

USING SOCIAL MEDIA IN GOVERNANCE AND CRISIS COMMUNICATION: A CASE STUDY OF THE LEBANESE GARBAGE CRISIS

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INTRODUCTION

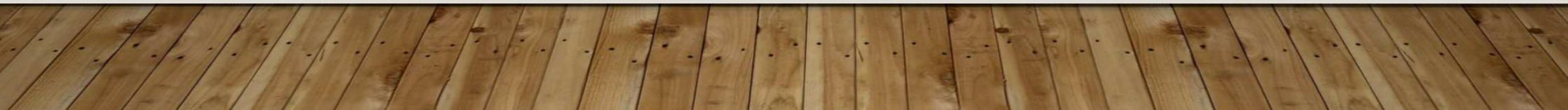
New Information Technology (NIT): revolutionized way we live and conduct businesses. It transformed organizational crises are dealt with for conflict resolution and utmost productivity.

Social & Mobile Media: became key players in disseminating info. to affected entities in crisis situations. They don't just offer more prospects to connect and exchange new paths for international outreach, but also local outreach, which are related to crises in organizational communication (Wright & Hinson, 2009).

Diffusion of innovation theory (Everett M. Rogers, 1962): supports the sharing of info. in crisis situations.

Effective communication: is essential to pass on info. & ideas in their desired system to all stakeholders.

Coombs' (2007) Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT): states that, when responding to crises, an organization must act in a manner of responsibility, which is proportional to the threat it is facing.



INTRODUCTION CONTINUES

Attribution Theory (Weiner, 1985b): people make judgments about causes of events w/negative outcomes. Attributions are “perceptions of the causality or the perceived reasons for a particular event’s occurrence.” (Weiner, 1985b)
(1) Causal attributions affect emotions generated by the event & future interactions w/the person involved.
(2) Crises are events triggering attributions; crises are usually negative; & consequently, people make attributions about the causes of events.

Lebanese Garbage Crisis: was it an event the government could control? Control implies responsibility (Weiner, 1995).

Purpose of Study: examining the extent to which Lebanese people attributed responsibility to the Lebanese government & the effect of those attributions on behavioral intentions; looking into recent events, practices, and attitudes concerning the use of social media in governance and crisis communication to better manage potential risks and crises.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Crisis Communication: unforeseen incident that may cause harm to a company, government, or other entity. It is often a result of a series of turbulences & major unrest amongst affected stakeholders.

Coombs (2014): defines crisis as a significant menace to operations or reputations that can have negative consequences if not handled properly.

Barnton (2001): A crisis inflicts harm on the corporation's standing because of the negative info. it generates about the corporation.

Corporate Governance: logic of action & causal relations bet. structures, interests & interactions (Kooijman, 2007). It connotes overall framework for the guidance & control of a company in a link with many stakeholders (Tricker, 2009; Hopt, 1998).

LITERATURE REVIEW CONTINUES

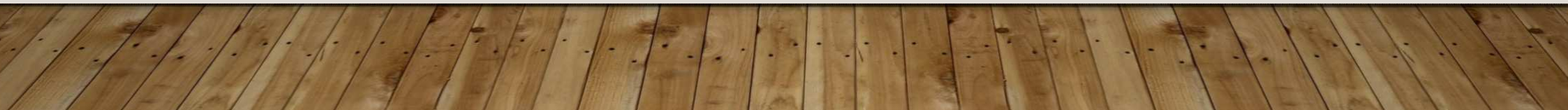
Social Media: Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, LinkedIn, Internet & its various applications speed up comm. & awareness over & above the use of the traditional crisis comm. strategy via traditional media because they allow real time comm.

Organization for Economic Co-operation & Development (OECD): was amongst the first corporations to identify crisis comm. as crucial topics in the 1990s & beyond.

Polbeck et al. (2010): Since social media are becoming more pervasive by the day, we are beginning to witness government worldwide use social media as comm. tools to engage citizens.

