

KRİZ İLETİŞİMİNDE GÜNCEL YAKLAŞIMLAR VE YENİ BİR FENOMEN: SOSYAL MEDYA

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Özet:

Bu çalışma, kriz dönemlerinde uygulanan kriz iletişim süreçlerini güncel yaklaşımlarla ortaya koymaktadır. Bu yaklaşımlar içerisinde kriz iletişiminde etkin olarak kullanılmaya başlanan sosyal medya mecrası çok yönlü olarak ele alınmaktadır. Kriz sırasında hiyerarşik düzenin sistemli ve disiplinli bir şekilde işleyebilmesi açısından sosyal medya uygulamalarının doğru bir şekilde yönetilebilmesi önemlidir. Bu durum hem kriz süreçlerinin başarıyla atlatılmasına yardımcı olmakta hem de kurumsal kimliğin şekillenmesi ve gelişmesine katkı sağlamaktadır. Bu gerçeklikten hareketle yapılan çalışmada kurumlara ve yöneticilere çeşitli tavsiyeler sunulmuştur.

Gelişen internet teknolojisi ve yaygınlaşan yeni medya uygulamaları, belirli avantajlar sağlarken, bir kısım sorunları da beraberinde getirmesi kaçınılmazdır. Artan kullanıcı sayısı ile birlikte, işletmeler için hedef kitleye ulaşmada ve tüketimi artırarak kârlılığını yükseltmede önemli bir araç haline gelen yeni medya mecrası, kurumları zarara uğratabilecek hatta bazı durumlarda mevcudiyetini sonlandıracak çapta derin krizlerin yaşanmasını olanaklı kılmaktadır. Krizlerin atlatılmasında bir araçken bazen de bizzat kriz sebebi olabilmektedir. Kısa süre içerisinde geniş kitlelere ulaşabilen bu yeni mecranın artık bir “kullanım kılavuzuna” ihtiyaç duyduğu bir gerçekliktir. Proaktif ve reaktif uygulamaları içerebilme özelliğine sahip olan sosyal medya, kriz süreçlerinin yönetilmesinde kurumsal iletişimin bir parçası olarak aktif olarak rol almalıdır. Fakat uygulamada sosyal medya geleneksel medya anlayışı ile kullanılmaya çalışılmakta ve bu birçok probleme zemin hazırlamaktadır. Bu çalışmada öncelikle sosyal medya yeni bir iletişim mecrası olarak değerlendirilmiş, sosyal medya araçları belirlenmiş ve bu mecranın kriz yönetimindeki uygulamaları açısından avantaj ve dezavantajları ortaya konulmuştur. Bununla birlikte sosyal medyanın kurumsal iletişimin bir parçası olarak değerlendirilmesine yardımcı olacak bazı ipuçlarına da yer verilmiştir.

Anahtar kelimeler: kriz iletişimi, sosyal medya, halkla ilişkiler

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Current Applications In Crisis Management and a New Phenomenon: Social Media

Abstract:

This study points out the current approaches in crisis communication periods applied during crisis periods. Among these approaches, social media is discussed in many ways, which is effectively used in crisis management. It is important to manage social media application in an accurate way in order to run a systematic and disciplined hierarchical order in times of crises. This situation both helps removing crisis periods successfully and contributes shaping and identity and improving it. Basing on this realm, several recommendations have been made for institutions and managers in this study.

Although the innovative Internet technology and widespread use of new media applications bring some advantages, it is also inevitable to have some problems. In addition to the increasing number of users, new media course has become an important tool to increase profitability for institutions by reaching large numbers of population; however, it also causes to have some deeper crises, which put an end on their existence in some cases, leading damages and losses. Although they are sometimes tools for overcoming crises, they may sometimes be the real causes. It is a fact that this new media course requires a 'instructions manual' as it reaches a large number of population. Having the feature of including both proactive and reactive applications, social media must have an active role in managing crisis periods as a part of institutional communication. However, social media is still used with an understanding of traditional media in application, therefore causing many problems. In this study, social media is primarily evaluated as a new communication course, the tools of social media are defined and its advantages and disadvantages in terms of applications to be used in crisis management are pointed out. In addition to this, there are also some supporting hints to evaluate social media as a part of institutional communication.

