CRISIS COMMUNICATION IN THE DIGITAL AGE:

Harnessing the power of social media

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Madeleine Rush is a communications specialist for the South Washington County School District, which encompasses 24 public schools in the cities of Cottage Grove, Woodbury, St. Paul Park and Newport, Minnesota. In this role, she is responsible for maintaining a favorable reputation for the school district and the support of its residents, parents, students and staff through public relations initiatives. She became interested in this topic when grappling with how her organization could effectively use social media in crisis communications responses, as it seemed to always be a part of the problem rather than the solution. Rush earned her bachelor of arts in 2010 from the University of Minnesota's School of Journalism and Mass Communications, and in 2013 began its program to obtain her master of arts in Strategic Communications to strengthen and advance her skillset.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This paper examines the role that social media has in effective crisis communications.

This includes an in-depth look at effective crisis management, the challenges and

opportunities that social media provide, and how communications professionals can

harness the power of social media to their advantage during an organizational crisis. The

central research question is: How is social media changing how to effectively

communicate during an organizational crisis?

Three primary research studies were conducted to help answer this question: a focus

group of communications professionals focused on how their crisis communications

strategies are being impacted by social media; an online survey asking respondents how

they use social media to seek or share information related to crisis events; and expert

interviews with three communications professionals to gain their insights as to how

organizations can effectively use social media in their crisis communications responses.

The paper concludes with a summary of key findings, and recommendations for how

communications professionals can successfully incorporate social media into their crisis

communications efforts.

INTRODUCTION

Many communications professionals are struggling to keep up with the new social media channels being introduced every day, and the ways that social media are impacting their profession. As new communication technologies emerge, we find ourselves questioning which we should use, which we should not use, and when these different tools are appropriate. These questions become even more crucial in a crisis situation, where the emergence of social media has posed many challenges and opportunities in terms of how organizations can control their message in these critical moments.

From the headlines out of Newtown, Connecticut, that gripped the nation in December 2012 proclaiming, *'Our hearts are broken today,' Gunman kills 27, including 20 children*, to the stark headlines of *Marathon terror* coming out of Boston, Massachusetts in April 2013, social media is changing how consumers access and share news and information in the midst of crisis situations. Communications professionals today must have an understanding of social media so that when a crisis situation hits, they can effectively use social media to their advantage and incorporate its use into their organization's crisis response.

This paper begins with a literature review of relevant readings, theories and models in regard to effective crisis communications and the introduction of social media into this mix. It will then review the findings of three primary research studies: a focus group of communications professionals focused on how their crisis communications strategies are being impacted by social media; an online survey asking respondents how they seek

information regarding crisis events and how they use social media to seek or share information related to crisis events; and expert interviews with three communications professionals to gain their insights as to how organizations can effectively use social media in their crisis communications responses. The central research question is: How is social media changing how to effectively communicate during an organizational crisis? The conclusion of this paper then ties the common themes of this research together and provides suggestions for further research to better understand the effect that social media is are having on crisis communication. How successfully an organization can manage its crisis communications is critical for its reputation, and understanding social media is an important component of modern crisis communications response.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Crisis communication

Communication is a critical element in successful crisis management, and individuals or organizations that communicate poorly during crises often make bad situations even worse (Marra, 1998). Organizations that communicate quickly and effectively are more likely to successfully manage a crisis situation. Successful crisis communication occurs in organizations where communications or public relations professionals have the autonomy to provide information as quickly as possible, without being delayed by the need to seek approval of messaging (Marra, 1998). This is relevant to how social media is changing crisis communications in that social media provides a tool to quickly

communicate to the public in the event of a crisis, and Marra implies that this is key to successful crisis communications.

A thoroughly developed crisis plan can only get an organization so far when a real crisis arises. If an organization does not value communication that supports the elements needed for excellent crisis public relations, a crisis plan is not likely to work (Marra, 1998). If public relations is a valued part of the organization's culture and the public relations practitioner is a trusted adviser to the leader of the organization, crisis situations are more likely to be handled effectively because a communications professional is helping make strategic decisions as to how to handle the crisis (Marra, 1998).

In terms of how this relates to the changing digital communications environment, this could mean that the ease of sharing information online, and in particular through social media, would be an asset for an organization to communicate information related to a crisis situation as it occurs in real-time. The best-made plans may include tools or resources that become challenging to use in a crisis situation, when social media could be much faster and more effective at reaching a broader audience.

Reputation management

Image Restoration Theory focuses on the message options that organizations have in crisis situations, including: denial, evasion of responsibility, reducing offensiveness, corrective action, and mortification (which is defined as confession and forgiveness) (Benoit, 1997). Based on the nature of the crisis, these message options can be applied

as coping strategies by an organization. In times of crisis, it does not matter if the organization is responsible for the offensive act, but whether the organization is perceived to be responsible for it by its key audience (Benoit, 1997). If the audience believes that the organization is at fault, then no matter if it is or is not, its reputation is at risk.

Organizations have various audiences, each with their diverse interests and goals. An organization must identify the most important audience, or prioritize important audiences, when managing crisis communications (Benoit, 1997). This has implications for the topic of employing social media strategies during crisis situations, because organizations could use these channels to target their audiences with different messages during crisis situations.

In response to a crisis, stakeholders prefer confession on the part of the organization, no matter what has caused the crisis, and confession mitigates anger and increases sympathy and loyalty (McDonald et al, 2010). The second most favorable response to a crisis by stakeholders is to have "no comment" on the part of the organization, but positive reactions to confessions and having "no comment" in response to a crisis could be related to their organization's credibility before the crisis situation occurred (McDonald et al, 2010). When organizations try to reduce their responsibility in a crisis situation, such as through denial, an excuse, or justification, it leads to stronger negative reactions from stakeholders (McDonald et al, 2010).

Situational Crisis Communication Theory uses an evidence-based context for understanding how to protect reputation in crisis management and to understand how

stakeholders will respond to a crisis (Coombs, 2007). Organizations with more favorable reputations prior to a crisis will suffer less damage to their reputation and will recover more quickly than an organization that has not built a strong reputation (Coombs, 2007). This theory also groups crisis situation into three types that create similar levels of crisis responsibility: victim, accidental and intentional. By identifying what type of crisis the situation is, the organization can determine how much responsibility their stakeholders will assume that they have in the crisis, and in return, how much of an effect it will have on their reputation (Coombs, 2007).

Most stakeholders will hear about an organizational crisis situation from the news media, online or through social media. However, most of the information that stakeholders receive about an organization comes from the news media, making media relations and coverage a crucial element of reputation management (Coombs, 2007). In addition, second-hand information that appears on social media can be critical during some crisis situations (Coombs, 2007). These findings demonstrate the effect that social media is having on crisis communications by reinforcing the need to manage an organization's reputation in the news media and on social media.

Social-Mediated Crisis Communication (SMCC) Model

The social-mediated crisis communication (SMCC) model is used to evaluate the effects of the information form that the public gets their information from during a crisis, including traditional media, social media, and word-of-mouth (Liu et al., 2011). Liu et al. evaluated what effect the information coming from a third party source, or from the

organization, has on the public's acceptance of crisis response. These authors

determined that people were most likely to accept an organization's defensive

responses to a crisis when they heard about it from the organization through traditional

media, and that people were least likely to accept crisis responses when information

came through the organization's word-of-mouth communications (Liu et al., 2011). This

implies that if an organization must defensively respond to a crisis situation, that people

will be more receptive to its message if it comes from traditional media, such as

television or online news, than word-of-mouth or social media.

During crises, people spend more time online (Liu et al., 2011). The SMCC model

suggests that people use social media during crises for three motivations: issue

relevance, information seeking and/or sharing, and emotional venting and/or support

(Liu et al., 2011). People are increasingly considering the Internet to be the most reliable

source for news because it shares information quickly, has unique information, and

encourages interactive conversations (Liu et al., 2011). These findings suggest that the

expansion of the Internet and online information sources is changing crisis

communications in many ways, notably how publics react and respond to crisis

communications. It is clear that people are increasingly turning to online sources to seek

and share information in crisis situations.

The SMCC model aims to help communicators understand how their audiences create,

consume, and share crisis information online and on social media. Jin, Fisher & Austin

(2014) tested five components of the SMCC model: crisis origin, crisis type,

infrastructure, message content, and message form. They conducted a mixed-design

experiment of college students to determine how a university should communicate to its key internal audience of students during a crisis situation. The experiment focused on the relative effect of crisis information form and source on individuals, while testing the between-subjects effects as a function of crisis origin.

In regard to crisis communication online, these authors found that:

> "Issues emerging online can be more unpredictable than issues that emerge offline, given the rapid evolution of different types of social media available for a vast spectrum of publics to voice their opinions and emotions, which lead to new challenges facing crisis managers in terms of how to monitor issues created and disseminated via social media." (Jin et al., 2014, pg. 76).

Jin et al. (2014) found that external origin, or having low organizational crisis responsibility, led to higher acceptance of the organization's defensive responses and led to higher acceptance of the organization's evasive responses. They also found that internal crisis origin, or having high organizational crisis responsibility, led to higher acceptance of the organization's accommodative responses (Jin et al. 2014). In addition, the authors found that, "if the crisis information is disseminated by a third party through social media, publics' attribution-dependent emotions such anger, contempt, and disgust are likely to be intensified or aggravated when the crisis origin is internal" (Jin et al., 2014, pg. 88).

Given these findings, the authors recommend that organizations should issue accommodative responses to crises if the situation shows that its audiences perceive that the organization is to blame for the crisis (Jin et al., 2014). They also argue that

these findings indicate that organizations should defend themselves when they have

low perceived responsibility for the crisis (Jin et al., 2014). This application of the SMCC

model supports that it makes a difference what medium stakeholders receive a message

or apology in, and offers guidance on how organizations should form their crisis

communications responses.

Social media as a channel for crisis communication

A research study by Schultz, Utz, and Göritz (2011), examined how new media play a

crucial role in modern crisis communications, and also supports the argument that the

medium in which stakeholders receive messages is very important. They determined

that the medium that people receive the message from in a crisis situation matters

more than the message itself in terms of the implication for the organization's

reputation and the reaction of its stakeholders (Schultz et al., 2011). People are more

likely to pass along or react to messages when they are angry about the incident, and

that apology and sympathy should therefore lead to less negative feelings (Schultz et al.,

2011).

The study by Schultz et al. focused on the effects of different media on crisis

communication. They found that blogs and Twitter fit the normative ideal of two-way

communication within public relations better than classic media or simple websites do

(Schultz et al., 2011). Social media are believed to be more interactive, authentic and

credible, and these online platforms foster dialog (Schultz et al., 2011). Schultz et al.

found that these factors led to organizations that use social media to have stronger

organizational reputations, stating that:

> "Perceived conversational human voice and communicated commitment on
>
> blogs correlate positively with relational outcomes such as trust, satisfaction, or
>
> commitment. In a similar vein, we expect crisis communication via social media
>
> to result in higher organizational reputation." (Schultz et al., pg. 22).

Since social media can be shared more easily, that makes its use in crisis

communications ideal because more people will get the necessary messages faster

(Schultz et al., 2011). These findings indicate that organizations should be using social

media to communicate during a crisis situation because the message is likely to reach

stakeholders in a way that they are receptive to, and that this strategy is beneficial to an

organization's reputation management.

Cottle (2014) explores how contemporary media communications have become fused

with modern disaster response. Though this article focuses on natural disaster response,

the concepts can be applied to organizational crises as well. In terms of disasters and

social media, Cottle notes that a 'civilian surge' of information in crises has a negative

impact on the management of the information that is shared. This idea is based on the

fact that viewers and consumers of news now have the ability to circulate disaster

communications faster than ever before (Cottle, 2014). This has also caused some

disasters that would have previously gone unseen or unnoticed to be forced into the

spotlight via social media (Cottle, 2014).

Cottle states that:

"The extensity and intensity of media and communications in the world today in respect of characteristics of space, speed, saturation, social relations enfranchisement, surveillance and opportunities to visualize and see disasters in the world today is historically unparalleled." (Cottle, pg. 5).

