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Research Article

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Trends in Corporate Crisis Communication Management

Peter Kibe Ngugi*

Jkuat University, Juja, Kenya

Abstract

The aim of this paper is to demonstrate how corporate communication has changed in the new digital era especially in crisis communication. The thrust of the thesis is that social media must be taken into account and its benefits harnessed maximumly in mitigating and lessening a crisis.

It also examines real cases of how social media has been applied either positively or negatively to aid crisis resolution or excarbate it. It cites strengths and challenges of this mode of communication and warns companies on pitfalls associated with social media. The recommendation is that instead of shunning it we must embrace and learn how to co-exist and benefit from it.

Keywords: Corporate communication; Crisis communication; Social media

Introduction

Coombs [1], note that no organization is immune to a crisis and it can arise from inside or outside the organization. According to Reynolds, "the moment it occurs, lives may be at risk and the reputation of a company or organization may also be at risk.

Heath [2] said to define crisis, you must first define risk. According to Heath,risk is an occurrence that can have positive or negative consequences of varying magnitudes, the occurrence of which and the effects of which can be variously predicted, controlled, and harmful or beneficial.

Coombs' [1] define crisis as "an event that is an unpredictable, a major threat that can have a negative effect on the organization, industry, or stakeholders if handled improperly".

Further Coombs [1], views crisis communications as messages that are integrated and critical elements of a four-part overall crisis management process that includes prevention, preparation, performance and learning.

Traditionally, crisis communications was viewed as a part of public relations used to craft a strategic post-crisis response that reduced or diffused blame and responsibility. But today crises crisis communications is seen as an ongoing process not relegated to the stage of post-crisis communication. Crisis communications is now associated with coordination of resources such as equipment, personnel, and information to avoid or reduce harm and for coordinating resources during post-crisis support and recovery. Crisis communications also plays the dominant role in risk identification where the appropriate communication of risk may spur mitigating behaviors that can reduce the risk [3].

Crisis communicators have the ability to shape how a crisis and the organization are viewed by the public. Sturges [4], outlined three steps process in crisis communication:

(1) information that tells stakeholders how to react to the crisis

(2) information that helps people psychologically cope with the magnitude of the crisis situation, and

(3) information that people will use to formulate an image about the organization.

Shari R Veil 2011 [5-7], all crises emit warning signals. And yet, organizations do not typically see the warnings in time to learn and adapt to prevent a crisis.

Coombs [1] described a basic three-stage model, which includes pre-crisis, crisis, and post-crisis macrostages.The pre-crisis stage focuses on crisis preparation such as prodromal/signal detection and probing. The crisis stage features actions taken to deal with the crisis or trigger event, such as damage containment and recovery. The post-crisis stage occurs after the crisis is resolved when crisis managers can learn from their recent experience.

What to do in Each Stage

According to Mathew W Seeger [8], for communication purposes, the phases of an emergency, disaster, or crisis include:

In Pre-Crisis stage, communication is mainly about monitoring/ recognition of risks/threats and promoting stakeholder understanding of risks,preparation for adverse events,campaign to Change to behavior to reduce likelihood of harm and monitoring for warning messages/ Signs.Also firms should build alliances and cooperation with agencies, organizations, and groups that will help during cises.This phase also involve development of consensual response strategies .

In the initial phase of a crisis or emergency, the public wants to know what they want to know *now*. They want timely and accurate facts about what happened and where and what is being done. They will question the magnitude of the crisis, the immediacy of the threat to them, the duration of the threat to them, and who is going to fix the problem. Communicators should be prepared to answer these questions as quickly, accurately, and fully as possible. Communication objectives during the initial phase should:acknowledge event with empathy ,explain and inform the public, in simplest forms, about the risk, establish organization/spokesperson credibility,provide emergency

***Corresponding author:** Peter Kibe Ngugi, Jkuat University, Juja, Kenya, Tel: +254 020 28500; E-mail: ngugi.leoking@gmail.com

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courses of action (including how/where to get more information) and commit to stakeholders and public to continued communication.