Keywords: Crisis management, social media, public relations

JEL Codes: M30, M39

Introduction

It is seen that the recognition of organizational structures are harmed and the trust put on the organizations are seriously affected during crisis periods. By the help of developments made in Internet technologies, people and institutions have met social media as a brand new medium. This new medium may both be an effective tool in crisis management and may also be a reason of a crisis due to its unconscious use. Having a large amount of power, social media makes it easier to reach information and data, supporting communication with low costs and giving an opportunity for mutual interaction in addition to sharing information in an unlimited and swift way. In such an environment and with such a power, crisis management requires great attention and skills. In this view, any possible problem will be avoided if social media users, either as employees or as managers, follow some principles. It is important to

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organize a Social Media Instructions Manual, prepared by following an institutional vision through these principles.

1. Crises and Crises Communication Under The Perspective Of Current Approaches

Crisis may be described as a situation, which creates sudden change and stress and is hard to cope with, in which routine procedures and normal applications of an individual, group or organization are unable to use. This definition may help to evaluate organizational crisis; however, there are many important points which other crisis definitions put an emphasis on (Booth, 1993: 85-86). Crisis is a tense situation, which threatens superior level objectives of an organization, jeopardizes the life of that organization, requiring an urgent reaction in which crisis prediction and prevention mechanisms of an organization are quite insufficient. The inability to interfere these threatening situations is described as the basic characteristic feature of a crisis by several researchers (Can, 2002: 333).

A crisis, which may be faced by institutions during their lifetime, can make it insufficient to use prevention and adaptation methods of an organization, which requires an extensive and quick response to the unexpected and unforeseen problems and can be described as a tense situation, which threatens their current values, objectives and presuppositions (Dincer, 1992:313). Management crisis refer to high cost situations when a management is unable to respond back to life-threatening unexpected developments in managements (Dutton, 1986:501). In another comprehensive definition, crisis is seen as an unplanned changing process, including the limited amount of time to remove or minimize the effects by taking necessary precautions, creating high tension among organization members due to uncertainty and time pressure, causing the organization to risk its presence also by threatening its values, objectives and resources (Ataman, 2001:231). In these definitions, we are faced with some basic negative elements of a crisis such as organizational threats, time pressure, high tension and high costs.

Organizations may experience different crisis while they are on active business. In addition to inter-organizational reasons, a crisis may also be caused by other external reasons. A crisis is about a difficult moment in a life of a person, an organization or a society and a depression era. A crisis situation may be formed either slowly or suddenly and may include a narrow or wide area (Demirtas, 2000: 359). No matter what length of time or how wide it spreads, it may lead to negative results in terms of organizations.

The appearance ways of crises are described in three models. In the first model, the problems appear suddenly. Such examples include accidents or scandals. In the second model, the problems appear on the agenda from time to time. Repeated agenda of trial periods in a court can be given as an example. The crises in the third model are the ones, which are already available in a small scale, but effects are realized over time. Such examples include air pollution and its increasing effects on human health. In all three types of crises, media pays great attention especially when they reach a peak (Kohtes and Klewes, 1997:10). It is possible to say that there is a direct proportion between the length and effects of a crises and the media interest.

Furthermore, a crisis is unable to determine the actions required for prior objectives of the management with limited resources. The objectives may vary, as the changing situations require early suppositions and quick action. The actions, which previously brought success or failure, are hard to change in new situations. As a result, it requires to make a decision in a large field, which is full of problems caused by lack of information both economically and strategically as no single action is available to apply (Summak, 2014:109).

When the main effects of crises, created over institutions, are taken into consideration, it is also seen besides loss of recognition that they also cause a decrease in quality work power, loss of value in equity shares, a trust erosion against the brand name and financial losses that grow in parallel to the loss of recognition (Peltekoglu, 2007: 444). Depending on the duration of crisis, it is possible to foresee that these losses will gradually increase. Therefore, it is necessary to manage this process in an effective way in order to remove these negative results.

In such situations where crisis management is well comprehended, image protection and efforts to reinforce it gain more importance (Cutlip et.al., 1994: 16). The most distinctive and tension-creating characteristic of a crisis or crisis situations is the uncertainty (Baltas, 2002: 6) and crisis communication action plans are prepared about the steps to be made in this situation, the paths and methods to follow.

