

## CRISIS COMMUNICATION AND SOCIAL MEDIA - HOW TO PREPARE FOR CRISES

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### Abstract:

One of the main challenges for business companies today is the crises that arise in the virtual world. Managing them is difficult even in the context of digital communication, since the unlimited resources of the online space give rise to new challenges and create previously unknown mechanisms for responding to them. Crises, on the one hand, are characterized by negative consequences (or the possibility of negative consequences), stress, emotional damage, traumatic impact (Freberg, 2011. 8), although it is also obvious that a crisis can generate changes in events. for the better. And this depends on crisis preparation, mitigation and crisis communication strategies.

**Keywords:** Crisis, Communication, Crisis communication, Social networks, Stakeholders, Crisis preparedness

You must fight social media fire with social media water - says Jay Baer (Expert in the field of marketing, radio and consumer rights). This is a clear wording that allows you to easily imagine how difficult it is to put out virtual fires in the digital space, where crises create new sources of ignition.

In the midst of digital communications, with the growth of influence of social networks, even one angry user can cause a crisis. Thus, no one is safe from the crisis. Today, social networks work 24/7, and therefore anti-crisis managers need much greater efforts, because a crisis can occur when we least expect it - during non-working hours, holidays or holidays.

On the other hand, we can evaluate a crisis as “an atypical event that may be predictable, but not expected” (Zaremba, 2005). However, negative events caused by crises (including long-term emotional, financial and reputational damage) can affect relationships in both the organization and society (Freberg, 2011.8).

Communication does allow for the intentional creation of certain outcomes, that is, communication is a tool used by both senders and receivers to achieve goals, solve problems, influence, and coordinate actions (Sellnow & Seeger, 2021. 15). To sum up, a crisis presents opportunities and threats. And communication helps us understand and comprehend these opportunities and threats (Sellnow & Seeger 2021, p. 12).

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(However, it is key to be prepared for crises, those unpredictable yet not unexpected events, which is where crisis communications comes into play) (Freberg, 2011.3).

How to prepare for crises when crisis communication comes into play?! First of all, a) let's once again evaluate what crisis communication is and, on the other hand, b) let's distinguish two important terms: "preparing" (preparing) and preparation (preparation).

Crisis communication, an interdisciplinary field and still a "young field" of science, involves the implementation of certain prescriptive actions in a crisis situation in order to limit the damage that can be done to the organization and stakeholders (Coombs, 2014). Crisis communication involves the collection and processing of information using technologies that allow the organization to provide effective communication during threats.

As Coombs explains, it is better if we use the term “preparation” instead of “preparation” in the crisis management process, since “preparation” expresses a continuous process rather than some static result (Coombs, 2019. 57). Organizations must have a communications strategy that can be easily adapted during anticipated crises. In addition, companies must recognize that preventative actions reduce the likelihood of organizational harm.

Companies must constantly be prepared for a wide range of potential crises, including issues such as weather, crime, cyber attacks, corporate crime, reputational crises and media/PR incidents. Crisis preparedness must also ensure timely communication with personnel, information sharing, asset protection, and business continuity in the event of a threat (RockDove Solutions, 2018).

Companies should also prepare for inevitable crises by taking six steps: Diagnose weaknesses; assessment of crisis types; Selection and training of a crisis management team, selection and training of representatives; Developing a Crisis Communication Plan (CCP); Crisis Communication System Review (here). (diagnosis of vulnerabilities, (2) assessment of crisis types, (3) selection and training of a crisis management team, (4) selection and training of a representative, (5) development of a crisis communication plan (CCP), and (6) analysis of a crisis communication system).

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Simply put, the best way to prepare for a crisis is to avoid it. Following this logic, it is theoretically possible to identify the risk and solve the problem before it becomes a crisis. But how realistic is it to avoid or prevent a crisis from a practical point of view?