This implies that the communications landscape has definitely changed as digital communications technologies have evolved, having implications on how organizations should communicate during a crisis. Time is a critical factor during crisis response, and social media is a tool that offers a way for organizations to communicate efficiently. At the same time, people outside of the organization are likely sharing messages on social media as a crisis unfolds, indicating that social media is too widely used to be ignored by organizations navigating a crisis. People will be sharing information on social media during a crisis situation regardless of if the organization affected is sharing information itself, making it challenging for an organization to shape how the situation unfolds if it does not engage in social media.

Social media monitoring for crisis communication

Another factor to be considered when integrating social media into a crisis communications plan is that quickly developing activity on social media can be tracked and analyzed to understand the public's needs during all phases of a crisis situation. In recent years, the role of social media in crisis communication has included issuing emergency warnings/alerts, receiving requests for assistance, supporting recovery efforts, and providing awareness and real-time information (Ruggiero & Vos, 2014). This

allows organizations to gain public insights as to what their publics need during an unfolding crisis situation.

Ruggiero and Vos (2014) found that, "the benefits that social media monitoring is much praised for, and that are expected from it, include access to authentic and honest data by providing an account of social life 'as it happens'," and that, "it enables the continuous, minute-by-minute, real-time data collection much needed by emergency managers, and tracking of fast changing perspectives over time" (pg. 6). Essentially, social media allows for effective two-way communication between an organization and its publics during a crisis situation. As the numbers of people online increase, the expectation that organizations will respond to reactions and discourse in the online environment also increases (Ruggiero & Vos, 2014).

Methods for monitoring social media for crisis communication response include textual analysis, research-driven analysis, computer-assisted analysis, network analysis, and other tools and solutions. These methods allow organizations to listen, interpret and respond to what people are saying online and how their publics are reacting during a crisis situation (Ruggiero & Vos, 2014). This has many implications for how organizations can use social media to their benefit when communicating during a crisis situation, including as a way of monitoring the public's response to the crisis.

Research question and expected outcome

With a research question focused on how social media is changing how to effectively communicate during an organizational crisis, this literature review suggests that social

media is becoming a necessary tool for crisis response. Social media provides an

efficient, effective and trusted medium to communicate with during a crisis situation.

Therefore, the study predicts that communications professionals are likely integrating

social media into their crisis communications responses and, if they are not already,

they would support using social media to enhance their crisis communications efforts

because people are turning to social media as a source of information during crises.

PRIMARY RESEARCH STUDIES

Study I: Focus Group

This study was meant to explore how typical communications professionals are

implementing social media into their crisis communications responses, the challenges

and opportunities they face in this regard, and what tools or methods they are using to

communicate in crisis situations. Discussion between participants allowed for real

examples to be shared from their professional experiences. The expected outcome of

the study was to better understand how communications professionals are currently

using social media to enhance their crisis communications efforts.

Expected Outcome

Communications professionals will agree that social media is an important component

of effective crisis communications response, and encourage its use as a means to quickly

share information.

Method

A focus group of school communications professionals was conducted to gather their insights as to how their crisis communications strategies are being impacted by social media. The purpose of this focus group was to evaluate how social media is changing how these professionals are able to effectively communicate during an organizational crisis. Eight communications professionals that work for public school districts in the Twin Cities Metro area were invited to participate in one hour long focus group via email; five were able to attend.

The focus group was held at 7:30 a.m. on Monday, April 20 at the principal investigator's office in Cottage Grove, Minnesota, with the discussion lasting 38 minutes. Participants were provided with an information sheet for the focus group, indicating the purpose of the research study, the procedures, and explaining the study's confidentiality and the voluntary nature of the study. Participants were given a copy of the information for their records.

The facilitated discussion covered what opportunities and challenges regarding social media that these professionals have experienced related to crisis communication. Participants were asked to share specific examples from their work. The focus group was audio-recorded, and the transcript (see Appendix, Study I) was analyzed to establish themes. This study received approval from the University of Minnesota's Institutional Review Board (IRB) as Research Exempt from IRB Committee Review under Exempt Category 2.

Results and Discussion

Challenges

Participants shared many challenges that they had experienced in regard to integrating social media into their crisis communications responses, including several examples.

One of the challenges that participants discussed in regard to using social media in their crisis communications responses is that they feel that they cannot control their message in social media settings. Participants also noted that the ability of users to comment on social media postings was a challenge in crisis situations, because the commenting could get out of hand and not relate to the information that the organization is able to share at that time. In this regard, one participant stated, "social media doesn't really allow you to tell your story the way it needs to be told in that type of situation."

These professionals also discussed how time was a barrier for them in regard to using social media during a crisis because they had other channels that were more of a priority to get messages out through, including phone calls, emails or text messages to parents. Participants discussed how crisis situations could change so quickly, that they were hesitant to update social media with consistent updates. One participant said that, "after things are over we might share an update on social media as well. But in the heat of it there's so many other things to keep up, to try to track what's happening on social media as well can be a bit overwhelming."

The group also discussed how crisis situations can begin, or grow on social media. Specific to this group of professionals, the examples included schools being placed on lockdown and a student death. In these cases, messages not originated by the school

district, but rather by students, parents or community members, circulated on social media. Participants discussed how they responded in these situations, and there was agreement that they typically allowed a community member (rather than a post from the school district) to correct misinformation. Typically they let this happen naturally, or in some cases by contacting members of the community and asking them to respond. They would monitor these situations so they understood the conversations taking place about their organization online, but they would not typically intervene. As one participant said, in regard to not responding directly but monitoring these situations, "you kind of let other people carry your message for you."

Opportunities

On the other hand, participants did view social media as a platform to offer information about rumors or misinformation that they saw circulating in their community, without directly responding to the negative or incorrect posts. One participant shared an example of how they used social media to share links to a blog post by the school district's superintendent to clear up misconceptions and incorrect information about their referendum campaign. The participant even noted that they paid to "promote" this post on Facebook so that more followers would see the correct information, and indicated that people referred to the blog post specifically at public meetings as a source for correct information. This example differs from previous examples in that it was an issue rather than an emergency type of crisis, serving as an example of the

distinction as to how these professionals regarded the use of social media in these different types of crisis situations.

Emergency response versus issue management

Participants were also asked to consider their use of social media in different types of crisis situations, categorized as either an emergency, for example a natural disaster or school shooting, or a public relations nightmare where they were responding to a negative issue. Participants indicated that there was a clear distinction in how to use social media in those different instances, with one saying, "it's those emergency situations where I think social media becomes challenging for us."

With school districts having a very specific audience of parents when these true emergency situations are happening, social media did not seem like an appropriate tool to communicate with to the participants of this focus group. These professionals have notification systems at their disposal to notify parents by phone, email or text message in the event of an emergency. One participant explained their thoughts in this regard in the following way:

> "If you're in the midst of a true crisis where student safety is paramount, you're trying to take care of the information going out to parents is really your first concern, going to social media is not going to be my first choice. But if it's something where it's maybe longer issue and it's not deemed...a life or death kind of situation, then social media can work. That's where conversations are happening and you have a little more time to be able to respond to things."

Participants also stated that they have used social media after the immediate threat of an emergency had passed during a crisis situation to share the outcomes or relevant information from the organization moving forward. An example in this regard included sharing memorial information for a student who had died or a fundraiser to support someone in the community that had died. Participants indicated that social media was a good way to share these messages, and have the community share them in return, in the recovery phase of a crisis.

In general, participants did not feel that social media was an effective tool for them to communicate during a public relations nightmare type of crisis situation. Participants agreed that in many cases, there was not enough information that they could legally share in these instances and that sharing any sort of statement at all would not be to their organization's advantage. In this regard, one participant stated that sharing a statement in response to this kind of controversy, especially if it involved an employee, would only "fuel the fire," and indicated that in this case saying nothing on social media would be better than sharing what they could, "because saying what you can isn't enough for a lot of people."

Discussion

Contrary to what the expected outcome had predicted, participants overall seemed hesitant to embrace the use of social media in their own crisis communications responses, particularly as a crisis situation was unfolding. This sentiment seemed to be shared across participants and in both emergency and public relations nightmare

situations. The reasons discussed for this included the need to respond in a timely

manner through other venues (phone, email, etc.) in crisis situations, the message

becoming out of their control due to other's comments, and other, more specific means

to communicate with their stakeholders via other channels.

Participants did, however, indicate that they had used or that they would consider the

use of social media after the fact, once the immediate nature of a crisis had passed, to

share necessary information about the situation moving forward as an option. They

discussed how this could be a positive use of social media, and a way to share

information quickly in a way that would be easily shared by others with helpful

resources in the aftermath of a crisis.

Limitations and Future Research

Limitations in this study include the scope of the communications professionals that

participated in the focus group. Given that they were all school communications

professionals, their primary audience in a crisis situation is generally the parents of the

students affected by the situation. These professionals have channels in place to reach

parents directly in a crisis, including direct phone calling, email and text messages,

which made social media less of a priority to them. Public relations professionals in

another field with different stakeholders may have different best practices in regard to

their own social media use in crisis communication.

In addition to the topics addressed in this research, it would be beneficial to explore

how people react to different messages received via different channels, to determine

what situations and emotional responses could warrant crisis communications through social media. Crisis situations and responses are getting even more challenging to predict in this digital environment when information is transmitted so quickly, and it would be helpful to identify possible responses that would be appropriate on social media, or the most expected by the consumer.

Study II: Online Survey

Organizations and communications professionals need to take into account how their audiences are consuming information in order to effectively reach them. In times of crisis, people may consume news and information differently than they would under more normal or stable circumstances. This study was intended to gather information regarding how people search for and receive information during crisis situations, and in particular how people use social media to gather or share information in crisis situations.

This study was also intended to identify if people use social media differently in different types of crisis situations: those that could be categorized as emergencies and those that could be categorized public relations nightmares. Another expected outcome of this study is to gather information about how social media was used to gather or share information in recent crisis events. This study received approval from the University of Minnesota's Institutional Review Board (IRB) as Research Exempt from IRB Committee Review under Exempt Category 2.

Expected Outcomes

1. Social media will be used by a majority of respondents as a way to seek information during crisis situations.

2. Respondents will indicate that they use social media more to seek or share information in crisis situations that can be categorized as emergencies as compared to public relations nightmares.

Method

An online survey was conducted from May 28 through June 20, 2015 using the snowball method to collect responses from friends, family members and colleagues through both email and social media. The sample size for this survey was 177 respondents, with 107 respondents answering every question.

The survey began with a confidentiality notice. The survey had 14 questions total, with three demographic questions at the conclusion of the survey. Respondents were asked the primary way that they seek information regarding crisis events, how often they use social media when seeking information regarding crisis events, what social media channels they use to seek information about crisis events, and how they typically use social media as a crisis situation is unfolding.

There were also four questions asked to explore if respondents used social media differently in crisis situations that could be categorized as emergencies versus public relations nightmares. Respondents were also asked how they use social media during

these different types of crisis situations and what they thought the primary role of social

media was in these different types of crisis situations.

Participants were also asked to select if they had used social media to seek or share

information from a list of recent crisis events, to describe a time that they had used

social media as their primary source of information regarding a crisis, and to describe

how they had received or searched for information in the recent Germanwings Flight

9525 Plane Crash.

In terms of demographics, 47% of the people who took the survey were 26-35 years old,

17% were 36-45 years old, 15% were 46-55 years old, 14% were 56 years old or older,

and 8% were 18-25 years old. Seventy-three percent of the survey respondents were

female, and 27% were male. In terms of education, 44% of respondents had earned a

Bachelor's degree, and another 44% had earned a Graduate or professional degree. The

complete results of the survey are available in the appendix.

Results and Discussion

Finding information about crisis events

When asked the primary way that they seek information regarding crisis events, 62% of

respondents selected online news media, 19% selected social media, 19% selected

television news media, and 1% selected print news media. This indicates that

organizations should definitely use online sources to communicate information during

crisis communications, given that a majority of respondents are turning to online

sources for their information. It also indicates that a majority of respondents do not use social media as their primary information source during a crisis.