The crisis maintenance phase includes an ongoing assessment of the event and allocation of resources. Staying on top of the information flow and maintaining tight coordination is essential. Processes for tracking communication activities become increasingly important as the workload increases. Communication objectives during the crisis maintenance phase should: help the public more accurately understand its own risks,provide background and encompassing information to those who need it (How could this happen? Has this happened before? How can we keep this from happening again? Will I be all right in the long term-will I recover?) ,gain understanding and support for response and recovery plans,listen to stakeholder and audience feedback and correct misinformation,explain emergency recommendations,empower risk/benefit decisionmaking.

In resolution stage, there is a return to normalcy with increased understanding about the crisis. Complete recovery systems are in place. This phase is characterized by a reduction in public/media interest. Once the crisis is resolved, you may need to respond to intense media scrutiny about how the event was handled. Communication objectives for the resolution phase should: improve appropriate public response in future similar emergencies through education,honestly examine problems and mishaps and then reinforce what worked in the recovery and response efforts,persuade the public to support public policy and resource allocation to the problem,promote the activities and capabilities of the organization (corporate identity reinforced-internally too).

When the crisis is over, evaluate communication plan performance, document lessons learnt, and determine specific actions to improve crisis systems or the crisis plan.

Stakeholder and Reputation Management

A crisis is thus a reality if the stakeholders deem the situation is so, no matter what the organization thinks [9].

- In order to deal with this subject, Coombs sets up a number of parameters for carrying out sound and responsible reputation management, including, but is not limited to:
- Organizations should be aware of and understand the expectations set forth by their stakeholders.
- The organization should facilitate regular two-way communication with their stakeholders.
- Stakeholders should feel that the organization is meeting their expectations.
- The stakeholders must feel that the organization is showing a genuine interest in them [9].

Social Media in Crisis Communication

Social media can be defined as "the various electronic tools, technologies, and applications that facilitate interactive communication and content exchange, enabling the user to move back and forth easily between the roles of audience and content producers" [10]. Some entities are already beginning to incorporate social media into their crisis communications plans.

Social media provides a way to do things that transcends time and space. With mobile technology, it allows crisis communicators access to voice, photographs, and video of a crisis as it happens, or moments after. This can be used for gathering or disseminating information. Social media is not the panacea of crisis communications, but it is another tool to communicate and another way to send and receive information. It is changing the landscape of the practice. There are positives and negatives but the advantages for crisis communications and social media far outweigh the disadvantages.

Outside social media, organizations pay large sums of money to have eyes and ears on the ground in times of crises, or even in times of normalcy to protect against potential crises.

Social media provides an opportunity for this, with minimal cost. Everyone is a watchdog. This means everyone has the power to help communicate in times of crises. The key is incorporating this power into your crisis communication plans and practicing it. While social media may be novel and seem foreign to some, in essence it is fundamentally the same way stakeholders communicate only it is not bounded geographically or temporally. Aforementioned research has found that people act the same in times of crises but merely over a different medium. This is promising news for crisis communicators. It means they do not need to reinvent the wheel.

It is necessary to build relationships with stakeholders using social media so they know where to find you in times of crises. This may also cut down on misinformation. It means establishing relationships with bloggers much like an organization would with reporters.

It means buying up domain names to protect your reputation. The pre-crisis phase is just as important as the crisis and post crisis phase. Likely whatever tone an organization has with its stakeholders already will carry over with its social media policy. However, social media allows that relationship to be stronger with easier more relaxed contact. A stronger relationship means a stronger reputation which helps in crisis communications. An organization that ignores the power of this new communications tool is an organization that may suffer more harm than necessary during a crisis, as well and more importantly the potentially negative health and safety impacts on their stakeholders.

Coombs' and other crisis communications model can be updated and enhanced by integrating the use of social media. Gonzalez-Herrero and Smith [11] suggested adding social media related steps to strengthening crisis response and, protecting an organization from triggering or exacerbating crises. In the pre-crisis phase new technologies can be used for monitoring and issues management tools. "Faced with these fragmented, empowered audiences (online), it is clear that early identification of issues and a quick, clear, honest response is essential to preventing issues from becoming crises and facts from becoming distorted by rumors. An early analysis of web-based content might provide the early warning needed to develop appropriate plans and responses and enable them to avoid bad situations". Researchers suggest registering all possible domain names, including ones with negative connotations to maintain control; registering with an online media monitoring service; creating a hidden or 'dark' website that can be used externally in case of a crisis; and drafting guidelines for online rumors. Also, have a web expert and/or blogger on your crisis team, and identify online influencers that can help you in times of crises. It is also important to create relationships with stakeholders online. One study by Sweetser and Metzgar found that those who read blogs perceive a lower level of crisis for an organization than those that don't. The researchers suggested that launching a blog in response to a crisis could be an effective crisis management tool.