According to Coombs, it is better to talk about the CRISIS MITIGATION PROCESS rather than its prevention, because "crisis prevention" is a "very strong term" that can mean "obstacle" in the sense of preventing "something." Many crises cannot be prevented, and crisis managers can only hope to mitigate the occurrence or consequences of the crisis.

During a crisis, the main source of information and a kind of "arbiter" for stakeholders and partners is social networks, so a crisis is a "failure of stakeholders' expectations." And when expectations are violated, stakeholders perceive the organization less positively, meaning the organization's reputation suffers (Coombs, 2019.19).

In preparing for a crisis, it is important to know who the target audience is, according to which communication channels, messages and content should be selected. Obviously, the problem with the digital world is the redundant information it generates, the vast majority of which is not needed by the organization. Therefore, it is vital for crisis management to develop business relationships with bloggers and journalists interested in the work of their organization, since media reports can expand the reach of information on social networks and reach a wider audience.

It is true that social media offers many opportunities for crisis communication, but it also obviously creates problems and barriers. Thus, it is important to choose the right crisis messages that are designed to reduce the reputational, financial and emotional damage caused by the crisis, while at the same time convincing the audience to maintain a positive attitude towards the entity affected by the crisis (Freberg). , 2011. 6).

Thus, social media has leverage to spread misinformation, rumors, and negative news, but social media can also facilitate online dialogue and information sharing. That is why digital dialogue is considered one of the main challenges in communication and, at the same time, a way to mitigate the crisis. In the dialogue between companies in crisis and interested parties, scientists distinguish five specific characteristics: mutual understanding (Reciprocity), tendency (Propinquity); Empathy, Risk, Commitment (Ihlen & Levenshus, 2017). When we



talk about social media, we also need to remember five critical elements of social media that are relevant to crisis communication:

- actors – users of social networks who demand social networks to respond to crises;
- Accessibility refers to what can be done using certain forms of technology in terms of social media;
- attention – means getting messages across to audiences, as digital media provides an opportunity to measure the number of users who share and respond to messages during crisis events;
- affect – “a means of attracting attention, accumulating attention and managing meaning”;
- Acceleration is expressed “in the movement of information through space and time” (Matthew & Seeger, 2021, p. 194).

The process of crisis management includes three phases - pre-crisis, immediate crisis and post-crisis. The pre-crisis process includes detection of crisis signals, their prevention (mitigation) and preparation. The direct crisis involves recognizing and responding to the cause of the crisis, while the post-crisis process involves post-crisis actions, stakeholder awareness, collaboration with investigative agencies, and crisis analysis (Coombs, 2007).

If we recall the Trust Barometer data of 2017, we will see that 68% of the population consider the information spread by various groups and individuals on social media more reliable than the official messages of the organization in crisis. It is also necessary to understand that effective communication is the most effective direct communication with the audience, that is, as the Edelman Trust Barometer recommends, let's start managing the crisis from the inside, with the relationship with the employees, and during the crisis do not forget the most valuable audience - the people (www.edelman.com. March 24, 2017) .

Another issue in crisis communication is the time factor, which “slows down with speed” (Coombs, 2019.182). In crisis communication, time really has a different trajectory: if an organization is not prepared for a potential crisis, it will increase the speed of the crisis and the risks of damage to the organization.

Conclusion: crisis communication is an ongoing process, because there is no past risk that will not remind us of itself in the post-crisis. Crisis communication is a living organism that must constantly monitor the pulse of social media. Late response to the crisis and being in self-justification mode damages the image of the organization and causes economic loss. Does the crisis end when the problem seems to be overcome? Naturally, there comes a time when the organization returns to normal activities. However, once the crisis is over, the analysis of the crisis does not end. It can be said that every crisis is a good lesson in preparing for the next crisis, that is why it is important to improve organizational management through crisis assessment. It is also necessary to monitor and analyze what the organization did right or wrong during the crisis - how well the crisis was recognized, whether the crisis was mitigated,

whether we had a crisis communication plan and how effectively we used social media resources.

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