However, 14% of respondents indicated that they always use social media when seeking information regarding crisis events, with an additional 34% frequently and 37% sometimes using social media. This means that 85% of respondents use social media when seeking information regarding crisis events at least sometimes, with only 15% of respondents indicating that they rarely or never use social media for this purpose. This finding supports the expected outcome that social media is used by a majority of respondents as a way to seek information during crisis situations.

Of respondents 18-25 years old, 50% use social media as their primary way to seek information regarding crisis events, as well as 25% of 26-35 years olds. The 18-25 and 26-35 years old demographics were also use social media more frequently when seeking information regarding crisis events than the older demographics. These findings demonstrate that the use of social media in crisis communications would be most appropriate when trying to reach a target audience of 18-36 years old. These younger demographics are more likely to be using social media as a source of information in crisis situations. These points are illustrated in Figures 1 and 2 below.

Figure 1: Age and how people seek information regarding crisis events

Age	What is the primary way that you seek information regarding crisis events?				Total
	Online news media	Print news media	Social Media	Television news media	
18-25	6 50.00%	0 0.00%	6 50.00%	0 0.00%	12 100.00%
26-35	47 65.28%	0 0.00%	18 25.00%	7 9.72%	72 100.00%
36-45	18 69.23%	0 0.00%	5 19.23%	3 11.54%	26 100.00%
46-55	14 60.87%	0 0.00%	1 4.35%	8 34.78%	23 100.00%
56 or older	12 57.14%	1 4.76%	1 4.76%	7 33.33%	21 100.00%
Total	97 62.99%	1 0.65%	31 20.13%	25 16.23%	154 100.00%

Figure 2: Age and how often people use social media when seeking crisis information

Age	How often do you use social media when seeking information regarding crisis events?					Total
	Always	Frequently	Sometimes	Rarely	Never	
18-25	3 25.00%	5 41.67%	3 25.00%	1 8.33%	0 0.00%	12 100.00%
26-35	14 19.44%	28 38.89%	24 33.33%	5 6.94%	1 1.39%	72 100.00%
36-45	3 11.54%	8 30.77%	11 42.31%	4 15.38%	0 0.00%	26 100.00%
46-55	2 8.70%	6 26.09%	9 39.13%	5 21.74%	1 4.35%	23 100.00%
56 or older	2 9.52%	5 23.81%	7 33.33%	5 23.81%	2 9.52%	21 100.00%
Total	24 15.58%	52 33.77%	54 35.06%	20 12.99%	4 2.60%	154 100.00%

Social media channels

Of the people who always or frequently use social media when seeking information about crisis events, 61% use Twitter to seek information about crisis events and 51% use Facebook to seek information about crisis events. Looking at this same group of people, those that indicate they always or frequently use social media when seeking information about crisis events, 55% said that they use social media as a crisis situation is unfolding to get information from news media sources, and 52% use social media to get information directly from the organization(s) that the crisis involves. The information regarding what social media channels are used is illustrated in Figure 3 below.

Figure 3: Frequency of using social media during crisis situations and what channels

	How often do you use social media when seeking information regarding crisis events?					
	Always	Frequently	Sometimes	Rarely	Never	Total
Facebook	18 13.14%	52 37.96%	53 38.69%	13 9.49%	1 0.73%	137 100.00%
Twitter	17 20.24%	34 40.48%	28 33.33%	5 5.95%	0 0.00%	84 100.00%
Instagram	1 6.67%	9 60.00%	4 26.67%	1 6.67%	0 0.00%	15 100.00%
YouTube	2 13.33%	7 46.67%	5 33.33%	1 6.67%	0 0.00%	15 100.00%
Other (please specify)	2 13.33%	7 46.67%	3 20.00%	2 13.33%	1 6.67%	15 100.00%
Total	25 14.62%	60 35.09%	65 38.01%	19 11.11%	2 1.17%	171 100.00%

How social media is used

In terms of how they use social media as a crisis situation is unfolding, 78% of respondents said they use social media to get information from news media sources, 48% said they use social media to get information directly from the organization(s) that

the crisis involves, 38% use social media to access firsthand or "citizen journalist"

accounts, while 20% of respondents use social media to share information. Of the

people who use Facebook to seek information about crisis events, 91% use it to share

information as a crisis situation is unfolding, 83% use Facebook to get information from

news media sources, and 82% use Facebook to get information directly from the

organization(s) that the crisis involves. For those that use Twitter to seek information

about crisis events, 66% use it to access firsthand or "citizen journalist" accounts, 60%

use Twitter to get information directly from the organization(s) that the crisis involves,

54% use Twitter to get information from news media sources, and 50% use Twitter to

share information. This information is illustrated in Figure 4 below.

Figure 4: How social media is used as crisis situation is unfolding

| | What social media channels do you use to seek information about crisis events? Please select all.... | | | | | |
	Facebook	Twitter	Instagram	YouTube	Other (please specify)	Total
To get information from news media sources	111 83.46%	73 54.89%	13 9.77%	11 8.27%	11 8.27%	133 100.00%
To get information directly from the organization(s) that the crisis involves	67 81.71%	50 60.98%	11 13.41%	4 4.88%	5 6.10%	82 100.00%
To share information yourself	31 91.18%	17 50.00%	4 11.76%	6 17.65%	5 14.71%	34 100.00%
To access firsthand or "citizen journalist" accounts	50 75.76%	44 66.67%	7 10.61%	4 6.06%	8 12.12%	66 100.00%
Other (please specify)	5 71.43%	2 28.57%	0 0.00%	0 0.00%	2 28.57%	7 100.00%
Total	136 80.47%	83 49.11%	15 8.88%	15 8.88%	15 8.88%	169 100.00%

These results indicate that organizations should use social media in their crisis response

efforts, because many people are using social media to get information directly from an

organization or from the news organizations that they follow on social media. Many

respondents also use Facebook or Twitter to share information about crisis situations, which indicates that both social media channels are places that organizations should put out information that they need their stakeholders to know in a crisis situation, as it will have a greater likelihood of being shared by people on those channels.

Emergency versus issue management crisis communication

When asked about crisis situations that could be categorized as an emergency (for example a shooting, natural disaster, plane crash, etc.), 83% of respondents used social media to get information from news media sources, 56% to get information directly from the organization(s) that the crisis involves, and 23% to share information. In the "other" field, several respondents added that they used social media in a crisis that could be categorized as an emergency to find information about victims or to verify the wellbeing of their family and friends. Also in regard to crisis situations categorized as emergencies, respondents indicated that the primary role of social media was as a means for organizations to quickly spread information about a situation (51%), as a way for people to connect with, help or share information with others (33%), and for "citizen journalists" or people directly involved in the situation to share firsthand accounts of a situation as it unfolds (16%).

When asked about crisis situations that could be categorized as a "public relations nightmare" (for example a protest, political/company scandal, product recall, etc.), 68% of respondents indicated that they used social media to get information from news media sources, 59% use social media to get information directly from the organization(s)

that the crisis involves, and 25% use social media to share information. In these crisis situations that are categorized as public relations nightmares, 49% of respondents believe that the primary role of social media is for organizations to quickly spread information about a situation, 28% said to connect with, help or share information with others, and 21% said for "citizen journalists" or people directly involved in the situation to share firsthand accounts of a situation as it unfolds.

These findings partially support the expected outcome that respondents will indicate that they use social media more to seek or share information in crisis situations that can be categorized as emergencies. This is supported only in regard to seeking information from news media sources, because more respondents indicated using social media for this reason in emergency situations (83%) rather than in public relations nightmare situations (68%). In terms of using social media to share information during crisis situations, results were very similar, with 23% that use social media to share information in emergencies and 25% sharing information in public relations nightmares. Results were also similar for getting information directly from organizations involved in the situation, with 56% using social media for that reason in emergency situations and 59% in public relations nightmare situations.

When asked about their use of social media in specific crisis events, 82% of respondents used social media to seek or share information during the Boston Marathon Bombing, 60% during the shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary, 57% during the protests in Ferguson, Missouri, 42% during the Germanwings Flight 9525 plane crash, 34% during Hurricane Sandy, and 18% during the Hillary Clinton email scandal. These results

indicated a greater use of social media during violent emergency events, including the Boston Marathon Bombing and shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary.

When asked to describe a time that they used social media as their primary source of information regarding a crisis situation, many respondents referenced natural disasters, shootings, and the Boston Marathon Bombing. In these instances, people shared that social media allowed them to follow up on the wellbeing of their family and friends and access information quickly. For example, one respondent said, "I followed the Boston Marathon Bombing closely on Twitter. I found I was able to access news much faster that way than with traditional news media." Another respondent said, "During the Boston Marathon Bombing, I used Facebook to check on the status of friends in the area." These examples demonstrate how social media can be used to share information and resources quickly in the midst of a crisis. This also supports the expected outcome that social media is used as way to seek or share information more in emergency situations, as the examples that were shared in response to this question referenced emergencies rather than public relations nightmares.

Multiple respondents also mentioned that they first heard of crisis situations on social media, and that social media was used as a starting point for them to find other information. One respondent said, "I first heard about the capture/death of Osama bin Laden through social media. Social media might not be my top choice for reputable information, but it is somewhere I often hear about things first, which then cues me to look elsewhere for more information." Other respondents stated, "social media may be the first to alert me to a crisis; after, I go online to news," and, "I use social media as a

platform to find more information; I typically click on trusted news sources from their social media pages for more information." These examples illustrate how people learn about crisis situations online, and often follow up with the links in their newsfeeds from organizations with information on the crisis situation.

Several respondents also described using social media to access firsthand accounts of a crisis situation as it unfolded. For example, on respondent said, "I received a lot of information about the Boston bombing through the social media site Reddit. I used it to see what people were thinking and get in-person accounts and photographs." Another respondent said, "I followed the Ferguson protests on social media, including first-hand Twitter posts and comments on Facebook links to news articles, which provided me with a wider viewpoint (not just the facts)." These examples allude to the rise of citizen journalism, and how people are turning to social media to get a more in-depth look at a crisis situation as it unfolds, rather than only what the traditional media forms are reporting.

Limitations and Future Research

One limitation to this study was that it was distributed in a snowball method, which likely led to the majority of the respondents being in the same age range (47% were ages 26-35). In addition, 73% of respondents were female. Participants were also highly educated, with 44% of respondents had earned a Bachelor's degree, and another 44% had earned a Graduate or professional degree, which is not representative of the

population at large. It would be ideal to have the demographics of the respondents be more equally represented, in terms of age, gender and education.

Another limitation for this study was the number of respondents. The sample size for this survey was 177 respondents, with 107 respondents answering every question. A larger sample size would have provided more reliable data, and would have likely reduced the differences in demographics.

Future research in this regard that would be beneficial would be to further identify the different ways that people use social media in crisis situations that could be categorized as emergencies versus public relations nightmares. These results did not provide findings that would indicate a significant difference, beyond the fact that people indicated they use social media to get information from news media sources at greater rates during emergency situations, and more respondents provided examples of emergency situations in their open ended responses when describing situations when they turned to social media as a primary source to seek or share information during a crisis. It would be interesting to probe deeper to differentiate between the two types of crisis situations, perhaps by giving respondents hypothetical scenarios in an experiment and asking them how they would use social media in different scenarios.

Study III: Expert Interviews

Experts in the fields of social media and crisis communications have professional experience and insights into how organizations can successful use social media in their crisis communications strategies. The intent of this study was to gather these insights

from professionals who can offer recommendations as to how organizations should use social media when faced with a crisis. Specific methods, tools and recommendations can be provided by experts through one-one-one, in-depth interviews, suggesting guidelines for other communications professionals as to how they should be using social media in their crisis communications responses.

Expected Outcomes

1. Experts in the field of crisis communication will recommend using social media to quickly share information with stakeholders in crisis situations.

2. Experts in the field of crisis communications will recommend using social media as a way to monitor how their stakeholders are reacting to crisis situations.