Research Findings: governments use social media platforms for governmental needs, (uses & gratifications) such as recruiting, offering (Dorris, 2008); reaching out to the public; sharing info. throughout many interdependent governmental agencies (Chang & Kanan, 2008; Dorris, 2008); creating an environment where community participation is possible (Dorris, 2008); & go in a transparent manner (Bertot & Jarger, 2010; Bertot, Jaeger, & Grimes, 2010).

Graham & Avery (2013): show that local governments are underutilizing social media in general.



LITERATURE REVIEW CONTINUES

Wingsley (2010) & Kuzma (2010): mass comm. through social media is much cheaper & helps to preserve valuable resources, such as time and money.

Johnson, Torres, Royo, & Flores (2012): looked at usage of social media platforms for European governments. They found that more than half of municipal councils have taken the initiative to use various social media platforms for day-to-day governance. Having a social media presence has proven to be effective for them.

Graham, Avery & Park (2015): Having a social media presence has proven to be effective, as many have realized great success w/social media to effectively disseminate news (30 million strong Egyptians).

LITERATURE REVIEW CONTINUES

Reston & Stetler (2012): found Twitter, Facebook & YouTube as the most relevant to local governments.

Wingsley (2010); Kuzma (2010); Procopio & Procopio (2007): social media have made it possible for cheap & rapid info. exchange to & from mass audiences. In many cases, people have stated that info. from social media may be an even more credible source than that from traditional mass media.

Lebanese Garbage Crisis: started on July 17, 2015 when the Lebanese government decided to finally close its largest landfill in Naameh, which was managed by Sukleen (private company). That crisis developed from a number of issues & reports that examined how crises might shape the selection of crisis response and examined the effect of crisis response strategies on government reputation (Bradford & Garret, 1995; Coombs, 1999a; Coombs & Holladay, 2001; Coombs & Schmidt, 2000; Coombs, 2004). Attribution theory serves as a guide for linking the situation to crisis response strategies (Coombs, 1995, 1998, 1999b; 2004).

LITERATURE REVIEW CONTINUES

Wendling, Radisch, & Jacobzone (2013): discussed challenges associated w/use of social media in a crisis comm. situation, such as the challenge of multiple players & comm. channels; transparency & reliability; damage to reputation; avoiding info. overload; protecting privacy at the same time of sharing data; taking care of security issues; & informing those publics that are unfamiliar w/social media or don't use them at all as well as assessing the impact of social media vis-à-vis traditional media.

Research Question: Based on attribution, diffusion of information, situational crisis communication as well as needs and gratifications theories, how does the Lebanese government deal with crisis situations & how does it communicate those crisis situations, such as its garbage crisis, to its public & stakeholders?

METHODOLOGY

Qualitative Survey: conducted in Dec. 2015-Jan. 2016 across various Lebanese constituencies.

Sample Size: expedient of 108 total subjects (64/59.3% males & 44/40.7% females)

Questions: based on scientific hypotheses incorporating existing theories & previous empirical findings

Measures: descriptive statistics assessed subjects' overall effectiveness on a five point scale 1-5 with a low effectiveness level of $0 \leq \text{SOE} < 2.5$, a medium level of $2.5 \leq \text{SOE} \leq 3.5$, and a high level of $3.5 < \text{SOE} \leq 5$.

Dimensions: consisted of various skills and their levels as seen in the following tables. While the respondents had quite a good knowledge about many of these skills/factors, their companies did not use their skills to the full potential for the benefit of the company, stakeholders, and the public at large, leading subjects to a very negative perception of their employers in general.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Lebanese government lacks good knowledge & experience in conceptual approaches & strategies to social media use in crisis communication.

Supervisory frameworks for social media use are weak in most Lebanese corporations.

Transparency & trustworthiness in the public sector w/regard to risk & crisis communication are mostly lacking.