In the crisis phase, Gonzalez-Herrero and Smith [11] suggest using the internet as a third-party information site such as a blog; creating interactive tools such as mini-surveys to understand stakeholders' perceptions; using chat tools to foster dialogues; and having CEOs personally address the stakeholders. Social media can also be used as a way to gather and communicate information.

According to Gonzalez-Herrero and Smith [11], "Companies need to evaluate whether different audiences are likely to turn to the internet for information during a crisis and make sure the organization responds accordingly…Not all audiences are equally familiar with social media and traditional channels of communications could be more adequate in some instances.

This can be determined using surveys in the pre-crisis phase. In the post-crisis phase, Gonzalez-Herrero and Smith suggested evaluating online-related measures; defining online strategies and tactics to re-build your company's reputation; continue tracking and monitoring blogs, online media; and sending an online thank-you note to those who helped during the crisis.

With social media, everyone has the potential to be watchdogs, citizen journalists and photojournalists that can constantly survey the world around them and share what they find online. This acceleration of communication and awareness has serious implications for crisis communications. It is changing the landscape in which crisis communicators operate. No longer do they do need to be confined by space and time. "The explosion of social media-everything from social networking websites, to blogs, to broadcast text messaging- has changed the way in which anyone involved in risk communications must look at overall communication plans.

Especially in times of emergency, social media can and should be employed to transmit critically important information immediately to as many people as possible" [10]. Today's portfolio of tools includes blogs, social networking sites, RSS feeds, texting, and other formats. The convergence of old and new technology is allowing people to converge during times of crises in old and news ways, as well. Hughes, Palen, Sutton, Liu and Vieweg more people are participating in disaster response because this technology has erased the temporal and geographic barriers. The ways they participate are the same, but the amount of participants is continually growing. According to Hughes, "This unwieldy frontier for disaster activity as a matter of social convergence parallels geographical on-site behavior".

During crises, people seek to find order in the chaos-they seek to make sense of what is happening around them. Weick dubs this "sensemaking." Social media, particularly where users can take pictures and videos of the event, adds another, very effective, avenue for doing this. "Sharing photos in such situations can be informative, newsworthy, and therapeutic.Such activity has been in place since the invention of cameras; now, with digital cameras and photo-sharing websites, the arena for sharing photographic-based information has expanded its reach" [12].

The technological convergence of camera phones and user-generated websites support new forms of peer-to-peer communication and grassroots organization. As an example, groups designated as "image aggregators" have been set up on Flickr in times of crises as a way for stakeholders to cope with the crises. According to the authors, this happened during hurricanes Katrina and Rita and the Virginia Tech shootings.

The enablement of sensemaking by this new technology can help crisis responders by supplying useful information about the emergency to crisis communicators and other stakeholders. "Information and communication technology (ICT) has expanded the ways people can assist and involve themselves in disaster situations. In recent disasters, ICT has served as a means of expanded communication for disaster survivors, curious onlookers, and compassionate helpers wishing to aid those directly affected by crisis both inside and outside the geographical space of the disaster" [12]. The stakeholders on the ground being affected by the crisis are generally the ones with firsthand knowledge of the event. These people may serve the role of information brokers or technical facilitators as they assist in connecting people and information via a number of technology media. They can help provide and distribute information as well as create visuals to help organize relevant information. They may not intend to help crisis communicators, but the information they provide inherently does.

"Sometimes the internet merely acts as an agent that accelerates the crises news cycle and breaks geographic boundaries" [11]. Under these circumstances, the internet would function as traditional mainstream media merely mirroring reality, although obviously in a much faster and viral way. This can make it difficult for crisis communicators to control their narratives, making it even more important for communicators to master the use of social media.

