Crisis Communication Management at Higher Education in Social Media Era

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Abstract:

The revolution in social media has dramatically changed the way the crisis communication can be managed and at almost at every level. This is especially important for institutes of higher education or for universities. Crisis management, if done properly, results in improving the reputation and image of the institutions. An effective communication is the key to resolution of crises. Communication through constantly evolving social media such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram can be effectively put to use in managing crises, especially as regards in keeping all stakeholders posted on the situation. When properly used, these resources can help subside a crisis, or at least prevent it from going out of control. Widespread use of social media has transformed various aspects of the way we communicate especially during a crisis. Social media as crisis resolution tool helps universities to communicate with their stakeholders. This paper highlights that how Social media plays two important roles in crisis communication. One important role is the propagation and response of crisis events in university and other to bringing positive influence to the crisis management. Social media may also create a variety of problems of communication during crises but these can be solved by use of social media itself.

Keywords: Crisis, Management, Social, Media. Era, Higher Education

Introduction

Different crisis happening at different levels are the challenges for the universities across the globe. Every event happening at campus like riots to hazing, hate crimes or other similar critical situations are spread very quickly through social media platform that results in students feeling uncomfortable and in danger. Institution's management must be aware of that how to respond effectively and recover from such events to keep students, faculty and staff safe. Unfortunately, not all crises are preventable and most can happen at any given moment. However, there are ways to prepare for the unavoidable.

Communication during a disaster is the key, and familiarizing yourself and your institution with crisis communication management plan can help you stay prepared, proactive and practical if something goes wrong.

Crisis, incidents, disasters, and emergencies are so on absolutely those terms which get thrown around interchangeably a lot and reality is that they are all really different ways of describing crisis. Some researchers have come up with ways to kind of categorizing crisis and levels of crisis and so these terms really refer to different levels of a crisis event. A critical event would be the lowest level event usually within realm of campus

crisis management. A critical incident is something that only impacts a subset of campus community. If something happens it does not impact the way that we operate on the rest of campus. It is really just that one building when we go up the scale sometimes the word emergency or campus emergency may be something that impacts the entire campus community and then we get to disaster. When it crosses the borders of the campus, it impacts not only the campus but also the surrounding community. Catastrophe would be basically the largest scale disaster which shares the same character. If we look at critical incident on a college campus, it would be something to a particular building or area so it could be a small flood in a building or fire in a building. If you look at something larger, like a protest or riot, it may be in a critical incident area that have a bad impact on campus business and may cause the shutting down of a college or a campus.

Literature Review

Hussain, S. B. (2014) stated that Management at higher education institutions can avoid or be better prepared to handle crises, if they have a crisis communication plan in place and if they communicate effectively during these uncertain periods of time. Apart from having a crisis communication plan, public relations practitioners need to develop communication strategies and processes to influence the cause of conflicts to the benefit of the organizations' stakeholders.'

Larson, W. A. (1994) described that institutions must respond in critical real-life crisis situations such as the arrest of a teacher involved in child pornography, riots, and strikes etc. to sustain their reputation among their stakeholders.

Littlefield, R. S., Beauchamp, K., Lane, D., and Sellnow, D. D. (2014) found that Crisis situations are fraught with uncertainty. As such, one goal for crisis communicators is to reduce that uncertainty for all groups through messages intended to provide instructions for how to mitigate or prevent a crisis from occurring.

Business continuity management in UK higher education: a case study of crisis communication in the era of social media (McGuinness, M., & Marchand, R. D. 2014) represented a role of social media that could take for crisis communication between a university and its student body and also discussed on development a picture of students' preferences for mode of communication for receiving messages during a crisis at their university, whilst attempting to gauge whether social media will enable universities to develop a more meaningful relationship with students.

Leadership goals vary at different stages of the crisis. Goals in the beginning stage focuses primarily on garnering information and gaining control of the crisis. In the middle stage, goals focus on taking action and formulating an appropriate response. In the end stage of crisis,

goals focus on evaluating effectiveness and addressing the long-term implications (Jacobsen, M. J. 2010).