Intensity of using social media for crisis communication activities is lacking.

Skilfulness in social media use is not lacking.

Overall effectiveness of social media uses in crisis communication activities is lacking.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

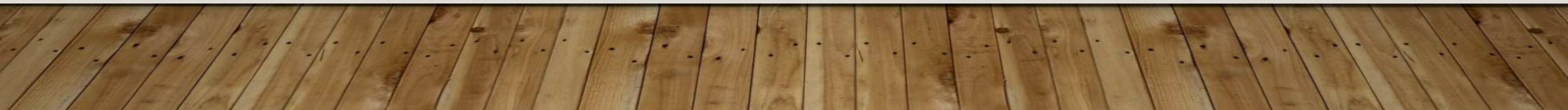
TABLE I: SUMMARY OF DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS

Sex	SS (Sample Size)	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q5	Q6
Male	64 (59.3%)	54.4%	57.6%	61.4%	63.4%	63.4%	68.3%
PR H.	24.0%						
PR M.	33.3%						
Trainees	01.9%						
Female	44 (40.7%)	23.9%	25.3%	27.0%	27.8%	27.8%	31.5%
PR H.	16.5%						
PR M.	22.8%						
Trainees	01.3%						
Private C.	44.7%						
Public C.	45.3%						
Total	108	78.3%	82.9%	88.4%	91.2%	91.2%	99.8%

TABLE 2: USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA FOR COMM. ACTIVITIES (USMCA)

STRATEGIES OF INITIATING & USING SOCIAL MEDIA (SIUS)

	Personal Use	Corporate Use	Governed Use	Total
M	92.2%	7.1%	1.7%	100%
E	93.4%	5.2%	1.4%	100%
D	95.1%	4.6%	1.3%	100%
MP	96.3%	3.6%	1.1%	100%
	97.5%	1.3%	1.2%	100%
M	92.3%	5.6%	2.1%	100%
C	94.2%	3.7%	2.1%	100%
E	93.7%	4.2%	2.1%	100%
IS	96.1%	2.8%	1.1%	100%
IA	95.4%	3.2%	1.4%	100%
Level	3.5<4.5≤5	0≤1.6<2.5	0≤1.1<2.50	
all Effectiveness	3.5<SOE≤5	0≤SOE<2.5	0≤SOE<2.5	



RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1 shows that 108 subjects completed responses (59.3% males & 40.7% females) & consisted of individuals who were quite informed about this current crisis. A total of 40.5 percent operate as heads of PR or corporate communication, 55.5 percent as PR managers or spokespeople, and 3.3 percent as trainees. The average age of subjects was 25 years.

Table 2 shows that very small percentages of the sample rarely utilized social media under administered or government (0 ≤ 1.1 < 2.50); also, small percentages were found to use social media for corporate needs, with the exception of a few months during the trash crisis (from July 2015 onwards) right when the garbage crisis started; while high percentages have been really active users for their personal communication activities for more than a year (3.5 < 4.0). Whereas individuals had been active users of social media for a variety of personal purposes, their corporations did not capitalize on their skills for governmental resolutions. Very large percentages, as can be seen under the column of personal use, indicate that they know how to use social media, but their employers avoided asking them to do so for professional use. They reported that their organizations had rarely used social media for risk and crisis communication.

TABLE 3: MAJOR CORPORATE CHARACTERISTICS

Variable	Q3-1=strongly agree - to - Q3-5=strongly disagree					Total
	Q3-1	Q3-2	Q3-3	Q3-4	Q3-5	
Transparency	83.4%	10.6%	4.4%	1.5%	0.0%	99.9%
Credibility	75.8%	14.7%	8.3%	1.2%	0.0%	100%
Responsibility	93.6%	06.1%	0.3%	0.0%	0.0%	100%
Carefulness	98.3%	01.7%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	100%
Selfishness	100.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	100%