Furthermore, in times of crises social media can also create a lot of noise in which stakeholders need to sift through to find or send relevant information. This is why it is important to establish relationships online in the pre-crisis phase so stakeholders know where to find relevant information in times of crises. An analysis by Palen and Starbird [12] illustrates that useful information is often "retweeted" via Twitter. "This trend supports the idea of retweets performing a recommendation role within Twitterverse, as locals actively choose to spread this type of information over others". This observation could be useful to crisis communicators trying to cut through the noise to access useful information.

Social media may also trigger crises in the form of rumors, hacking, shadow or copy-cat websites, web security breaks, and all forms of cyber-terrorism [11]. For instance, in 1994 Intel had to replace thousands of Pentium chips when a math professor discovered a flaw and posted it on the internet. Similarly, bicycle-lock company Kryptonite lost $10 million when a blogger posted that its locks could be opened by a ballpoint pen and the rumor spread. Additionally, big corporations such as Mercedes-Benz, United Airlines and McDonald’s all have spoof copy cat websites that can, or have, posed problems for the companies [11]. As mentioned earlier, it is recommended that organizations have the foresight to purchase all perceived negative and positive domain names associated with their company.

Social media platforms create opportunities for organizations to have real conversations With internal and external publics. For stakeholders, social media also brings opportunities because it is easier for them to be watchdogs and track companies with unethical communication behaviors. For that reason, companies cannot run away and disappear from social media channels; they need to be more present than ever to promote conversations with stakeholders.

“The value of social media is that users are highly engaged and wanted to be heard”. The way in which companies communicate with stakeholders during a crisis event is rapidly changing with the 24-hour access provided by the Internet, Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube. Public relations practitioners and other communication executives are struggling to craft messages and maintain control of the flow of messages within this dynamic landscape.

As Schiller explains, in "times of crisis, while corporate communication executives are preparing manicured statements, customers are [simultaneously] blogging, e-mailing and posting photos out of rage and desperation because the very people who should be listening to them aren't". Bell asserts that stakeholders become "interpretive communities in organizational crisis contexts," capable of cultivating an organization's reputation through information they receive in cyberspace. Social media allow stakeholders to control when, where, and how "reputational meanings are born and disseminated" as "an organization's reputation is built on the stories formed by stakeholders and spread within networks". Nowhere is this dynamic between organizations and their publics more apparent than on video sharing sites, such as YouTube, that encourage citizens and bloggers to be the co-producers of messages.

Burgess and Green explain that YouTube users engage with this medium "as if it is a space specifically designed for them and that should therefore serve their own particular interests". This can have enormous positive or negative impacts for organizations involved in crisis management [13-16], including but not limited to the inability of boundary spanners to monitor the vastness of this space; malicious users who might create a crisis; and the leveraging capabilities of this platform to enhance a brand during a crisis. Just as consumers can use this social medium to create a crisis for a company and interpret an organization's reputation throughout, so too can an organization use this medium to manage a crisis and improve its reputation.

Use of Social Media in Kenya during Crisis

Research by Portland and Tweetminster in 2011 found Kenya as Africa's second most active country on Twitter after South Africa.

Daudi Khamadi Were of Ushahidi Technology Solutions on September 25, 2013 reporting for (CNN) in Nairobi, Kenya said that information on the attack on Westgate was first broken on social media as those in the mall and its environs flooded their Twitter, Facebook and Instagram accounts with text and images.The amount of information being generated quickly turned into a flood as more and more people started posting or sharing information that was previously posted. During the Westgate crisis most government agencies accounts were updated with official government information on operations and casualties.

The Kenya Red Cross ran the most credible, useful and respected Twitter account during the entire Westgate crisis. Kenya Red Cross digital media team helped coordinate and publicize the largest blood drive in Kenya's history collecting about 6,380 units of blood across the country in around 48 hours following the attack.

Were, information on the large fire at Jomo Kenyatta International Airport in Nairobi on August 7 first broke on social media. The Ministry of Interior and Coordination went live with hourly updates confirming the fire as early as 6am EATThe Kenya Airports Authority were equally updating citizens and its passengers amidst rising speculations of the cause of the fire.Kenya Airways used the platform to issue a statement and updates its passengers about the cancellation of all its flights. Kenya's Red Cross also took advantage of the platform to update that no passenger or staff at the airport was affected by the inferno.