Method

Three expert interviews were conducted from June 15-28, 2015, with communications professionals in the Twin Cities metro area that have professional experience in crisis communications. The interviews were conducted over the phone and were audio recorded, with the full transcripts of these interviews available in the appendix. Each interview was between 15-22 minutes long.

The professionals interviewed were: Rick Kaufman, APR, Executive Director of Community Relations and Emergency Management for Bloomington Public Schools; Steven Henneberry, Assistant Director of the University News Service at the University of Minnesota; and Matt Kucharski, Executive Vice President of PadillaCRT in Minneapolis

and Adjunct Instructor in the University of Minnesota's School of Journalism and Mass Communications.

Each expert was asked to describe their professional experience as it relates to social media and crisis communications, and they were asked the same three questions in their interviews. Interviewees were asked what opportunities and challenges they think social media presents in regard to crisis communication, how they would recommend using social media to communicate during a crisis and what specific tools or methods they would use, and if they think organizations should use social media differently in crisis situations that could be described as emergencies versus public relations nightmares. Follow-up questions were asked as needed to clarify answers and find out more information.

Results and Discussion

Expert Interview: Rick Kaufman, APR, Executive Director of Community Relations and Emergency Management for Bloomington Public Schools

The first expert interview conducted was with Rick Kaufman, Executive Director of Community Relations and Emergency Management for Bloomington Public Schools in Bloomington, Minnesota. Kaufman has 24 years of experience in school districts working in community relations, communications and emergency management. He was part of the crisis response team for the Columbine High School shooting in 1999, and has since counseled other school districts that have gone through large-scale crisis situations, including the mass shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Connecticut

in 2012. In recent years, Kaufman has studied the implications that social media has had

on crisis communications, and has incorporated that into his training and counseling.

In his interview, Kaufman discussed how he believes one of the first steps in successful

crisis communication is reducing the uncertainty that arises. He noted how in the past

when faced with crisis situations, organizations would take time gathering information

to make statements for the various questions that could be asked in response to the

situation. This notion, Kaufman said, has become outdated with the onset of social

media. In regard to these pre-developed statements, Kaufman said:

> "Unfortunately those became very antiquated and meant many of our
>
> communications aspects became antiquated with the onset of social media, and
>
> the fact that our communities, our stakeholders no longer wanted to be
>
> communicated to, but want to be a part of the information, or want to be part of
>
> the crisis if you will, or tragedy."

Kaufman described this shift as going from one-way communications to a two-way

dialog. He described how social media helps spread information quickly, which reduces

the amount of uncertainty that people feel when going through a crisis situation. "Social

media has provided instant communication that people need to know about what's

happening," said Kaufman.

Kaufman then described organizations that effectively communicate during a crisis as

being the first one to share their message and sharing correct information. He said that

these two elements, being first and being correct, make the organization credible in the

face of a crisis, and that social media can assist organizations in this regard. His thoughts

in this regard support the expected outcome that experts would advise organizations to

use social media during crisis situations to quickly reach their audiences with important

information. Kaufman said:

> "I think when you're communicating in a crisis you have to be first. If you're not
>
> first as an organization, you spend a whole lot of time playing catch up,
>
> sometimes for hours, certainly days, even weeks or longer depending on the
>
> magnitude of the crisis. You have to be right. If you're not right your mistakes are
>
> often repeated, or worse, cited as the truth, and you have to be credible. If
>
> you're not right or first then you will not be credible, so when we talk about
>
> crisis communication and the use of social media, its really using that tool to its
>
> advantage, which is to get information out in a very rapid quick manner, and
>
> then it begins to allow you to take hold of the messages."

In terms of challenges that social media can cause for organizations during crisis

communications, Kaufman said that there could be many competing messages on social

media that an organization needs to work to be heard through. He described how

organizations can get in front of crisis situations by communicating quickly, even in if

they are faced with a lack of information, by crafting "response statements" that say

that the organization is aware of the situation, and stating the prioritized action steps

that the organization is taking. "By doing that," said Kaufman, "what you're allowing

your organization to do is be more in charge or on top of the message, and it doesn't

create a whole lot of rumors and myths to go with it."

In order to effectively use social media to communicate during a crisis situation, Kaufman said that organizations should already be established on these channels. He said that he believes social media has changed how people seek information, including as a primary source of news, and that social media has changed people's expectations in terms of how organizations will communicate with them. Kaufman believes that Twitter in particular is a primary source of news in crisis situations. In this regard, he said:

> "It's one of the quickest ways for our stakeholders or anyone's organization's stakeholders to get information in the face of a crisis, so I strongly believe that school districts or organizations must have an absolute connection to, or use of, social media. And it can't be when the crisis hits, because if you don't have your audience or stakeholders that are following you, whether its Twitter or social media or YouTube, if they are not already there, you don't even have a chance to get them when the crisis starts. They've now gone to other sources, other trusted sources, to get their information."

In terms of if there is a difference in how organizations should use social media in crisis situations that could be described as emergencies versus public relations nightmares, Kaufman described that social media can be a useful tool that should be used in all situations, particularly as a monitoring tool. "It's a tool for us to assess how our community is doing in general, even when you don't have crisis," he said. Kaufman also described how social media could help an organization manage its reputation. "We can't shy away from bad news; it's a fact of nature, it's a reality," said Kaufman. "We humans

have a propensity to forgive and forget as long as the organization is willing to apologize

and really talk more about not letting it happen again, and what we will do to fix it."

In summary, Kaufman reiterated that, "you need to respond immediately to

stakeholders in the onset of the crisis." He said that, "social media provides a

tremendously valuable platform in which to do that and maintains a credible two-way

dialogue." Throughout his interview, Kaufman described social media as an essential

part of crisis communications, saying:

> "Listen to concerns that others put out there, and be accountable to the public,
>
> because that's what they're demanding, by not holing up and not sharing
>
> information. You know the big thing? Don't be afraid of social media. It is here to
>
> stay, and I think organizations that are not using it are putting themselves at a
>
> disadvantage."

Expert Interview: Steven Henneberry, Assistant Director of the University News Service at

the University of Minnesota

The second expert interview conducted was Steven Henneberry, the Assistant Director

of the University News Service at the University of Minnesota. Henneberry's role fits

within the central public relations office for the university, and he serves as the public

information officer for the University of Minnesota during crisis situations. In crisis

situations, Henneberry assists with crafting statements, providing information,

managing social media channels, and coordinating with the university's emergency

management department and other local emergency response agencies.

In regard to the opportunities that social media presents in crisis communication,

Henneberry described how organizations can share information on social media could

be categorized into four types. He said that, "The opportunity is there to be able to tell

people what you're doing, tell people what they can do, tell people what you know and

tell people what you don't know." This is a simple way for organizations to categorize

the information they would want to communicate during a crisis.

In terms of the challenges that social media can raise in crisis communications,

Henneberry said that there is great pressure to provide complete responses quickly

which can cause important points to be lost, and "that people always want more

information than you're going to be able to provide." He added, "No matter how quickly

you notify people, it's not quick enough. While with social media it's possible to have a

two-way conversation, a lot is lost in 140 characters or in a Facebook comment thread."

To that point, Henneberry said that social media is challenging because communications

professionals need to be even more cautious with their word choice because they have

limited space to post information, and that information is easily shareable. This means

that if the information is incorrect, it could cause greater damage on social media

because it is on a platform that is easily shareable.

Like Kaufman, Henneberry also discussed how he believed that Twitter was an

important social media channel to use in crisis communications. He described how

Twitter could be easily used to provide multiple updates on a situation as it unfolds.

Henneberry said, "In a couple hours, we give them two or three or four different

updates so they know. We know that you're never going to give enough updates in

those situations." He also described how he did not believe that organizations could share too many updates on Twitter, suggesting that people do not get overwhelmed with multiple updates on that social media platform.

Even though Twitter's character limit can be a challenge, Henneberry also said that he thinks this can be beneficial for organizations because it can force them to be as clear and concise as possible He said that this can be even more important in a crisis situation, when people could be less receptive to complex information. In this regard, Henneberry said:

> "People who are going to be reading your tweets in a crisis situation…their ability to kind of take in and process this information is going to be limited because they're going to be in a state of panic. The simpler that you can make the message, it become more action-oriented, you can make it easier to follow, and you can get people to respond better. Meaning that they'll do what you tell them to."

In terms of using social media to monitor crisis situations or issues involving the organization, Henneberry mentioned that he has followed hashtags or added information to hashtags that had already been created. He said that, "We haven't created our own hashtag, but we've certainly tried to use other hashtags that are being used by other Twitter users, and Facebook too now with their hashtags, just to try to feed into that."

When asked about crisis situations that could be categorized as public relations nightmares, Henneberry said that he would only recommend using social media in that

case to correct misinformation. "Correcting facts is about the only time that I would advocate for that," he said. Henneberry explained that in his role, he felt that he couldn't have productive conversations on social media related to issues the university was facing. He said, "If we can't get our points off at 140 characters, as much as we'd like to, it just opens to door for more conversation that we need to think of a better way to have that conversation."

Expert Interview: Matt Kucharski, Executive Vice President of PadillaCRT in Minneapolis
The third expert interview that was conducted was with Matt Kucharski, the Executive Vice President of PadillaCRT for public relations and reputation management in Minneapolis, Minnesota. As one of the senior team members in the crises practice, Kucharski assists clients that are dealing with crises situations. He may use traditional media, social media, or other communication channels to help clients manage crisis situations and maintain their reputation during that critical time. Kucharski is also an Adjunct Instructor in the University of Minnesota's School of Journalism and Mass Communications.
Kucharski said that social media has "changed the game" in terms of crisis communications. He described how in the past, organizations would try to communicate directly to stakeholders when dealing with crisis situations or critical issues, and if they could not reach their stakeholders directly, they would utilize the news media. Kucharski believes the introduction of social media is an entirely new channel available for crisis

communications, which also brings with it detractors, or those with dissenting opinions

or negative views. In this regard, he said:

> "It's not just a matter of you telling your story to a reporter, and the reporter
>
> going out and maybe finding some alternative points of view and publishing your
>
> story. Now, it's all of your opinions and points, as well as all of your detractors'.
>
> And it's happening at a much quicker pace, and it's happening without a
>
> journalistic filter."

In order to use social media effectively in crisis communications, Kucharski discussed

how organizations need to start by identifying their key audience and what they are

trying to communicate. Then, he said, you can begin to identify how you might

incorporate social media and you can find your audience on social media. When

describing this process, Kucharski said:

> "You always have the opportunity of saying, are we going to use social media to
>
> inform people of this problem, or are we just going to wait and see what people
>
> think when they do find out about it, and then we'll correct anything when that
>
> comes up? That's a fundamental question."

Once an organization has determined if they will address and issue head-on or wait to

see what their stakeholders' reaction is to the issue before they communicate,

Kucharski said they must monitor how people are reacting. He described how to use

social media in this regard by saying:

> "You want to make sure you're listening to what people's reactions are.
>
> Including access to who they're communicating to, but also to the detractors,

people who maybe are on the other side of the issue, what are they saying? Are people believing what they are saying? Then you adjust accordingly; you determine whether or not it makes sense to participate in the conversation to clarify. Or sometimes the communities are self-regulating and they're kind of figuring it out for themselves and dealing with it, and you can kind of sit back and let the conversation flow because it's all going fine, people are correcting each other and it's okay. Or you might have to take more drastic action and go out and do some more aggressive communication to your social media to different target audiences."

In terms of monitoring, Kucharski described how organizations could adjust their crisis communications based on what people are saying on social media. The organization can use the information provided by its stakeholders on social media to its advantage, even if it does not utilize social media to communicate. "You don't necessarily always have to add to the information, but monitoring is a must," he said.

Kucharski did not necessarily agree with Kaufman and Henneberry in terms of Twitter being an essential social media channel for crisis communications, though he said it could be important depending on the situation. He argued that since Twitter is typically redirecting people to content elsewhere, it does not solve communications problems. Instead, Kucharski said there are many social media channels to consider, and that you need to consider where your audience goes to find information. "You need to look up the social media channels that are used by that group of audiences, and design your crises communications around that," he said.

