Protecting Organization Reputations during A Crisis: Emerging Social Media in Risk and Crisis Communication

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Abstract

Background/Objectives: This study focuses on how social media is used by Kuwaiti organizations as a tool in risk and crisis communication. Methods/Statistical Analysis: It examines how social media affects people’s opinions about the performance of companies, including whether or not people are really influenced by rumors and negative comments about these companies. In particular, the purpose of the study was to investigate how people were affected by available news and information on social media about organization performance. Findings: This study investigates whether people believe and trust information available on social media about organizations, and to what degree they are influenced by news or information regarding these organizations. Finally, we try to explore whether negative comments and rumors on social media platforms have an impact on people’s personal opinions, and to what extent. The participants for this study were a sample of Kuwaiti citizens living in the state of Kuwait. A random sample of 382 men and woman from different ages who use social media was obtained through an online survey (Survey Monkey). In this study, the researcher used an online questionnaire, with a total of 382 Kuwaiti citizens initially approached for responses, which were then analyzed for research. The results revealed that the majority of the respondents (82%) are at least sometimes affected by news and information available on social media, while 87% believe that social media is a successful tool in maintaining the reputation of a company. 65% of respondents indicated that social media plays a significant role in the development of companies, and 58% are influenced by abusive comments showing up on social media in relation to the companies’ reputation. Application/Improvements: The application of this study indicated that participants preferred to use Instagram as a social media tool, suggesting that this platform has specific features that do not exist on other platforms, such as high-quality photos being available and users being able to return to them whenever they need.

Keywords: Business to Consumer and Cronbach’s Alpha, Management Crisis, Social Media

1. Introduction

Social media for businesses is no longer merely optional; with social media management services saving businesses more time and generating better results in general, social media has become a fundamental part of any organization’s marketing strategy today. Social media platforms such as Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat and YouTube can assist organizations in connecting with their customers, raising brand awareness, maintaining reputation, and boosting the latest news and updates.

Increasingly, organizations are using social media as one of their primary means of communication. While this has many advantages, public relations officials must
be cautious about how social media is used during times of organizational crisis. Social media often gives critics direct communication access to these organizations, and public relations managers need to be increasingly careful about how to interact with and on social media in order to avoid deepening a crisis. However, theoretically grounded research on social media use for the purposes of crisis communication is limited. More research is therefore needed to assess the roles that organizations assign to social media use, as well as the perceived advantages and disadvantages of social media use when it comes to addressing organizational crises. Research that addresses these issues can encourage the development of clear crisis planning strategies for organizations. There are four major threats to social media: 1. Employees can deliberately damage the reputation of their companies. 2. Leaks: Employees may leak information unintentionally and thus hurt the employer. 3. Violation of privacy and 4. Loss of control: A situation occurs when someone wants to make a fuss by releasing controversial information.

2. Organization Crisis

An organizational crisis is an unpredictable event, or the widespread perception of an unpredictable event that threatens the ability of an organization to enact its mission. The term organizational crisis has two meanings; an organizational crisis can be resource-related or reputation-related. A resource-related organizational crisis relates to unanticipated events that impact on an organization’s area of focus or target population in ways that increase an immediate need for support. As an example, an international medical emergency aid organization might experience a resource crisis in the aftermath of a tsunami. The organization might have rapidly depleting resources and turn to social media to make an appeal for more support.

In a reputation-related organizational crisis, an undesirable event, such as insolvency or an employee scandal, can result in the perception that the agency is unable or unfit to carry out its mission. For instance, an employee arrested for fraudulently taking money from a non-profit organization can decrease support for the agency. Decreasing confidence in an organization is due to its association with a negative event, even when the agency remains solvent and the employee’s situation is resolved.

3. Research Problems and Methodology

This research work was proposed to address the following five questions:

Question 1: what is the best social media platform to use, whether for gaining information, communicating, trading etc.?

Question 2: Do people trust social media and how much are they affected by information and news reported on social media?

Question 3: Do people believe that social media is a successful way for a company to maintain its reputation?

Question 4: Do people think that social media plays a significant role in the development of a company’s performance?

Question 5: Do abusive comments relating to specific companies on social media affect people’s opinions about those companies?