He outlines other uses like when Kenyans used Twitter to organize carpooling during a strike by public transport operators by sharing information using the hashtag #carpoolKE and even to find out which petrol stations had stocks of fuel during fuel shortages using the hashtag #findfuel. Ordinary Kenyan citizens have learned how to use social media and other digital tools to amplify their voices in order to have impact.

It is not lost on observers the the increasing presence of official Kenyan government accounts on social media. President Kenyatta's election campaign invested heavily in its social media and digital communication, and this has continued in government [17].

In another record-breaking social media led campaign the Kenya Red Cross partnered with Safaricom, Kenya's largest mobile phone network, to launch a fundraising drive using Safaricom's M-pesa mobile money platform. As of 2pm EAT on 25th September, 76 hours after its launch, Safaricom reported that the #WeAreOne campaign had raised $783,485 in donations made largely by individual Kenyans.

Earlier a successful partnerships between Kenya Red Cross and Safaricom in 2011 a campaign dubbed Kenyans For Kenya raised around $11.5 million in four weeks for Kenyans facing severe famine.

He concludes that ordinary citizens using social media would become a much more effective tool in time of crisis, altering today's communication flows."

Global Perspectives

2007 Southern California wildfire

During the 2007 Southern California wildfires, people used Google Mashups to create maps that showed locations of evacuated areas, contained burns, destroyed homes, and other relevant information. The mashups were created by volunteer groups in the area, along with news sources that sent out information via Twitter in order to supply the public with the latest information [12].

SARS outbreak in China

During the SARS outbreak in China, citizens communicated information and opinions regarding the virus through text messaging. This avenue was chosen to circumvent the government's efforts to deny the public information. Citizens knew more about the virus than the World Health Organization and thus filled the information void using their own method-mobile technology [18].

2008 Mumbai, India hostage

During the 2008 Mumbai, India hostage situation in which terrorists killed 173 people and injured more than 300, hostages and resident witnesses were transmitting disturbing accounts and images using text on their mobile phones, Twitter Tweets, and Flickr images [18]. Washington, D.C. storm damage.

Fox 5 News in Washington, D.C. received instant feedback regarding storm damage via Twitter and Facebook and aired it on their newscasts. This information was received faster than the response from the sheriff's offices in affected areas (American Public Health Association) [10].

Virginia tech massacre

When trying to determine who the victims of the Virginia Tech Massacre were, people began posting information on websites such as the "I'm Ok at VT" Facebook page. The lists were a completely independent, decentralized effort that were accurate and treated with intense seriousness by participants out of respect for the victims' families. This behavior broke with the typical ways in which activity by the public is portrayed in times of crises, which is one in need of policing and control [12].

United airlines

Allison R Soule [19], a nine-month correspondence seeking reparations for his guitar damaged by United Airlines (UA) [20] in 2009 baggage handlers ended, musician Dave Carroll writing a song, produced a video narrating his ordeal, and uploaded it to the popular video-sharing Web site YouTube. Within hours, the video went viral, generating a torrent of negative YouTube comments about United [21], commentary from the mainstream media, and more than 3 million views the first week of its launch [22]. The result was a social media wildfire that spread among different channels for hours before United acknowledged its transgression publicly. According to Nielsen Online, Carroll's video was one of the most hotly discussed topics in the blogosphere, ranking below an Amazon.com cataloging error affecting many homosexual books1 and above the YouTube video of Domino's Pizza 1 In April 2009.

Domino's pizza

Young CL, Flowers A, Domino's Pizza was embroiled in a viral crisis situation when two rogue employees posted videos of adulterated food on YouTube in April 2009. Bob Garfield, a writer for Ad Age Blogs, recounts in an online article how this incident began. On Easter Sunday in April 2009, two Domino's employees who were bored "working in a North Carolina store figured it would be just hilarious to post a video of themselves, defiling sandwich ingredients". The duo created five videos in total, one of which showed an individual sticking mozzarella cheese up his nose and then blowing the cheese on a sandwich, among other unsanitary and stomach-turning activities. An estimated 1 million people viewed these videos before they were pulled two days later.