Successfully overcoming crisis situations requires an effective planning of crisis management. Crisis management planning enables to virtually determine all possible crisis areas in an organization and to form the necessary principles. Crisis management planning involves the formation of effective communication channels to minimize the damages caused by a crisis and the evaluation and testing of all current items concerning a crisis (Regester and Larkin, 1997: 173-174). In this aspect, environmental interaction plays an important role to remove crisis situations.

The institutions are required to put much importance on environmental interaction in our current trade understanding in which competition becomes more difficult each day for trade organizations integrated to capitalist system, profitability tends to decrease and sustainable growth requires more skills than the periods of closed economy. Therefore, establishing trust-based sustainable relations with the environment plays a crucial role especially to overcome crisis situations.

Although it does not seem possible to remove all of the problems in environmental interaction, it is possible by using strategical crisis communication to keep them on an optimal level and to minimize them in a way that they will not make any harm in the organization (Simsek, 1999: 316).

Crisis communication is the development and application of strategies related to the crisis experiences and 'perception' of precautions taken. In competitive environments, the crisis reality must be accepted to have the minimum damage caused by the crisis and crisis communication must be placed in the natural flow of daily management in order to get the best of these crises (Kadibesegil 2003: 55).

Coombs stated five different strategies, which managements can apply in terms of Crisis Management Strategies. These strategies are summarized as follows: Ignoring Strategy is the effort to deny the current situation by following an aggressive style and to remove the crisis by threatening weaker ones. Crisis is denied and explanations are made to indicate why crisis have not occurred. In remote strategy, there is an effort to weaken the connection between crisis and the institution. Information about the crisis is explained and forgiveness is implicitly demanded. However, the responsibility of institution is minimized by putting the blame on another person or institution involved in the crisis, then forgiveness is asked and justification is sought. Self-Acceptance Strategy focuses on supporting the current image of the institution, maintaining a better position with the crisis and receiving more praise to get the approval of others. Gangrene Strategy aims to get acceptance and forgiveness. It involves improvements in the mechanism in order not to experience similar crises again that offers compensation to the victims and asking forgiveness. Painful strategy aims to describe the

organization as a victim and to raise sympathy in the public. In this strategy, the institution is regarded as the victim. It tries to remove the crisis situation by sacrificing it (Coombs, 1995:449-465). There may be differences in the application of these strategies in accordance with the institutional structure of the organization, the type of crisis experience and its dimensions. Using new tools as a product of technological developments in addition to traditional communication devices and methods will improve the efficiency in the strategies to be applied. Among these tools, social media increases its popularity day by day and starts being one of the main strategies of crisis communication.

When it is thought that any threats coming from virtual environment can spread over millions of people within hours or even minutes like a dangerous virus, it makes it necessary for institutions to protect their institutional recognition by taking appropriate actions immediately and putting them into force without any hesitation (Er, 2008: 153).

It is now essential especially in new media crises to take effective solutions without despising problematic issues by improving the skill to eliminate possible problems with a sense of good observation, adopted as the basic principles of crisis management understanding (Peltekoglu, 2007: 452). Because new media has the power to reach millions of people within seconds at such times of negative events and this power must be kept under protection and managed accordingly.

2. Use Of Social Media In Crisis Communication as a Popular Medium

There is no specific model in the literature for social media in terms of crisis management. However, the research studies and evaluations made indicate that it is possible to regard the crises in social media in two ways. The first one is the crises experienced in real life and transferred to social media environment within the institution or some person/s from outside. Managing these crises in social media is possible by following its development in virtual environment and with small-scaled interventions. The real source of crisis transferred to social media is often uncertain and it plays less importance in terms of its noticeability. However, it should not be forgotten that social media might also constitute a basis for different crises when it is thought that it is also a sharing point. Social media is an important source for informing target populations of institutions and it makes it obligatory to spend effort against preventing damaging statements related to the image and recognition of an institution without giving opponents this chance (Ulger, 2003: 292). Second type of crisis to be experienced in social media is directly initiated and continued in this environment. Social media users show a greater interest into such crises as they have a social media basis. Besides, a professionally organized social media crisis plan must be put into action and this plan must continuously be followed by senior managers, as the field against which the crisis is fought is places on social media. In such crises that started in social media, the institution must take the user comments into consideration and must spend an effort to find a solution instead of acting against them. Otherwise, the crisis dimensions will enlarge and the position of institution in social network will be transferred to such different networks where it will be harder for the institution to intervene and a process of losing recognition will begin (Bat et.al., 2014:209-210).