Odu, O. M. (2014).found that cultism, communication gap between authorities and students representative, hyper-patriotic youthful exuberance in deviating from behavioural norms of the society and students home background are major causes of students crisis in higher institutions in Nigeria.

When news of crises makes national headlines, prospective students and their parents may reconsider admissions or even withdraw their applications from the institutions associated with the crises. Universities and colleges must work hard to keep these students interested in their institutions, and assure parents and students that the institutions are safe. 'To measure the effectiveness of institutions' crisis management teams' of universities must consider how these events impact the views of prospective students Kelsay, L. S. (2007).

As managers take significant time strategising on how to achieve business or academic objectives, according to the organisation's vision and mission, the same vigour ought to be used in planning for crises. They should not wait to use a reactive approach. They ought to integrate crises management into strategic planning processes and statements of corporate excellence (Manyasi, B. N. (2010).

Crisis provides a rich backdrop within which to explore the interdependent relationship between colleges and universities, the distributed nature of leadership in higher education, and an increasingly complex and generally unpredictable environment. In short, crisis in higher education serves as a relevant context for leadership analysis (Gigliotti, R. A. 2017).

In the period of rapid social transformation, the external environment of the university becomes more and more complex, which makes the university face various severe tests in the process of reform and development. Reflected in the university itself; the crisis events show a growing trend (Wanting, Xu.2019)'.

The advent of social media has transformed the crisis communication landscape because it permits more interactivity sharing and exchange of information, ideas, and pictures/videos in split seconds. However, social media's interactive and dialogic nature means it is an easier platform to create communities and bring around the protest. Practitioners of public relations and organizations are recommended to follow social media activity and act on it, because if utilised accordingly, it could act as a negotiation platform during crises (Apuke, O.D., & Tunca,E.A. 2019).

Problem Statement: Under the environment of social media**,** managing crisis at universities can be challenging but somewhere it can be managed by social media itself.

Objective

1. How to use social media for resolution of crises.

2. How to prevent misuse of Social Media during crisis.

Research Methodology

Data is collected through opened-ended questionnaires from students, faculty, and staff at the University and also through secondary resources like paper, article, magazine**s** etc.

Types of Crisis on Social Media

Any type of crisis can be extended online but there are three primary types of crisis located online and really flourished in that type of environment.

Rumours: False information about the Organization

The first type is rumours that are unfounded and untrue information about your organization circulating on the internet. Such unfounded and untrue information leads to monitoring and controlling crisis on organization web pages that address crisis.

Complaints about the services or facilities

The second one is complaints raised by the stakeholders who are upset about organization's services and facilities. They might have had problems with infrastructure or other teaching and non teaching facilities, so this is an early warning sign that organization needs to improve their services in order to maintain their reputation.

Challenges

The third one is the challenge where some groups may be organization's own stakeholders. They could be activists thinking that what organizations are doing morally is wrong and expect them to change their behaviour.

So any those of three types of crisis can flourish online but any type of crisis response nowadays has to consider the online environment.

Crisis Management in Social Media Era

Social media is the information platform where the stakeholders are creating and sharing information online. It is used as consumer generated media. This includes activities such as blogging, micro blogging and social networking sites such as Facebook, Instagram etc. and stakeholders are actively sharing information and it is sharing of information which makes social media a concern to crisis managers. If they are sharing bad information about organization then it could create a crisis and could spread rapidly to a large number of people in short amount of time. If any complaint about any organization is posted on social media, then universities must not ignore the posted complaint. If universities are reluctant to pay need to the information posted by their stakeholders, sometime persistent communication of its own stakeholders can force the university into making the action or replying against the complaint .Nowadays, through the social media the crisis come to light very actively and visibly in online environment.

Accessing the threat?

There are millions of messages written every day and placed on social media. Less the 1% of those is probably read by more than one person so we need to rethink about how we access whether or not what are hearing and reading online is actually threat to our organization. There are 3 factors that are useful here.