Subjects were asked to state which social media platforms, if any, would be appropriate for communicating with during an organizational crisis. Subjects were also asked to complete a demographics form asking about their age, sex, education level, and status. To achieve the research objectives effectively, a quantitative approach has been used.

The questionnaire was administered online using SurveyMonkey.com. SPSS statistical software was used to analyze the data. The totaled rating scales were first
assessed for reliability using Cronbach’s Alpha to determine how all items in the questionnaire were related to one another.

4. Numerical Results

A total of 382 Kuwaiti citizens were initially approached for responses, and these responses were then analyzed for research. As responding to all the questions were a requirement to submit the survey, there was no incomplete data.

**RQ1:** Participants were asked about the best social media platform for them in general in order to search for information, to communicate, or for any other purpose. The results showed that the majority of respondents preferred to use Instagram with 38%. Slightly lower responses were

![Figure 1. Social media platform preferences.](image1)

![Figure 2. The degree of credibility in social media news.](image2)
recorded for Snapchat and Twitter at 26% and 23% respectively, while the lowest percentage went to Facebook with only 1.3% (Figure 1).

RQ2: As can be seen from (Figure 2), participants were asked whether they generally believe the news and information available on social media. 82% of respondents

Figure 3. The level of effectiveness of social media.

Figure 4. Social media and maintaining a company's reputation.
indicated that they sometimes believe the news and information, 10% that they completely trust this news and information, and only 7% that they did not trust this news and information on social media at all.

**RQ3**: As is shown by (Figure 3), participants were asked if they were influenced by the news and information available on social media. The result was that 67% said they were sometimes influenced, 18% that they were totally influenced, and the lowest percentage of 14% that they never influenced by the news and information available on social media.

**RQ4**: Participants were asked about their point of view regarding management crisis, and the role of social media in maintaining an organization’s reputation during such a crisis. Results showed that the vast majority of respondents indicated a significant role of social media in this area at 87%, while only 13% denied such a role, as can be seen in (Figure 4).

**RQ5**: Finally, participants were asked whether or not negative comments and rumors on social media about an organization’s performance negatively affect their own opinion about the organization. The results showed a clear majority indicating that they are influenced by these types of comments at least some extent with 58%, with only 16% reporting that they are never affected by such comments as shown in Figure 5.

## 5. Discussion and Conclusion

The main findings of this study indicated that participants preferred to use Instagram as a social media tool, suggesting that this platform has specific features that do not exist on other platforms, such as high-quality photos being available and users being able to return to them whenever they need. The platform can also easily boost updates and information about their companies via their account, whether this is with a picture or short video, allowing people to choose based on if like to see more than read, or if they want to see the news with a related
picture or video. The result of this exploratory study further suggests that launching an Instagram account is the best way to communicate with an audience in Kuwait, and in response to crises may indeed be an effective management tool. In examining whether participants believe and trust the news and information reported on social media, the majority of responses indicated that they are sometimes trustful of this news and information, demonstrating that most people normally verify what they read as well by what they see and hear via other mediums.

This suggests that companies should focus on the details as written on social media relating to news and information, regardless of whether it is positive or negative, and hire experts on behalf of the company to concentrate solely on its social media management and presence. Furthermore, this study reveals that the majority of responses indicated that social media is a great tool to maintain a company’s reputation and development, with participants in this study who emphasize the role of social media during organization crisis having the highest percentage. When asked whether they were influenced by negative or abusive comments about a company’s performance on social media, the majority of participants indicated that they are influenced by such comments to some extent, which indicates the significant role of social media on people’s opinions. As such, these findings suggest that organizations in crisis should continue to employ open communication practice during crisis situations, and consider negative comments and rumors as a strong tool that could potentially either maintain or destroy their company’s reputation.

This study opens up several areas for future research. First, in order to facilitate the adoption of social media, we can study our samples more deeply to investigate the correlation between variables such as age, sex, education level, and status. All of these variables could play a major role in the level of influence and impact that social media plays on individuals. More importantly, academic research should have a focus on gathering and organizing the fragmented empirical research to provide a systematic and holistic picture of the possibilities of social media in management crises, developing ways to provide a strategic picture of the real impact of social media in maintaining an organization’s reputation and ultimate success.

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7. References

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