In terms of crisis situations that could be categorized as emergencies, Kucharski said

that social media has created a new phase of initial crisis communications response. He

described how organizations must react to the information that is shared immediately

after a crisis happens to manage the situation and prevent the spread of

misinformation. Kucharski said:

> "What happens is the first wave of information out there is a lot of notification
>
> and speculation. Then, the 24-hour news stations come in and give us more of an
>
> interpretation. Then, the analysis stage comes in after that, and then there's the
>
> retrospective phase of what's going to happen going forward. So what social
>
> media has created, it has created a new phase of evolution of a crisis on the
>
> front end. So you have to manage that new phase and watch the information
>
> that's coming out immediately after the event happens, and try to correct
>
> anything that looks like it's a misconception or just false information. If not, it
>
> will just perpetuate."

Interview Themes

Overall, these professionals described how social media could effectively be used by

organizations during crisis situations to share information quickly, to monitor how

stakeholders are reacting to the crisis, and to adjust their crisis response as necessary

based on how their stakeholders are reacting. These experts supported this study's

expected outcomes by recommending the use of social media to quickly share

information with stakeholders in crisis situations and by recommending using social

media as a way to monitor how their stakeholders are reacting to crisis situations.

The main argument of these professionals in regard to advocating for the use of social

media in crisis response is that social media provides a fast, two-way means of

communication that also allows organizations to react to what their stakeholders need

in a crisis situation. These experts agreed that social media has altered the course of

how organizations must respond to crisis situations, and discussed how organizations

must provide information as quickly as they can in order to remain in control of their

crisis communications response.

Limitations and Further Research

One limitation in this set of expert interviews is that there were only three professionals

interviewed. Other professionals were invited to be interviewed, but were ultimately

unable to participate. Conducting more interviews would have allowed for more

comparisons between professionals, which could have identified more themes in terms

of how to effectively use social media in crisis communication responses.

Future research in this regard could look more broadly into how social media is defined,

and examine different channels for different uses or various target audiences. Kucharski

was the only interviewee that mentioned that there are many social media channels

that exist beyond the obvious channels of Twitter and Facebook, and it would be

beneficial to explore how industry-specific or other social media channels could be used

in crisis communications responses.

CONCLUSION

One of the most compelling ways in which social media can be used to an organization's advantage during crisis communications is as a way to listen, interpret and respond to how publics are reacting online. Social media can be used in crisis situations to support recovery efforts, provide awareness and real-time information, and to send alerts or notifications (Ruggiero & Vos, 2014). The social-mediated crisis communication model (SMCC) also suggests that people use social media during crises to seek and share information and for emotional venting or support (Liu et al., 2011). This is a relatively new consideration for managing crisis communications, whereas the organization can seek out ways for others to disseminate information quickly or to encourage interactive conversations with its publics.

Organizations where communications professionals have the independence to provide information as quickly as possible, without needing to seek approval of messaging, will have more successful crisis communication (Marra, 1998). Social media allows rapid communication to the public in crisis situations, which was found to be imperative to successful crisis communications.

In addition, social media, if used effectively, can assist with maintaining a positive organizational reputation in the midst of a crisis. Social media are believed to be more interactive, authentic and credible, and to be platforms to foster dialog (Schultz et al., 2011). Stakeholders feel that the organization is communicating directly to them via social media, and that helps build or rebuild trust. This was supported by focus group participants, who indicated that they found social media as a helpful tool to respond to

rumors or other misinformation that was causing a crisis in their organization, either

through a direct response or through a third party. Focus group participants noted that

they could use social media to share information directly from the organization, or its

leader, with a response to this kind of crisis.

In this digital age, it seems imperative that organizations communicate as quickly as

possible in a crisis situation because information will inevitably be shared online. The

communications professionals in the focus group indicated that time was one of the

main reasons they did not use social media as a crisis response tool, because they felt

that situations changed too quickly to get responses in place, and they feared putting

out misinformation that could further damage the organization. However, research

indicates that organizations that communicate quickly and effectively are more likely to

successfully manage a crisis situation (Marra, 1998). Experts in the field agreed that

social media has shortened the response time that organizations have to communicate

in a crisis, and that it is essential for organizations to communicate quickly to assure that

there is no uncertainty regarding their response.

Some negative consequences of social media for crisis communications include the

unparalleled rate that information can now be shared online, and the fact that many

issues are being exposed online, thus creating organizational crises that would have

potentially gone unnoticed before the emergence of social media. The social-mediated

crisis communication model (SMCC) indicates that crisis situations that emerge, or come

to light, online can be more unpredictable than issues that emerge offline (Jin et al.,

2014).

There are many challenges in these instances, when communications professionals are attempting to monitor rapidly evolving social media. Viewers and consumers of news now have the ability to circulate disaster communications faster than ever before, can spread misinformation, or raise panic, all having a negative impact on the management of the information that is shared (Cottle, 2014). This finding was shared by the communications professionals in the focus group, and fear of making a mistake in communications due to lack of information seemed to be the primary reason why they were hesitant to use social media in their own crisis communications responses. However experts pointed out that social media could be used as a powerful monitoring tool, even if the organization has not yet contributed to the discussion around the critical issue.

A key reason that organizations should embrace social media as a crisis communications strategy is that many people use social media as a tool to find or share information during crisis events. During crises, people spend more time online (Liu et al., 2011). People are increasingly considering the Internet to be the most reliable source for news because it shares information quickly, has unique information, and encourages interactive conversations (Liu et al., 2011). In terms of how they use social media as a crisis situation is unfolding, 78% of respondents to this study's online survey said they use social media to get information from news media sources, 48% said they use social media to get information directly from the organization(s) that the crisis involves, 38% use social media to access firsthand or "citizen journalist" accounts, while 20% of respondents use social media to share information.

Overall, these findings support the expected outcome that communications

professionals are likely integrating social media into their crisis communications

responses and, if they were not already, would support using social media to enhance

their crisis communications efforts. Given that every crisis situation is different,

communications professionals need to adapt their use of social media to fit the

scenario, with some situations found to be more appropriate to use social media in than

others. Regardless, it is clear that social media is having an impact on effective

communications responses, particularly as a way to monitor situations, share

information quickly and to maintain a positive organizational reputation.

How is social media changing how to effectively communicate during an organizational

crisis? Social media have affected crisis communications by making it even more critical

to communicate quickly during a crisis in order to maintain a positive organizational

reputation, and social media provides a two-way communication tool for crisis

management and response efforts. There is also a new and growing consideration that

stakeholders and the media can and will add to the online dialog surrounding a crisis,

and that successful crisis communication will take this into account. As the scope and

complexity of the digital communications landscape continue to increase, so will the

importance of effective organizational crisis communications management.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Social media has changed the crisis communications landscape. This research indicates that organizations should be aware of how their audiences use social media, and should use social media as a tool to help communicate in an organizational crisis. Organizations should respond as soon as they can to a crisis situation to maintain trust and credibility, and social media provides and efficient channel to reach critical audiences where they are already looking for information. In addition, organizations need to be established and active on social media channels before a crisis situation hits so that they have a following of their stakeholders on social media. Organizations should also be aware of where their audiences are going to find information, so that in crisis situations they know how to best reach these audiences.

I believe that organizations should leverage the use of social media as a necessary communications tool to monitor how their stakeholders are reacting to a crisis, and adjust their communications in response to better accommodate the needs of their stakeholders. At the very least, social media expands an organization's reach with critical information. Organizations should not be afraid of social media, rather they should embrace the power that social media holds and use it to their advantage as a monitoring tool and as a way to efficiently communicate in a crisis.

With the advantages of using social media in crisis communications clearly identified, there are always nuances to these situations that need to be considered. Organizations need to react to these different situations and think strategically about how to use social media when their organization is facing a crisis that is an emergency or an issue.

The framework that follows is my recommendation for how social media should be used to effectively communicate during an organizational crisis, defining the different types of crisis communication that this research explored and using school districts, my area of work, as an example.

Framework for the use of social media during crisis situations in school districts

	Emergency: Crisis situation is actively unfolding and evolving *(Examples: School shooting, lockdown, natural disaster)*	**Issue Management:** Reputational challenge *(Examples: Scandals, mismanagement)*	**Tragedy:** Static event affecting the community *(Example: Death of student or staff member)*
Goals	• Use social media to share information efficiently • Be first to communicate • Share correct information	• Use social media as a monitoring tool • Determine if response is needed	• Use social media in recovery response of a tragedy
Immediacy	• Respond quickly • Post updates as they become available • Monitor responses to answer repeat questions if possible	The problem needs to be addressed if: • Statements or rumors are building momentum • The issue makes its way into mainstream media	• Share information when resources are available
Messages	• You are aware of the situation • What you are doing • What they can do • What you know • What you do not know	• Apologize if at fault • Share how issue will be resolved and prevented in the future	• Communicate ways to express grief • Share resources available
Audience	• Priority: Parents, students and staff at	• Priority: Internal stakeholders	• Priority: Parents, students and staff

	the school the emergency occurred/affects • Secondary: Media • Tertiary: Extended district community	• Secondary: Media • Tertiary: External stakeholders	at the school the tragedy affects • Secondary: Extended district community
Reach & Channels	• Twitter • Facebook • Redirect to where updates will be posted (page on website) • Encourage sharing of posts/updates	Monitoring: • Twitter & Facebook Response: • Internal channels as appropriate for internal audiences • Redirect media/additional stakeholders to statement on website via Twitter	• The school's Facebook and Twitter pages
Example	*The district is aware of the lockdown at ABC Elementary, and is working with the police department to determine the situation. Parents should not go to the school, and will receive more information by phone. The district will share updates as they are available.*	*Due to an error in the district's Transportation Department, several students did not receive transportation services on the first day of school. "We are deeply sorry to have caused confusion and anxiety on the first day of school," said the Transportation Director. "We have resolved the issue in our internal communications and will work to assure that it does not happen in the future.*	*ABC Middle School is sad to share the news that student XYZ passed away this week. Counselors will be available for students in school this morning, and parents are welcome to join staff in a grief session after school.*

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APPENDIX

Study I: Focus group

Email to recruit Focus Group participants

Hello,

As you may know, I am currently completing my M.A. in Strategic Communications through the University of Minnesota's School of Journalism and Mass Communications. The requirements of my final Capstone project includes conducting research on my topic, which is focused on the impact of social media on crisis communications strategies.

You are invited to participate in a focus group on the impact of social media on crisis communications strategies. You were selected as a possible participant because you are a communications professional for a Twin Cities metro area public school district. We will discuss what opportunities and challenges you have experienced regarding social media and crisis communication. Participants will be asked to share specific examples from their work, and offer scenarios to discuss.

This focus group will take one hour, and will be held at 7:30 a.m. on Monday, April 20 at my district office (7362 E. Point Douglas Rd. S., Cottage Grove). Please let me know by Friday if you are able to attend.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely, Madeleine Rush

Focus Group Question Outline

- How have you used social media to communicate during a crisis? What specific tools/methods have you used?
- What benefits do you see social media when communicating during a crisis?
- What problems have you encountered regarding social media and crisis communications?
- Can you describe a specific scenario or example where you used social media during a crisis?
- If your school district was experiencing a crisis such as a school shooting or natural disaster, how would you use social media?
- If your school district was experiencing a crisis that is more of a "public relations nightmare" such as a scandal, how would you use social media?

INFORMATION SHEET FOR RESEARCH
Social Media and Crisis Communication

You are invited to participate in a focus group on the impact of social media on crisis communications strategies. You were selected as a possible participant because you are a communications professional for a Twin Cities metro area public school district. We ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may hae before agreeing to be in the study.

This study is being conducted by: Madeleine Rush, Masters of Arts student in Strategic Communications at te University of Minnesota

Procedures:
If you agree to be in this study, we would ask you to do the following:
- Discuss what opportunities and challenges you have experienced regarding social media and crisis communication.
- Share specific examples from their work, and offer scenarios to discuss.