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 3 above reveals that government agencies and units are considered lacking in transparency, carefulness, and responsibility, losing credibility and appearing extremely selfish in the eyes of the public (T=83.4%; Cred=75.8%; R=93.6%; Int=98.3%; Self=100%). These traits are extremely important to the public and especially when those agencies and units keep the public in the dark when it comes to important decisions and information related to their health, safety, and a variety of other crucial matters into their lives and the lives of their children.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

TABLE 4: RESPONDENTS SELF-RATING ON RELATED TRAIT

Variable	Q5-1 strongly agree - to – Q5-5=strongly disagree					Total
	Q3-1	Q3-2	Q3-3	Q3-4	Q3-5	
Skillful	30.4%	40.7%	14.4%	10.6%	3.9%	100%
Competent	35.8%	39.7%	16.3%	5.2%	2.9%	99.9%
Responsible	93.6%	06.1%	0.3	0.0%	0.0%	100%
Careful	98.3%	01.7%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	100%
Risk assumption	66.2%	20.3%	11.4%	2.1%	0.0%	100%
Quick reaction	64.1%	22.6%	13.2%	0.0%	0.0%	99.9%

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

- **Table 4** above shows that only 30.4 percent of all subjects indicated that they are skillful and 35.8 percent perceive themselves as competent. However, they rated themselves high in terms of being responsible, careful, assuming risk, and quick to react in emergencies and crisis situations. This coincided with the lack of structural prerequisites for strategic planning in almost all of the nations companies. Only a tiny minority of agencies or companies had established a specific social media department in the country to take care of crises; and whenever established, these departments had little authority: only one-third of these departments were responsible for the development of strategies and had sovereignty over their budget whenever it existed.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND GUIDELINES FOR EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION IN CRISIS SITUATIONS

Knowledge that a crisis exists quickly. Crisis must be identified & well defined. (ex.: Johnson and Johnson Tylenol incidence in Chicago, USA in 1982). The company's chairman formed a seven-member strategy team that, under his guidance, reacted to protect the people first and foremost & protect the product second (Knight, 1982).

Management Procedures should be communicated to senior officers. Initiation of most urgent communication should follow a top-down approach. Those identifying the crisis should have a set of procedures specific to handling the situation (Robinson, 2010).

Communication to the public is a must. (PR department takes care of this step).

Communication to specific groups. Officials should communicate specific courses of action to particular sub-groups (preventative, corrective, or deterrent actions in nature).

Management should establish channels for feedback. To know effectiveness of the measures taken to respond to the crisis. Social media can play a vital role here, for they are widely used and have access to the Internet (Wright & Hinson, 2009).

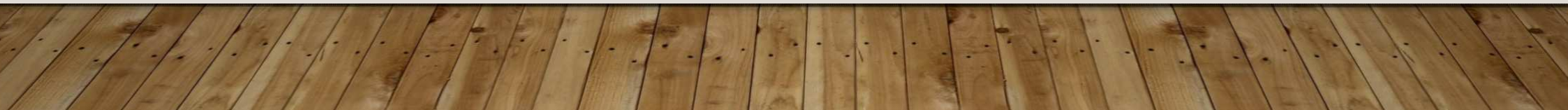
Management should review the status quo & communicate with honesty, candour, & transparency. All stakeholders have a right to know the facts. A Plan B will be used in the event of any shortcoming. Plan B should be constructed in strong partnership with credible sources (experts, technocrats,) to ensure consistent messages w/o bias (Robinson, 2010).

Communication, specifically social media, must be highly considered & well upheld. All media should be readily accessible to all who wish to use them. People should express their concerns and opinions freely and openly. Suppression of free speech can work only for a limited period of time, for it is likely to backfire or have a boomerang effect.

Those in charge should be ready to accept any dramatic and sudden changes in events. Those responding to a crisis should be ready to 'expect the unexpected' (Veil, B. B., & R. M. Veil, 2011).