In this process, accurate and reliable information must be presented to social media and other target groups at the first moments of crisis. Therefore, the population will have the opportunity to compare what information the institution gives and what is written in social media about that institution and personal judgments will lessen. The main problem here is that removing the news completely from this environment is impossible. What is more important here is that accurate information must remove faster among larger populations when

compared to false information. In addition, it forms a basis for target population to have positive feelings about the institution. Here, it is very important to use all social media tools. These tools are not sufficient at times of crisis, as they are not used efficiently and effectively in Turkey. In such situations, social media tools of crisis management strategies must be organized in an effective way in public relations (Isler et.al., 2013:182), therefore making social media tools an important elements of crisis management.

In the early 2011, the transformation of Arab Spring in Middle East and North Africa into such massive and regional civil movement is beyond any doubt made possible by the contributions of social media. It even led people to define these civil movements as 'social media movement' after using this new medium for organization and as a communication tool. Although these definitions are lacking of some meaning, they are not inaccurate. Most of the people in that region came together via using many social networks such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube and organized large-scaled demonstrations, having the opportunity to express their reactions.

In Turkey, social media gets more power day by day although no serious event is experienced so far, but affecting the institutions in some way. It is seen that social media is frequently used in Gezi events in terms of social events. People and groups communicated via using social media and participated in demonstrations. People all over the world realized the power of social media and defined several basic strategies to take this under control. However, although the institutions in Turkey seem to use and control social media, there is no serious or eligible efforts yet.

Crisis management has been a serious activity in organizations, which is often ignored by everybody. The Internet accelerated the need for crisis planning. Due to information age and many communication models, crises may occur unexpectedly and swiftly turn into a consumption crisis. During crises, the institutions and their managers have to make very critical decisions under intense pressure, extreme stress, external research, limited time and information confusion. In this aspect, it is possible to talk about two main types of crisis (Holtz 1999: 199-200). The first includes random and/or meaningless stuff. In such types of crises, the organization is, generally but not all the time, the victim. The reliance of customers and other groups on the organization is under risk and the ability of organization to respond back indicates either its guilt or its innocence in the eyes of public and it may re-confirm the identity of organization. The second is the backbreaking crises and they happen when some persons seek for individual profit. A previous employee shows the institution's misdeeds in public. No matter how much time is over, organizations are rarely the victim in such backbreaking crises. The company stands out against the loss of recognition, reliability or other tangible or intangible values. Any effective response given to backbreaking crises may stop possible future damages. However, organization is never proved right only by communication.

Internet technology has created the social media phenomenon as it increases the social interaction depending on the postmodern developments. This field, defined as social network or social communication websites, includes postmodern Internet applications. Social media is a term 'used for online tools and websites to create a mutual interaction, enabling users to share information, opinions, interests and data' (Sayimer, 2008:123). Social media may differ from traditional media although they have the same name. The most important difference, making it unique, is its ability to let each individual to create its own social media content, to make comments and to contribute via stating his/her own opinions or ideas (Yagmurlu, 2011:6).

The institutions follow social media networks in order to be involved in Internet conversations and to give a fast response to any questions (Ward, 2011: 2). Social media must continuously be followed by the institutions in terms of advertorials and public relations. It plays an important role for institutional recognition to know what opinions people have at other fields of internet and to search for other social media environments, institutional brands, institution names and even the names of managers (Cetin, 2010: 90). It will be helpful to provide small instructive booklets for both the managers and the employees to put these recommendations into application.

3. Social Media Instructions Manual

Fast spread of information and communication technologies also with the fast spread of social media especially in recent years make it possible to reach all people in a fastest way when a disaster or crisis happens somewhere around the world. Therefore, reporting any negative situation or crisis occurred somewhere for a reason plays an important role if you want to transfer it accurately and swiftly to your target population before other sources become aware of it. Current strategies of public relations are no more sufficient for this because information reaches the target population very fast without even being aware of it thanks to social media tools. Taking these crisis management strategies in public relations into consideration and using and controlling them efficiently play a strategic role in terms of management, institutions and organizations (MEB, 2007: 15).