All responses will be audio recorded for accuracy. This study should take no more than one hour of your time.

Confidentiality:
The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report we might publish, we will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely and only researchers will have access to the records. Only the Primary researcher and her advisors will access all data, including audio recordings. Audio recordings will be disposed of at the completion of this study; no later than September 1, 2015.

Voluntary Nature of the Study:
Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with the University of Minnesota. If you decide to participate, you are free not to answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

Contacts and Questions:
The researcher conducting this study is Madeleine Rush. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you are encouraged to contact the researcher at saxle001@umn.edu or 651-214-6937, or you can contact her advisor Steven Wehrenberg at wehre003@umn.edu or 612-625-6383. If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, you are encouraged to contact the Research Subjects' Advocate Line, D528 Mayo, 420 Delaware St. SE, Minneapolis, MN 55455 or 612-625-1650.

You will be given a copy of this information to keep for your records.

Focus Group Transcript

Moderator: Well let's go ahead and get started. I really appreciate you taking the time to come help me out today. As I mentioned, this focus group is for my Capstone research. I am finishing up my master's this summer, and I'm focusing on how social media is impacting crisis communications. And I invited you all as communications professionals, so that's what we're going to be talking about, in your work and in your role how you see that social media is impacting the way you respond during different kind of crisis situations. I am audio recording this focus group today, but you're not going to be identified by name and the transcript will only be used for the purpose of my own research. Participation in this focus group is voluntary, and you are giving your consent to be involved in my research study. There is more information in this regard on the information sheet in front of you, feel free to take that with you today for your records if you want.

I'd like to hear from everyone today, so speak up whenever you have a comment. Let's start out today by discussion what social media tools or crisis response methods you've actually used. So how you've used social media to communicate during a crises and what kind of specific tools you have taken advantage of.

Speaker1:   So I'll start, so before starting here I worked for Girl Scouts of Greater Iowa, a non-profit organization. And in crises situations, and situations popped up a lot in Girl Scouts actually, and on our Facebook page people would make comments. And then other people would comment on that and sometime we'd have like 50 comments within 5 minutes. And what we would always do to try and kind of manage this situation is we would say, "If you have a concern please email." We'd provide the email address and we would try to take it off social media. Because I mean if we tried to actually respond to what they were saying, we knew that would just fuel the fire and there would just be more and more and more comments. So we always just tried to take it offline and either call them, which took it offline, or just emailed them or had them email us. I mean that helped but a lot of times even that, if someone is just if they want to say something there just you know its kind to hard really rectify that to.

Speaker2:   Well I think my experience with social media in a crises situation is that the community takes it and runs with. No matter if we start or don't start the situation. And I don't know of a time where we have put it out there and begun it on social media because within the school district were able to use Blackboard Connect, and reach parents much more quickly and that's who our audience is anyway. And when you start going out to

social media, I think like (Speaker1) said, immediately 50 people are chiming in that may or may not know. Social media doesn't really allow you to tell your story the way it needs to be told in that type of situation. Because it's so limited in words and getting people to pay attention. So I would say we rather share what may have happened or a final update at the end through social media.

Moderator: Okay…

Speaker3:   I think we have a similar philosophy too, is we have our standard means of communicating with families during a crisis and with the media during crisis. And that is the phone messages and our website, which is a place where we can control the message and put out what is there. So for us too we have tried to keep things off of social media as much as possible. However, maybe this is a question later, but what happens with social media when the message is out there? Because a lot of times information is being shared that way. You know kids are posting things, and parents are seeing something that's happening in the building. So that becomes a little tricky too, but as far as us communicating our message, we stay off of social media and use more of our established channels.

Moderator: Okay, so if you put something on your website, you are not posting that response then on your Facebook or Twitter pages? You just kind of keep it where parents can find it if they need to, but not necessarily push it out that way?

Speaker3:   Yeah. It's more of what (Speaker2) said too. When you're in the heat of the crisis you're just going to the website and posting information. After things are over we might share an update on social media as well. But in the heat of it there's so many other things to keep up, to try track what's happening on social media as well can be a bit overwhelming.

Speaker4:   You have to set expectations I think. And we're only human, so to say to or to promise your audiences or parents and stakeholders that you're going to be able, in a crisis situation, to have everything updated all the time is unrealistic. And so I know that's where part of you know what you're saying in terms of email being where we can communicate a message. And it's clear and it's complete and all those things. And the fact that you know, you have your website and things. It's also an expectation so I can't be out there putting messages everywhere because of time. And then you have to go back and circle you know and check every one and then do it again. That loop takes more time than you think. And crisis situations I've been in, time is not your friend. You know you just think, "Oh I'm going to get that translation back immediately," you

know that message, that email whatever it is. You know 45 minutes later you know and that's just the way it is, that's the way it works. And so I think part of it is managing expectations. To say I can have it on my website, I can send you an email, beyond that I will try do my best.

Moderator: Any specific examples that anyone could maybe share about a specific crisis situation, and how you were able to use social media? Or again, it could be a problem that you faced where it started on social media and now you're not in control of the message?

Speaker2: Well and that's what I think happens to us is that we don't start it on social media. But it's on social media because it's out of our control.

Moderator: What kind of situations?

Speaker2: Well something as simple as like an uncalled for lockdown at the high school, because the kids have this *(indicates cell phone)* in their hands or their pockets. And they pull these out and so then they start right away throwing things out there on social media. And they don't know maybe why they're in lockdown. Or they don't that it's a practice or a regular lockdown. So that's one situation, I mean it may or may not be a difficult situation. I'm thinking of the student death that we had at one of our middle schools two years ago. And it wasn't our social media, but that's what happens is, "Did you hear, did you find out?" And all of the Rest in Peace hashtags and things. And we will only release so much information on the person that's being impacted, because number one it's just nobody business to understand what happened, and unless the family actually says, "No please do tell or please say." But in that particular situation we were not going to go down that road at all, you can't, we can get ourselves into a lot of trouble. So then all of sudden its actually her mom now, that's out and starting to post exactly, you know, went down with her child. And it just wasn't a good situation and it just kind of runs rampant and starts all different conversations. To the point where it's no longer about the death of that kid anymore. And that's where people that aren't even impacted by the situation outside of the school or even outside of our district… it just goes viral I guess. And you don't know who these people are that are starting to say things and comment, and I just think that makes it really difficult for everybody to work through a situation.

Speaker4: And part of it I think, they feel like they have some anonymity behind a computer. And so they feel like they can say whatever they want. And then I've honestly, with the evolution of Facebook, there's a lot of people who don't I believe fully realize that their comment is as public as it is.

They feel like they're commenting to their niece or nephew or something like. And I will say it's sometimes the older generation. And it's like what? [Laughter] I would go up and read the comments and I think they didn't know that everyone can see that comment to that. And you know sometimes it's in a humorous way, sometimes in a mean spirited way, and that's detrimental. And that's where it really becomes sad I think. So there's a little bit of a barrier with the people who are even using the technology. And one thing I've seen that I found interesting. When we had the one cold day, was it in January? And there was so much social media flurry about that. So number one, I used it in that sense in that situation, which I don't know if you'd call it a crisis. But it was lots of opinions. To get something out quickly, because the people who are out on social media were the most high maintenance people I feel like. It was like, you know, for lack of a better word, it was some of the most high maintenance parents, where everyone else was just going with the regular program. But there were kids and adults interacting, you know and I don't think that some of the adults realized that. That the kids were out there posting on Facebook and things and as soon as you know someone would post for a little bit. And then, 'cause you would watch the thread, and then all of sudden they would identify themselves as a student. And you could tell all the adults went "oh okay, well I'm going to actually watch what I'm saying now, I'm actually going to pay attention to my comments," and its like hello you should always be doing that. It's interesting to be an observing I think in our seat sometimes and watch some of the things people post out there and you just wonder what's going through their minds.

Speaker2: Well we have the superintendent's twitter page, and by far the followers are students. And that I mean I don't know how many times and in what particular situations, there have been very inappropriate comments back to the superintendent, to the point where we showed the superintendent and he called the parents of these kids if we could find out who they were. Because it does, it gets that way and I think these kids think "well that's not a problem you know there never going to do anything or come back at me with anything." And yeah and mom and dad, you know, they're taken quite aback at what these kids are saying much less to the superintendent. You trying to hide behind this nasty little feed on twitter…it just…and I don't know if any of those were in crisis situations someone else I know would know that better.

[Laughter]

Moderator: Are there any other specific examples that anyone could walk us through about how you did use social media in a crisis situation?

Speaker3:   I'm trying to think…there are so many different types of crisis. And I think what we talked about is those situations where it's really I'm thinking more of incident that's inside the school. There's some sort of lockdown, there's some sort of issue at the school where student safety is paramount. And you're really trying to control the message that's going out. But then there's the things that just pop up kind of what you talked about the snow days. Some of those just random things where a lot of public interest in it, I wouldn't necessarily call a crisis, but it's something that takes a lot of time and attention, and it's a communication issue so perhaps that does count. And some of those times it seems more appropriate for social media. And I do think in my mind it works with that time piece too. I mean if you're in the midst of a true crisis where student safety is paramount, you're trying to take care of the information going out to parents is really your first concern, going social media is not going to be my first choice. But if it's something where it's maybe longer issue and it's not deemed, you know, a life or death kind of situation. Then social media can work, that's where conversations are happening and you have a little more time to be able to respond to things. So maybe that's what it would come down to me is kind of that timing that intensity of the work you're doing.

Moderator: So it would depend on the situation itself, there's no black or white? It all depends on kind of the situation you're facing?

Speaker3:   I think so.

Speaker4:   We had a situation at the beginning of the year where a parent, from what we can figure, the parent must have had some sort of agenda with our transportation service, because we own our own buses in my district. And they took a picture, he was behind a bus, I actually don't even know if he took it frankly. But we'll assume that he did, of a student who was, who looked to be laying on the ground in the back of the bus. So that one little window that would be at everyone feet in the rear. And went to a community page, so it didn't go to our pages at all. Went to a community page and posted it up and something negative about you know the bus driver, like "why is the bus driver letting this happen?" And it was actually what should happen, happened. Because my superintendent came into me and said, "What do we do about this?" you know and transportation said, "What do we do about this?" You know it's making us look bad. I said well first of all it's not on our page, and so we just waited we took a step back. 'Cause you can sometimes have that urge to be really reactive. But we watched and frankly the community took care of it. You know the community, first of all because some of them said, "I don't even see it,

that picture's really blurry, I don't know what you're looking at." And a lots of that going on and then some people saying, "but you can see brake lights in that you know the bus isn't moving." It's not like the bus is, you know, barreling down the highway, and you know, different things like that. And they sort of diffused that parent who, like I said, must have had some sort of agenda to smear, you know, our transportation service or a bus driver, or whatever it was. I don't even know if it was his child's bus or what it was. But you know that's how they say, that when your supporters kind of come to your aid, and you don't even have to get involved in the situation, which is a beautiful thing, but it's really nerve racking waiting for that to happen, and hoping that that happens, and keeping everybody calm. Because back to that time issue, time is moving so quickly, but also time is moving so slowly in some of those situations.

Speaker2:   Well and that's thing about knowing, we never respond to social media. Unless there's a very specific question and then I don't know how many times we've even just tried to reach out to that individual instead of responding. That is just an extra little tool for us to share our good news and our things that are going on. I'm nervous about our referendum and the election coming up, because I'm pretty sure things will be getting a bigger voice out there. We've got some nasty bloggers and we don't know how far the reach is, other than some people are starting to pay attention. And so that's a concern, where do we start being more responsive to those things on social media. But like you say, I think there's enough people that are upset with the crazies that are out there that maybe it's more of a community aloud conversation than a school district thing. It's our news, but it's up to you guys to kind of walk through everything.

Speaker1:   And they can find the balance you know.

Speaker2:   Usually.