Management should assure the public that they are working towards self-efficacy. Management officials need to show the public that they have things under control.

These government didn't follow any of the above guidelines or recommendations, instead, it was purely deceiving the public and exacerbating the crisis further.



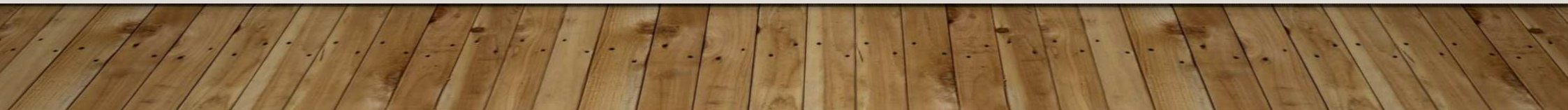
LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Sample size: results cannot be considered very representative of the entire Lebanese population. While the overall trend shows what's been going on in the country, it is not to be questioned in its validity and applicability to the nation's politicians; however, it would be more rigorous to further test it with a larger sample size. It would be particularly interesting to draw a comparison between subjects with higher rates of social media use and those with lower rates, as is the case in Lebanon, one of the developing countries.

Survey conduction: in person & via surrogates. It was not based on a random sample. Therefore, potential subjects may have been excluded from being surveyed in this form of survey. Random sampling procedures could've provided added value to our investigation. As a result, the level of experience of social media use in the study could be even lower or higher in the overall population of Lebanon.

Understanding of social media approaches: The results show respondents claiming that the nation's government workers do not have specific plans or strategies to deal with any emergent crises, and yet hardly any of the prerequisites for such plans had been implemented. Hence, the effectiveness of such strategies when they exist, is questionable. Even though qualitative research approaches can assist in gathering more information concerning social perception of crisis governance and crisis communication, still those approaches fall short of specific data regarding implementation techniques and procedures that are needed for such plans. Thus, more research could be conducted concerning those techniques and the employees in charge of implementing them.

Limitation of study: study has focused on a new aspect of research in the survey methodology and the initial results are offered here. However, this study should be replicated in order to get a clearer picture of the connectivity between the different elements of the Lebanese society so as to gauge those general trends, which could be better indicative and supporting of our findings.



CONCLUSION

Authors discussed use of social media platforms in governance and crisis communication: Using social media has proved to be beneficial to individuals, small groups/committees, firms, & ultimately local government entities everywhere in developed and many developing countries, except in Lebanon.

Authors analyzed current Lebanese trash crisis, its causes, & lack of finding a solution to it. Politics, lobbying & corruption are main causes of crisis (whose company is going to win this lucrative contract has been maintaining government inaction and quick reaction to the country's major crisis ever).

Extensive literature review: was conducted for that purpose. Review provided valuable info. about use of social media and other relevant concepts. While a great majority of Lebanese government officials were found to misperceive use of social media platforms and admit that outside corporates have benefited immensely from them, still they continue to quarrel and subject their own people to misery. Therefore, they are perceived by all subjects as lagging behind due to either laziness or lack of 'know how', which is deplorable.

CONCLUSION CONTINUES

More research is needed in this area: while this paper is an eye-opening, the authors recommend that more of this type of research could be conducted. Surveying many more corporate employees on the issue of using social media platforms during crisis communication and the effect of that use on governance as well as the public image must be done. This kind of research, in and of itself, would add clarity to this very important and timely issue with regard to crisis and governance communication, especially in a nation like Lebanon. It may also shed some light on the particular problems, which some employees are facing with that use.

Finally, the authors like to conclude with what Coombs (2014) stated: while crises start as bad risks, effective crisis supervision can diminish the harm emanating from them and, in some cases, allow corporations to emerge sturdier than before those crises. Nonetheless, crises are not sublime to improve corporations. As no corporation is protected or immune from crises, hence, all must do their best to plan for at least one.