First is that you should be scanning or constantly monitoring the online environment to see what your stakeholders are saying about your organization. If you identify some talk a troubling or problematic statement on social media that can be potentially evolve into crisis then you need to access the doers In the online environment, a lot of people read and follow the statement posted by stakeholders that can be spread out quickly and if the message is spreading out then it would be time to switch from monitoring the social environment to action involved in crisis management.

Advice to Crisis Managers

There are three important pieces of advice for managers using online environment. The first is to be seen. During the crisis, a manager should have information about his/her crisis management efforts on your webpage that is where your stakeholders including the news. Media are going to go for information if they don't find it and there is concern that perhaps managers are not managing the crisis very well at all.

Secondly go where the action is required .If the negative information about your organization is appearing in a particular blog or in particular social media site, you need to respond that site,

just be very careful to explain who you do work for and why you are responding to that message. Lastly it is engagement versus intimidation. It is unfortunate but some organizations feel the best way to deal with online crisis is actually to suppress information. They will use threats to stop people talking about their organization instead they should be trying commitment. With engagement you, contact the person posting the negative information. Ask them why there is a problem and how you might resolve it. If you resolve that problem, you not only have prevented a crisis but might actually create an advocate for your organization as your actions to reach out and organization could stand as a foundation for that person to voice in your favour.

Mistakes to be avoided

It is not just important to know what piece of advice you should follow in the online environment or dealing with social media but also important what you should not be doing. There are two negative steps you can take by misusing social media. First one is more talking than listening. The social media, the providence of the stakeholders where they are creating and circulating messages and if you try, come in and dominate their conversation that is going to be viewed very negatively instead you should be listening.

Additionally, you must be critical and transparent whenever you engage in the social media. You have to identify your position in the organization and what organization you work for.

The idea of internet is the free flow of information and expression of ideas so any deception not saying who you present is going to be very problematic that can create an additional crisis for your organization. If you fail to expose who you work for and that comes out later that will undermine your credibility.

Today stakeholders have presence online and that arena is only the importance going to increase an important for crisis managers .When it comes to crisis, a management process to manage the crisis is needed and have to think about strategy and need to know how organization will use the online environment as part of crisis response integrating the online into existing traditional crisis management techniques that will improve and make their response much more effective.

Crisis means incidents that in any way impact institutions and the weights that we categorize them. The categories are based on the level of impact to the institutions. The events in the environment can have impacts on institutions. The role of social media in instant communication plays a great role in spreading and managing crisis. If something happens on campus students can instantly text through this platform and if their parents too are linked to that, they can expect instant response from the institutions. Sometimes, they have misinformation about events occurred in campus that also has changed the dynamics of the level in which a college campus or university is trying to respond to things because you are getting all this stuff that may or may not be true.

In the time of crisis, due of media attention and because they need to respond to the general public, sometimes campus leaders forget that the internal audience is also important and so the communication that goes to campus employees also goes to students and parents. It is not same as what is going out to general public. So much attention and focus is put on how to prepare a statement for the media that people generally do not communicate internally and that awful to the people who are right there on campus and are learning new things on evening news rather than hearing it firsthand from the people who they are giving their all.

The Secret to Successful Crisis Management at Higher Education used in Social Media Era

If a student share any picture of an incident with some comments to social media then organization that before they even had the chance to assess the gravity of this crisis to respond about that incident. They were being contacted by the media because this image had now gone viral and people wanted to know what happened. Student's instinct to share her experience resulted in amplifying the challenges that this organization needed to deal and face throughout the crisis social media. The real time news cycle and mobile technology, these things have come together and they have transformed the landscape for crisis management. They have presented us with some major challenges such as the speed at which we need to be able to respond and communicate in real time

or the fact that everything today is public. This real time news cycle makes it increasingly difficult for you to get ahead of the story before the story is already ahead of you and yet whether we like it or not. These are today's crisis realities and successful crisis management depends on your team's ability to manage. These real time challenges are digital landscapes presented to us in a crisis while simultaneously managing the actual crisis in real time. It is very important here that how you equip your team with the skills and tools to successfully manage the crisis in this 21st century.