It is more important to know how the institution is doing in virtual world, especially in social media environments rather than how rival institutions are doing. Therefore, the institution must consciously be involved in these social networks, determine for what purposes these networks are built in the beginning and professionally follow these networks in terms of its institutional vision and objectives. It is possible to say that any social media environment built with lack of conscious will result in unrestrainable institutional crises (Bat et.al., 2014:208). Therefore, the personnel employed in these institutions must be informed about social media even on a minimum scale. A ‘Social Media Instructions Manual’, to be prepared in addition to this general briefing, will help to manage social media institutionally, therefore minimizing any possible risks. The following four main approaches must taken into account when preparing the manual and the content must include them.

a. Managing Institutional Recognition over Social Media: Institutional recognition is, in general, the long term combination of evaluations made on overall performance of the institution in showing shareholders what the institution is, how the responsibilities are held, how the shareholders are met and how the institution adapts itself to the social politic environment (Anca and Roderick 2007: 234). This recognition, which is hard to achieve in short time, may be initiated over social media in a second and reaches to large populations, but may be lost in a crisis situation. Although it is a virtual environment, the loss of recognition is completely real.

Nowadays, the use of social media has become an important medium both for companies and employees. An accurate and efficient use of social media by the employees increases the interest in the products and services of that company and enables to reach larger populations. Consumers and potential customers get information in a fast way and better communicate with the company. In spite of these advantages under normal circumstances, criticizing company policies especially in crisis periods over social media may lead to damage institutional recognition, which is already under risk. When the employees share their

opinions about the products and services of a company, it is better for them to take the opinion of managers first in order to create an institutional composition. Moreover, they should also take into consideration that they represent their institutions and any loss of recognition to occur will also affect their status.

Social media enables users to make comments easily. However, company employees are required to limit this field in terms of institutional recognition. It is important to keep these negative comments far from institutional recognition for managing this process. Employees are required not to complain about their job using social media, not to discredit their colleagues and not to exhibit insulting attitudes and behaviors against them.

Customers would like to know to whom they are speaking in virtual world just like they would in real life. It is important to include names, company names and positions in the shares in order to have an effective communication. This situation both builds trust in company-customer communication and will also reflect in marketing operations positively. People will increase their trust in employees, therefore in the company after making employee names familiar in the social media. Any message, which will result in losing this trust, must be deleted from the accounts right away. Active social channels must continuously be monitored and social recognition of the institution must be under protection by communicating with followers.

Responding user comments and their question about the institution or the products by keeping a close track will make the institution recognized by the people, seeing that there is nothing to hide and everything is visible to followers.

b. Defining Limits in Sharing Information: Besides sharing contents in social media communication, avoiding sharing is also an important part of social media management. What is done through social media is indeed described as a method of ‘communication’ and ‘connection’. Analyzing the human psychology and sociological structure is an important part of this management strategy. It is normal that we have different opinions about customers who come from different social backgrounds and have different personality types. However, our negative opinions about customers must never be shared over social media. This situation may both be a reason for a crisis and may also seriously cause to lose recognition. It is not an appropriate attitude to share project and meeting information about the company over social media. No matter how transparent the modern institutional bodies are, there is always a limit and they must protect their confidentiality. Assistance may be sought from managers or a communication specialist in terms of what content to share over social media. Copyright issues may also come to the agenda in the shares without even realizing it. Such a person or an institution sharing copyrighted issues may be on the hook against the law.

When sharing about such sensitive issues as politics, sports, religion, terrorism and sex, social attitudes must be taken into consideration. Otherwise, individual and institutional recognition may seriously be damaged.

Readers other than the target population must also be taken into consideration together with the target population when sharing to get more potential customers over social media. It should be kept in mind that these shares will possibly be seen not only by the target population, but also current customers, previous customers and even the workmen who think to cooperate with this company in the future.