During the first 24 hours, Tim McIntyre, Vice President of Corporate Communications, surveyed the situation and determined that the videos were not a hoax. He then began to communicate internally and externally with "relevant audiences at that time [including] our social media people, our head of security, senior management team," according to Amy Jacques in an article published in *The Public Relations Strategist*. McIntyre collaborated with the consumer watchdog organization GoodAsYou.org, which first alerted Domino's of the employee video, to identify the rogue employees as Kristy Hammond and Michael Setzer. By Tuesday, according to McIntyre, the company was responding to customers' queries on Twitter about whether the company knew about the situation, what the company was doing, and why the company had not issued an official statement [23]. By Wednesday, Patrick Doyle, President of Domino's Pizza, recorded an apology that was then uploaded onto YouTube. Eastern Michigan University [24]

Eastern Michigan University [25], a large, comprehensive institution with over 20,000 students, has approximately 700 full-time faculty members.The contract between the university and the unionized professors (the AAUP bargaining unit representing all tenure-track faculty there) was setnto expire on August 31, 2006. Negotiations had gone on all that summer,yet no closure had been achieved on the key issues of salaries, health care,and compensation rates for off-campus or noncredit instruction.

Leading up to the contract expiration date, the union communicated with its membership primarily through e-mail, Web site updates, and a chief negotiator's blog. As the deadline approached, the union briefed members on the negotiation process nearly every day through e-mails.

These messages directed faculty to updates on the union's Web site as well as the chief negotiator's blog posting that detailed both substance and tone of the negotiations. One entry describing negotiations stated, "The climate worsened when we heard reports that administrators threatened new faculty with loss of health insurance if they struck. And . . . threats to interfere with our legal right to picket further outraged us" [26].

The university administration also kept a Web site updated with summaries from each negotiation session and press releases.

Theoritical Framework

Image restoration theory

William L Benoit [27] "Image Restoration Theory", states that when confronted with a crisis, the appropriate response is to review your message options and possibilities, to minimize or restore the damage of the corporate image. The different message options involve both the possibility of:

1. Readily acknowledging that the organization is at fault, to
2. Avoiding the responsibility of the crisis.

Accepting responsibility can provide an applicable solution depending on the context and the target audience, however, by doing so, a potential increase in the risk of a continued escalation in terms of liability issues may surface simultaneously [27].

In opposition to the apologetic, yet more responsible, solutions, the evasive countermeasures exist. While taking this course of action, the ramifications must be considered carefully as the chance of a severe backfire is a prominent risk [27].

Therefore, when preparing for a crisis, the Image Restoration Theory relies on organizations' abilities to, or deliberate choices of, building crisis scenarios and through them organize and arrange for the crisis at hand. The scenario building combined with the predefined set of message options thus create a general base for utilization in the event of a crisis. Choose a technique that minimize the damage caused to the image and prevent other risks from escalating

Attribution theory

Attribution Theory states that an organization should employ "mortification strategies" to try to win forgiveness from publics and create acceptance for the crisis.

Accordingly, United practiced three known mortification strategies:

- Remediation by donating $3,000 to charity in lieu of repaying Carroll, per his request;
- Repentance by apologizing to Carroll personally and admitting guilt to reporter
- inquiries; and
- Rectification of the matter by stating that it would use United Breaks Guitars as a training tool for new employees to prevent similar issues from occurring again ("Broken guitar song gets airline's attention," 2009).

United also practiced response strategies outlined by Timothy Coombs's.

Situational crisis communication theory (SCCT)

SCCT maintains that "deal response strategies" should be exercised with preventable crises. For example, United demonstrated:

- Concern by sympathizing with Carroll, commending his honesty;
- Compassion by making the charitable donation to Carroll's philanthropy of choice;
- Regret in admitting that the damage was inexcusable; and
- Apology when United called Carroll personally as well as vowing to use his video to train new employees ("Broken guitar song gets airline's attention," 2009).

Online crisis communication model

Kasper Østergaard [28], proposes an online model which he notes that the general umbrella cover seven phases termed as: Detection and Recognition, Prioritize, Mobilize, Analyze, Engagement, Walking the Talk and Talking the Walk, and Crisis Evaluation.

To this, he adds two surrounding dimensions to emphasize the importance of continuously monitoring the environment and seeking to continuously improve the crisis response. These are termed: Context Consciousness and Kaizen.

The purpose of his model is to deliver a generic model that is flexible by its nature claiming no two organizations or their surroundings are identical. Thus, the main objective is to introduce an approach within the world of prescriptive planning and emergent processing, to which the various phases and dimensions can be fitted to the local as well as global contexts.More research need to be put into this model to make it comprehensible and user friendly.