Speaker4:   We got lucky in our referendum, that our vote no, they weren't tech savvy, so they didn't use any social media. I mean I thought about that halfway through like, holy moly, like that's a blessing. You know these people are out there, they really attacked us from the newspapers and the editorials and things and that's where that fight was fought. But I used social media to push messages that contradicted those negative editorial articles. And because of the way, and I don't want to completely focus on Facebook, but because of the way their algorithm is working these days. There was a Better Ed postcard that went out. Better Ed is, you know, a private group who is for "change" in education. And for your recording I'm doing air quotes. And they put out a postcard right in our

community that attacked our test scores. And just really out of context, the numbers were correct technically what they were putting out for percentages were correct. However there was no context, there was no, they were just looking to make a splash and to get people riled up. And then right in the middle of our referendum campaign. And so it was a, you know they did, they also posted on their Facebook page. They have electronic means, their website and things. And so I was able to work with our superintendent she wrote a blog post, we posted that right on social media. We boosted the post, so we put a little money behind it so we could get that moving. 7,000 views later, you know we were able to really push that message and break through. And I heard people, parents that at public meetings you know, and within that week they were saying, "wait a second did you read the superintendent's blog post?" "You've got to read that, that's where you find the information that you need you know," to one parent who said, "I got this postcard!" and then like I said, the other balanced it out and said, "no, no, no that's not what the facts are." You know, and I was like whoa, that's powerful, that's a powerful use of social media.

Speaker3:   And that's the way that we would use it more to. Again, there are different types of crisis. And more just that message kind of the communications crisis, if you will, where somebody else is trying to spread a message that is against what we know is true. We use social media quite a bit for that. It's those emergency situations where I think social media becomes challenging for us.

Moderator: So let's talk about those different kinds of crises. So you have your emergency crisis situations, say a natural disaster, a school shooting, or some other type of real emergency. Or you have more of your PR nightmare kind of crisis, where you're trying to maybe respond to something negative, or there's a scandal that you have to deal with. So thinking of the real emergency kind of crisis, can you see a way that you would use social media in that sense? To either find information or share information?

Speaker1:   We've used it through our students actually so in the middle of a crisis situation we knew kids would be out there talking about things. So we've made sure that teachers were prepared with a message to give to kids and say, "look if you going on pull out your phones right now, this is the message that you need to be sharing." So that's worked pretty well for us, we know they're going to be doing it anyway so it's just a way to help control the message. So teachers legitimately give them a, you know pull your phone out right now this is what you can share.

Moderator: Was that during a lockdown or something?

Speaker3:   That was during a lockdown, and I'm trying to remember exactly what situation. There was something…I'm pretty sure we were ordered to have a lockdown, there was something going on in the neighborhood. Something like that was happening at our high school, so we and we did that at the junior high level as well with our junior high kids in a similar situation.

Moderator: So they were able to tell their twitter followers or their parents?

Speaker3:   Yeah, so they know what going on, we're on lockdown, we're safe. You know whatever the message was that we asked them to share. And that was an effective way, we knew that they were going to be sharing a message anyway we just wanted to make sure that they were saying the right thing instead of increasing the fear.

Speaker2:   So when you do that, my fear is that we have so many media in our community, and when they see things like that it just drives them our way and it just aggravates the situation, and our thing is to tell the kids not to be sending things out if at all possible. And I don't know if that's the reality, I mean we have 7-8 secondary schools. So for me to be able to quickly get something out to those principals to get to those teachers, it's not going to happen. The lockdown might as well be over by the time were able to get something like that to happen. So the speed of it isn't quite speedy enough from our perspective, because it takes, you know, I think that one of our biggest criticisms is that we don't share out fast enough. Well, I don't want to share anything that's not what it needs to be. And we are so large, that by the time that were really ready, you know, to make sure that everybody is paying attention, everybody's going to pick up that email, or whatever, the situation may be over. So we're almost better to just really send a very clear message right after the fact that this occurred in school or whatever today. But in those situations, when it's no longer about us, it is a community wide or if it's a police matter, I don't want to do anything more than what the police would maybe have me do. And we've noticed now that our at least one of our local police departments is very, they're on a Facebook lickity split with a shooting in the neighborhood, or you know, they've quadrant of an area for a fire or some certain situation. And their putting that out there. And so that always causes me, and maybe that's how we find out about it as well because it's in one of our schools is nearby or something. So it's really tough what to know exactly what the right decision is in social media, it really is tough because it just gets so out of control so fast.

Speaker4:   And we're a little bit of a smaller district to so I think we utilize our email and our outbound call system to get to the parents quicker. And then we would try and control the social media, whereas we don't really feel like we have a big enough twitter following or Facebook interaction that it would really help to do that. We would just focus on immediate inner, like inside to outside parents; we're going to get to you this way. So I think that's what's been working for our district.

Moderator: That makes sense. Could anyone see themselves using social media to deal with the aftermath of that kind of crisis? Say a school shooting, or a tornado or another emergency. What might be the benefits of reaching your community in social media during those times after the actual threat has passed and you're now kind of in the recovery phase?

Speaker3:   I think we talked about that before in the crisis, you want to deal with getting information to parents, and then the media. But afterwards you know there's probably chatter in your community, and that's a good time, when you're not in the heat of the moment, when you can share information and be able to watch a little bit more effectively what's being talked about on there. So I think it works very well and we have used that in situations where something is over. Here's the result, here's what people should know, and we'll push it out on social media.

Speaker2:   We want to just clarify and squelch any rumors that are out there. And I think that's the biggest thing about after the fact, that your information is your clarification.

Speaker4:   And there's the positive you know, so many situations the follow up may be a memorial service or a fund drive of some kind. Some sort of fundraiser some sort of healing event, you know, that you want the community to be a part of and want everyone to know about. And in those, I mean, we've used social media, like with Officer Patrick who was shot in Mendota Heights. It was summer, so we didn't have kids in our schools beyond our school age care program. We did go on lockdown; we did use social media in those instances. But really just tried to be a partner to the city, to in the aftermath share any information that we could. Partly because it was summer, I mean, it was harder to communicate with people. But about any sort of, you know, memorial service, vigils, anything that was happening because that was just a shocking even for our community. And on the flip side of that in other situations we may have, his daughters didn't go to our schools but they had. You know we would have been able to provide services we would have had counselors available things like that. But again, it was summer

so you know it's a little situation-specific, but you want people to know that those things are available and we as schools have the structure to offer support in crisis and after crisis.

Moderator: That's a great example.

Speaker1:   And then just the fact that when you share something out with twitter and Facebook, other people can share it. I think that's one of the biggest benefits if you want to get information out there to a lot of people. I mean a lot of times a lot of people will share it on their own pages.

Moderator: Right, and do you think they're more or less likely to share it if it's something positive or do you think negative news is shared more?

Speaker1:   I don't know, I mean it just works both ways. It's like social media is a benefit because I think they are still likely to share like positive, memorial service information. But right, that also works to your disadvantage because if it's something negative they're also likely to share it so...

Speaker2:   And I think the more localized whatever it is that you're doing, so yes you share, but I wouldn't share probably that type of a situation if I'm not in that community. Unless it touched my heart, or you know, was something you know really current that I was going to try and clarify.

Moderator: So now let's think more of the PR nightmare kind of crisis, the scandal situation or something of that nature. How have you or how would you use social media in that sense? I know we talked about putting information on the website instead of social media, would you share a statement on social media if your organization was really facing heat for something?

Speaker2:   No, I typically just don't. There's other ways to do that and it may just fuel the fire again. I just think that anything that's out there that is controversial it just wouldn't do us any favors. Because it's not going to be a win-win. There's just going to be too many people who are against what you're saying and then their messages get loud and clear and get carried to the people that are behind you and it second guesses people. And it just depends on the situation, I mean we've had our share, and I think you can't say things about particular, you know, students and their families or employees its beyond our right to do that. So in those kinds of situations most of it involves people too, and I wouldn't go down that road, I just wouldn't go down that road.

Moderator: So you think in that case, saying nothing is better than saying what you can?

Speaker2:   On social media, right. Because saying what you can isn't enough for a lot of people.

Moderator: So it's just not worth it in your eyes?

Speaker2:   Nope.

Moderator: Anyone else have thoughts?

Speaker3:   I think that's a situation as what we've talked about before. You kind of let other people carry your message for you. You don't put it on your own page but you know it's out there. Perhaps, I live in the community that I work in, so if I saw something I might call a friend and say, "hey did you see this?" and get them fueled up about it. Let them respond, let it really be more community-driven. Cause I think, it would totally depend on the situation, but something where your describing where there just is very little information that can be shared I think it does cause more controversy if you post something on your website that says nothing… or I mean if on your Facebook page and it really says nothing and then it just gets people going even more. It's not a message that you can control. But again, just working through other people to help curb things and have another side to the story is a good thing but it's not the district's official statement.

Speaker5:   We had an issue pretty recently with a lunchroom para. And we knew that there was stuff circling around on social media from that, and that a lot of people were linking like the news article that was released in to Facebook so that other parents could see it, so it was kind of we just we didn't respond to any social media of that kind. So we sent out an email to parents right away, and we commented to media to let them know that the information that we were giving to the media was at most that we could at that time, so they can pull it from there.

Moderator: Any other examples or thoughts about that kind of "PR nightmare" situation?

Speaker2:   If you can think of something you want me to talk about it just say it.

Moderator: That's okay, good; well does anyone have anything else they want to share any other examples. Or what kind of social media do you use? Is it

all just Facebook and twitter? Has anyone found any other tools that they really think are helpful?

Speaker5:   Primarily Facebook for us right now. Just looking at demographics just looking at where are parents are and you know keeping them our foremost audience and how to reach them. And dabbling in twitter. Beyond that, I mean I've though about Pinterest I've thought about Instagram I've thought about a lot of things. But it goes back to that time. You know how much time do you have? Experts would tell you don't duplicate messages you know across platforms. Change them, and vary them, well that's all I have time to do. If I've been doing it "wrong," then I don't know if it's, you know something that we should do. And Facebook, you need to be there. It does work in great ways when it comes to sharing positive messages and great things that are happening in your community. So I don't feel a lot of push to change.

Speaker2:   You know I think you can get overwhelmed. There's already too many things to do in our world. And if you add platform after platform after platform, it just gets out of control and you can't manage it well. We've had a lot of the weird of situations outside of Facebook and Twitter. Vine…what was the other one I was trying to just… they just are, they're nasty. They don't have the same sort of restrictions. And you wouldn't to be affiliated with that anyway. And sometimes I wonder how everybody really feels about the school district, you know, being out there and police departments being out there through social media. I'm of the older generation and it doesn't always seem like it's the best thing to be doing. Because really how much is too much these days? And you just see a lot nasty exchanges going on between kids and hurt feelings and it's also not a good thing. I would add one more thing that just for everybody's information. We are its Blackboard Connect purchased, who did they just purchase?

Speaker1:   Parent link?

Speaker2:   Parent link. And then sociability…

Speaker3:   School wires too right?

Speaker1:   Parent link, the school wires app now?

Speaker2:   It's one of those.

Speaker3:   Something along those lines.

Speaker2: So they were out here recently and offered us a pilot opportunity with sociability. Do have you heard of sociability? It puts in GPS coordinates of your community. And it tracks your, you put in a certain, you know all the parameters. Our school names, 2015 November 3rd election, referendum. All those kinds of things. And it finds what the conversations are of anybody; you don't have to be friends with them. So were going to take them up on that, they're going to give it to us free from September through our election in November. And to me that's just scary, for me as a user, scary. And the fact that someone else is doing that much tracking of what it is that I'm saying and, I don't know that we let the community know. We're going to talk about this a little bit further. Saint Paul Schools is doing it, I think they bought it I think there doing it this year there implementing it this year they're going to use it. Which this really just really kind of creeps me out that were going to be able to do that. And, I mean I have had conversations with several people before we said, "sure we'll give it a try." But I just can't imagine what we'll end up with, but we were kind of told that it's really going to help us with our messaging. And those people that are out there saying all those things that you don't want to be said that we wouldn't know about, well now were going to know about them. So now we can work to counter them whether it's through social media or our website or you know however else were going to communicate, so its interesting.