Shares without release rights or any reference to other sources may seriously damage the users and the company. It is important to make a lot of shares to get the best of social media, but care must be taken in terms of copyright issues. It must be stated in the social media instructions manual to be prepared that any mistake here will cause serious results. One of the factors to create trust between customers and the institution is the transparency; however, it is essential not to share private information so as not to make any harm on others. Any mistake made about information confidentiality will not only damage the company and brand image, but also will it lead to initiate lawsuits by the information owners at the same time. This point must absolutely be taken into consideration when preparing the social media instructions manual.

c. The Language and Style Used: Offensive attitudes must be avoided as the language and style used over social media will seriously affect the institutional image. Some users can push one's patience about the institutional structure or the products, as it is impossible to have the same opinion with everyone. Even in such circumstances, the language and style must carefully be used. Moreover, the psychological situation of that person will seriously affect his/her communication style and messages he/she wants to deliver. Followers will not be pleased when such messages with sad, angry and furious expressions are shared. As in traditional media, one should also be sincere and honest in social media. Making unrealistic promises on behalf of the company, stating negative opinions about the products and services of rival companies and organizing smear campaigns against rivals will not be an ethical attitude.

Employees and managers must be farsighted when sharing over social media. They have to develop different viewpoints in order to be farsighted. These shares reach many different types of people and they may have different world opinions. Therefore, one should take into consideration the people to share and must absolutely avoid sharing rude, disrespecting or racist ideas.

d. Enhancing Familiarity and Creating Values: The worst type of crisis intervention over social media is the copy-paste response. Template responses prepared earlier sometimes cause the reaction of users even when used by some social media agencies other than the companies. One should stay away from such type of strategies and be unique. A company loses its uniqueness once it starts responding via copy-paste answers to the criticism, comments or questions of its followers.

Social media offers a great opportunity to reach its customers. Of course, a familiarity must be formed in the social media world in order to get the best of this opportunity. The most effective way to create this familiarity is to include the social media account information of

the institution in all promotion materials, company cards or any visual elements used by the company.

It is possible to create a social media familiarity in real world using this method. Another way of enhancing familiarity is to share high quality and valuable contents. You will get more followers or likes if you can create values and then you will be able to reach more people.

It will be possible for employees and managers to manage social media both reactively and proactively using the social media instructions manual. In this way, social media will not be a threat for the brand or company, but it will be a medium to enable forming volunteer institutional envoys.

Results

Organizations may face with many large or small-scaled crises in their life periods. Besides resulting from internal reasons, these crises may also result from external reasons. No matter what the reasons are, it is a negative process that puts organizations into a different situation and makes it hard to realize short or long-term objectives, requiring an effective management. Social media appears as a phenomenon by the inclusion of Internet in both people's and institutions' lives. If this phenomenon is not used consciously, it may be a reason for a crisis and it may also be an effective medium when used consciously. The threats that may result from social media can reach to millions of users within seconds all around the world. The information, comments and photos may cause loss of institutional recognition using this power. In such circumstances, traditional methods to compete with crises may be insufficient.

No matter how small the crisis resulting from social media is, one should always keep in mind that it may quickly enlarge due to its multiplier effect and require immediate action. Therefore, these types of crises must not be only evaluated on a national scale, but also it must be evaluated on an international scale. All social networks must be monitored during a crisis period, because a crisis that occurred in a certain network may create an agenda in other networks.

Social media must definitely be described as a medium and a method when fighting against crises and as the reason of crises within the crisis plan of institutions. Besides, 'Social Media Instructions Manual' must be prepared in accordance with the institutional mission for all managers and employees. In this way, a professional understanding will be developed when managing current crises over social media and most crises resulting from social media will be avoided at the same time. The contents of instructions manual must be defined by considering the factors to protect and develop the institutional recognition when preparing it. An outline must be drawn about what information will be shared in this content and managers and personnel must be informed on this issue. The language and style used when managing social media and enhancing its efficacy are important and must be emphasized extensively in the manual. The information, comments and photos shared will contribute to enhance familiarity and must involve these features to create a value. Therefore, the institutional image will be supported over social media. Active role of senior managers in the institution plays an important role in terms of the process when managing crises using social media. People will

be more convinced of the explanations by managers instead of an ordinary officer's explanations and shares.

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