Conclusion

Many messages that "go viral" are often circulated through popular social media sites. Social media, often comprised of user-generated content, is characterized by the consumer's participation in content creation, as opposed to utilizing media for consumption only. Common types of social media are blogs, microblogs (such as Twitter), web forums, social bookmarking sites, photo and video sharing communities, as well as social networking platforms such as Facebook and MySpace.

Often, social media are a carbon copy of an individual's preferences, likes, and dislikes. Thus, companies have attempted to become more engaged in social media to harness the available personal information for marketing and segmentation purposes. Andy Marken compare social media to a person's primary identifying factor: "They leave a digital fingerprint of who they are, who/what they like/don't like, what they do/don't do, where they go/don't go and when they do all this stuff".

Boyd and Ellison identify three main utilities of social media sites that allow users to:

- Construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system;
- Articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection; and
- View and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system.

Argenti [29] argues that "technology has fundamentally changed the dynamic between corporations and their employees and outside constituencies, creating a new sense of entitlement by enabling insiders and outsiders to disseminate and collect information about companies at will" leading to "a new equality in communication". This new equality levels the playing field between the organization's leadership team and its unions. In the past, corporations had the communication staffs, the public relations firms, and the media relationships to control much of the information the public received. Today, with technology, unions and union members are able to make their voices heard and to build support for their positions.

Research has begun to address the new opportunities and challenges for unions resulting from the growth of the Internet and the World Wide Web [30,31]. In a special issue of Working USA, The Journal of Labor and Society, Ness sees the challenges inherent in employer control of new technologies; however, he also points out the growth in information technologies as an "opportunity [for unions] to build new channels of communication rather than a hindrance." Information technology can serve a means for "transmitting useful information to members and providing a new path for organizing" through Web sites and direct e-mails. Shostak [32], writing on cyber unions, frames the change eloquently by describing union communication in the past as involving "a staid house organ, poorly attended meetings and many (commonly ignored) mailings". Instead, today's union members can easily access union Web sites that provide access to updated information on union activities and negotiations as well as facts, figures, and archives. Other common tools are streaming videos, links to relevant Web sites, and blogs. E-mail allows two-way communication permitting union leaders and members to share their perspectives with leaders. Stevens and Greer note that both e-mail and Web sites give members a voice and serve as an information source to them and the public. Today, with technology, unions and union members are able to make their voices heard and to build support for their positions.

Shostak [31] cautions, however, that "high tech" works best when supporting "high touch" efforts. If unions rely primarily on e-mail and Web sites to communicate with members, they may find that this use of lean technology as ineffective as the commonly ignored mailings of the past [32,33]. Personal communications (richer messages) by phone or face to face with union leaders and other members build the relationships that in turn may motivate members to read e-mails from a known source or to seek outupdates on a Web site.

Blogging is one way to encourage and channel upward communication. Santora likens blogs to union halls in cyberspace. Information formerly shared in the union hall is posted online using Web sites workers can manage and access. Significantly, he notes that this information comes from the bottom up rather than the traditional top down and underscores the potential for future changes in the labor movement as well. Gely and Bierman note that these blogs permit employees "to discuss a broad range of topics, both work-related and personal, and create a sense of community".

Barnett's case study of a newspaper strike in Calgary, Canada describes the many ways strikers used technology to communicate, including a Web site with news articles and photos, flyers directing the public to the union's Web site, and even chat rooms to discuss the strike. Strikers used e-mail extensively to provide picketing information and to update negotiations,as well as to build connectedness among the strikers and community supporters.

Many strikers concluded that communicating with the public, supporters, and fellow strikers with e-mail campaigns, flyers, and

Web sites had a greater impact than the numerous hours of picketing members had endured, often in bitter cold.

Recommendation

- It is recommended that organizations closely monitor online discourse about them because it can negatively affect their image especially if it goes on for sometime without their notice.
- Incase of an online crisis like the one on Domino Pizza, it is recommended that you fight viral with viral,in other words you create your own online content to counter the offensive message.If possible pull out the offending message in time.
- Social media can make or break company reputation but the sad reality is that we cannot afford to ignore it.It is recommended that we make the best out of it.

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