In order to get ahead of the new cycle, position of organization as voice of trust, credibility and leadership in a crisis which ultimately is the goal in order to do that effectively in crisis management. Today it needs to be natural rather than solely reactionary. This is very important for team instinctively know how to identify risk and opportunity, how to communicate and where to communicate in real time when a crisis occurs. If crisis management today needs to be instinctive then the question becomes how do cultivate these instincts. These instincts are developed by choosing to be proactive.

Every day, we want to be being proactive and want to make these crisis realities work for us rather than against us. Organization works both online and offline to take proactive initiatives to build trust and develop an instil credibility with their stakeholders and calls this building a bank of "community trust".

Sometime organization experiences internal crisis that is public made. This crisis could have very well destroyed the reputation and the credibility of this organization. To instil trust and credibility, team has to take proactive initiatives. When the crisis occurs they absolutely need to make a withdrawal out of this bank but there is still enough trust left over because team has taken these proactive initiatives every day. Everyday, organization's team should know instinctively how to communicate and where to communicate in real time throughout the crisis. They should know what their stakeholders' expect and they should know where to go to ensure their communications are real time and appropriate and a result of all this, crisis does not directly impact on reputation of organization.

Data Hacking Crisis Management at University in Digital Era

This digital era presents a new risk like data breaches to every single organization which is a predictable risk. When data is hacked and it is not taken any precautionary measures then it leads up to crisis. Any organization has power to minimize this risk by encrypting their data. It can be seen as unacceptable by their stakeholders because their confidential information is now being sold in the black market and these people may just have to deal with the risks of identity theft for the rest of their lives.

Now let's pretend that data had adapted, proactive mindset approach into the very culture of their organization which must be implemented in order

to make crisis management strategies. They should empower their team to foresee a risk and they should take proactive measures to minimize the risk of crisis and by adapting this type of proactive thinking and empowering their team to seek out opportunities which will help to the best of their capability.

Question arises here that how one organization can use it as a proactive initiative and as opportunity to connect with their stakeholders. In this case, organization can send a direct communication to each of their stakeholder along with the line of "we realize that in this digital era a data breach is risk that is unfortunately leaves every single organization vulnerable but we also realize that you trust us with your information and we want you to know that we take your trust extremely seriously and that's why we have chosen to our utmost to keep your confidential information as safe and secure as we possibly can now". It is possible to have proactive mindset approach wherein very fundamentals of your crisis management strategies are applied at organization. Organization having proactive mindset approach should cultivate these instincts to empower their team, with taking initiatives and seeking out opportunities capabilities. That is the secret to successful crisis management in the 21ˢᵗ century and this digital landscape presents us with so many obstacles and so many challenges in our crisis management. However, today it also provides you with first-time opportunity .If we think about mobile technology, there are an estimated seven billion people on this planet and a

recent UN study revealed that six out of the seven billion people on this planet have access to mobile devices. Now what kind of opportunity does that provide crisis management to prevent crisis communication? Adapting this type of proactive and innovative mindset, some organizations are actually leveraging the power of mobile technology in this digital landscape as their crisis preparedness and crisis management strategies are into them.

You have tool in your pockets that provides you with unique communications, emergency management and crisis management opportunities. They are available to you right now for free sitting in your pockets waiting for you to control them but in order to do that we have to develop this way of thinking . We have to encourage every single member of the team to proactively look for risk, to identify it and to proactively minimize it and to look for opportunities to connect, build trust and credibility with your stakeholders. This digital landscape with all of its challenges presents you with plethora opportunity to do that. Restructure of entire internal culture being proactive simply means to choose to take one step in the right direction.

Conclusions

When any emergency or crisis is caused at universities, need of communication is mediate. First task with responding and communicating must be confident in execution a critical responsibilities. When universities are affecting by disaster or locked chain scenario, they need to know how to activate emergence procedures fast. A successful crisis response is defined by the capacity to access and act quickly and decisively. Universities' visibility and accessibility to communicating help them to resolve emergency and disaster effectively. Universities have to provide a comprehensive solution that allows them to manage a crisis at local or multi campus level and enable them to plan to give responses to other crisis.

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