigate the crisis messages covered by the media (Coombs, 2019. 162). Only in this case is it possible to have a consistent communication with the media during a crisis, which will give the stakeholders the opportunity to receive accurate, primary information from the classical media, and not secondary, confusing news fabricated by the social media itself (Coombs, 2007).

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