Moderator: And that's a little more specific or advanced in terms of analytics, but has anyone used a hashtag or would you use a hashtag when you're dealing with a crisis or when you're responding to those rumors that are out there? Would you use a hashtag district833novemberwhatever? Or does that not seem helpful?

Speaker3: We've used it on positive side; we haven't used it in a crisis or negative situation. So it's definitely a good question but no for us. We've just really tried it more for when we're promoting something positive and wanted to spread it around.

Speaker4: We have not used one yet. Maybe in the future thought about in a more of a positive way. But it has it been something that I'll bet that our vote yes tried. I observed them in the last referendum but it just, I mean, never could get enough traction I guess. So great to use it you makes your post look really tech savvy and official. But it never caught on so.

Speaker3: I'm trying to think that too. We did it for our kindergarten campaign, Pony K Rocks, that one. I mean again it was very small but our citizens group used it for the last campaign too. And I think they did have more

success with then, they had a great campaign social media last time. But no it's interesting to think about using that in a rumor kind of situation.

Moderator: Well that all for my questions but, dose anyone else have anything that you want to add as a final note on social media and crisis communication?

Speaker2: I'm looking forward to the outcome of your paper so we can have it.

[Laughter]

Moderator: Gee yeah thanks, me too.

Speaker1: Have you done much research to see how businesses use social media to handle crisis? Because I think they have…schools are always little bit behind when it comes to using technology for communication, and we're a different environment. We have different ways that we can communicate with our internal audiences.
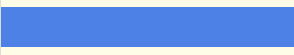
Moderator: And our audiences are really different. So I have, and it's really interesting to hear what you all have to think. It doesn't really fit the norm all the time for what the recommendation is in terms of using social media. But I'm also looking at the user end of things: How do you, if a crisis is happening, how you do use social media to find information or share information yourself? What do people expect or how do they want to receive that communication?

Speaker1: Interesting. One other thing I was going to mention and I don't know where it fits, but I have deleted posts before. So we have our guidelines, and so we do monitor our page and you know, as we talked about, sometimes things are on other pages and its other you know forums and groups and things like that. But I have direct messaged people and said "your post is inappropriate and I have deleted it from our page." Because it's got profanity in it or something that's just wrong and things like that. And so we take that very seriously. And have those guidelines, we have those guidelines for our superintendents blog as well and to say you know keep it clean. Keep it everyone calm and respectful.

Moderator: Great, well thank you all so much for being here and sharing your thoughts and starting your Monday with me. I really appreciate your help.

Study II: Online survey results

1. What is the primary way that you seek information regarding crisis events?

#	Answer		Response	%
1	Online news media		110	62%
2	Print news media		1	1%
3	Social Media		33	19%
4	Television news media		33	19%
	Total		177	100%

Statistic	Value
Min Value	1
Max Value	4
Mean	1.94
Variance	1.56
Standard Deviation	1.25
Total Responses	177

2. How often do you use social media when seeking information regarding crisis events?

#	Answer		Response	%
1	Always		25	14%
2	Frequently		60	34%
3	Sometimes		65	37%
4	Rarely		20	11%
5	Never		7	4%
	Total		177	100%

Statistic	Value
Min Value	1
Max Value	5
Mean	2.57
Variance	1.00
Standard Deviation	1.00
Total Responses	177

3. What social media channels do you use to seek information about crisis events? Please select all that apply.

#	Answer		Response	%
1	Facebook		137	80%
2	Twitter		84	49%
3	Instagram		15	9%
4	YouTube		15	9%
5	Other (please specify)		15	9%

Other (please specify)
Internet News
blogs
local news outlets
reddit
tv
CNN
text
BBC website
T.V.
Google, Google +
TV stations
Reddit
CNN app
Television
online news sites

Statistic	Value
Min Value	1
Max Value	5
Total Responses	171

4. How do you typically use social media as a crisis situation is unfolding? Select all that apply.

#	Answer		Response	%
1	To get information from news media sources		135	78%
2	To get information directly from the organization(s) that the crisis involves		83	48%
3	To share information yourself		35	20%
4	To access firsthand or "citizen journalist" accounts		66	38%
5	Other (please specify)		7	4%

Other (please specify)
TV
I usually Google search the topic and read whatever comes up, from several sources, to check facts/info against one another.
to ensure loved ones are safe
to get info from friends/contacts
I often ignore the reports on social media
To get information before it can be reported by media
To get friend s opinions

Statistic	Value
Min Value	1
Max Value	5
Total Responses	172

5. How do you use social media during a crisis that could be categorized as an emergency (for example a shooting, natural disaster, plane crash, etc.)? Select all that apply.

#	Answer		Response	%
1	To get information from news media sources		135	83%
2	To get information directly from the organization(s) that the crisis involves		91	56%
3	To share information yourself		37	23%
4	Other (please specify)		11	7%

Other (please specify)
I read information that appears on my feed without searching it out.
In the question below, I'd like to rank/recognize that it is VERY important for citizen journalists to share info, equally as important as organizationally shared media information. This allows the public to keep informed, away from media biases.
to hear others' interpretation of unfolding events
check safety of loved ones
To get info rapidly that has not been released on news sites (e.g., police helicopter in my neighborhood; events unfolding)
look for word from possible victims- ex: Nepal quake
To gather info from people at or near the scene
To check up on friends and relatives who may be impacted.
I don't rely on social media during a crisis. it's rarely accurate and usually highly biased

Statistic	Value
Min Value	1
Max Value	4
Total Responses	162

6. What would you say is the primary role of social media in a crisis that could be categorized as an emergency?

#	Answer		Response	%
1	As a means for organizations to quickly spread information about a situation		85	51%
2	As a way for people to connect with, help or share information with others		54	33%
3	For "citizen journalists" or people directly involved in the situation to share firsthand accounts of a situation as it unfolds		27	16%
	Total		166	100%

Statistic	Value
Min Value	1
Max Value	3
Mean	1.65
Variance	0.56
Standard Deviation	0.75
Total Responses	166

7. How do you use social media during a crisis that could be categorized as a "public relations nightmare" (for example a protest, political/company scandal, product recall, etc.)? Select all that apply.

| #	Answer		Response	%
1	To get information from news media sources		107	68%
2	To get information directly from the organization(s) that the crisis involves		94	59%
3	To share information yourself		39	25%
4	Other (please specify)		6	4%

Other (please specify)
I don't really
to get info the news media will not share
first hand participant accounts
To gauge impressions from contacts
see previous description

Statistic	Value
Min Value	1
Max Value	4
Total Responses	158

8. What would you say is the primary role of social media in a crisis that could be categorized as a public relations nightmare?

#	Answer		Response	%
1	As a means for organizations to quickly spread information about a situation		78	49%
2	As a way for people to connect with, help or share information with others		44	28%
3	For "citizen journalists" or people directly involved in the situation to share firsthand accounts of a situation as it unfolds		33	21%
4	Other (please specify)		4	3%
	Total		159	100%

Other (please specify)
Gossip
unclear question
Spread of rumors and "quick reaponse" half truths
Not the most accurate response options. Organizations with sound crisis plan use social media to provide factual information relative to the situation, while others will use it as a "spin" machine.

Statistic	Value
Min Value	1
Max Value	4
Mean	1.77
Variance	0.75
Standard Deviation	0.87
Total Responses	159

9. Did you use social media to seek or share information in any of the following recent crisis events? Select all that apply.

#	Answer		Response	%
1	Shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary		82	60%
2	Boston Marathon Bombing		111	82%
3	Ferguson Protests		78	57%
4	Hurricane Sandy		46	34%
5	Germanwings Flight 9525 Plane Crash		57	42%
6	Hillary Clinton Email Scandal		25	18%
7	Other (please specify)		7	5%

Other (please specify)
Search for Barway Collins
Baltimore Uprising
hunt for the Marathon bomber
MN Legislative Session ending and if education bill passed or not
None
none
Baltimore

Statistic	Value
Min Value	1
Max Value	7
Total Responses	136

10. Please describe a time that you used social media as your primary source of information regarding a crisis situation.

Text Response
In the aftermath of the Boston marathon bombing
Ferguson protest, I followed on Twitter
Bridge collapse MN
N/A
I don't use social media as a source to get information about a crisis.
Information sourcing. Then, I go to new media sites directly.
Clicked on links as they appeared in my news feed
Sandy Hook
Ferguson
Hurricane Sandy, we had no power.
I followed the Boston Marathon Bombing closely on twitter. I found I was able to access news much faster that way than with traditional news media.
Boston bombings, followed on twitter from primary sources at the scene
generally for local news events in my community
When I didn't know about the crisis and learned of it on social media
When a cousin-in-law's family member was in Sandy Hook
I receiving a lot of information about the Boston bombing through the social media site reddit. I used it to see what people were thinking and get in person accounts and photographs.
Never
I'm not sure this would be categorized as a crisis, but I use twitter to stay abreast of legislative crises like goverment shutdowns and special sessions. Most recently I've been monitoring the state legislature's special session shennanigans.
Shared others info to spread awareness
Never
Germs wing
when I needed immediate up to date info not available on news websites
I got most updated information about German plane crisis from Facebook
I first heard about the capture/death of Osama bin Laden through social media. Social media might not be my top choice for reputable information, but it is somewhere I often hear about things FIRST, which then cues me to look elsewhere for more information.
When the Boston Marathon Bombing happened I used Facebook to follow the story.
HUrricane Katrina
flooding in Texas but frankly, I depend on more traditional media sources - newspaper websites, TV news, radio news
While working at Girl Scouts of Greater Iowa, we shared information about a water main break with parents through Facebook and Twitter.
local school shooting
Maybe not the best "crisis" example, but I checked Twitter one night before going to bed and learned from Patton Oswalt that the US military had killed Osama Bin Laden. So

that was a weird way to get that news.

During the Boston Marathon bombing I used Facebook to check on the status of friends in the area.

Primary source? Never.

Updates on Sandyhook. I could aggregate across various reports quickly.

Weather events where family reside and or vacationing

Used Twitter to get updates on the crash that led to the death of Red Arrows pilot Jon egging

Boston Marathon: FB to find information about friends near the crisis. Also searched for details about when and where the bombs exploded on twitter.

Public Relations "crisis "when related sports matters

all of the above

during the Boston marathon bombing, to get first hand accounts

Traveling home on the Metro-North, train was stopped. Found out the train in front of us crashed.

have not

recent floods in Texas

social media may be the first to alert me to a crisis; after, I go online to news organizations I trust --- and on Sundays, print for analysis + opinion.

Recent Houston Floods

I always cross-reference anything I read on social media with a reputable news outlet

the death of that 5 year old by salt poisoning through his G-tube.

Recent floods in Texas - to see how friends and family were affected (through firsthand accounts by non-journalists).

murders in North Minneapolis

Memorial Day flooding in Texas

Never

Being on Twitter frequently allows me to see trending topics and Retweets, so frequently it would happen when story caught me attention on Twitter before I had a chance to see/hear about it on the news

Baltimore Uprising

Flooding and tornados in Austin

Baltimore Protests and Riots

situation unfolding in my city in real time

None

I use Twitter to find out about local emergencies--fires, missing persons, etc. //Don't seek info on Facebook but often first hear about a crisis there.

Tornado in North Minneapolis

I do not use SM as a primary source

I was on Reddit during the boston marathon bombing

As I had friends running in the Boston Marathon on the day of the bombing, I used social media to stay connected with them and the most current news being reported.

searched social media during a local crisis

I followed the Ferguson protests on social media, including first-hand twitter posts and

comments on Facebook links to news articles, which provided me with a wider viewpoint (not just the facts).

There was a grocery store nearby that was evacuated because they believed there was a man with a weapon inside. Police and swat teams were surrounding the store and while the local news was covering the story live, I found it helpful to get more information and updates from twitter.

Social media is one of many ways I've communicated during crisis situations. One of the recent ways my organization has used social media is to share news about a student death... normally we wouldn't have done this, but it was a highly publicized case and we wanted to make sure families were hearing from us first. Our communications also included calls home and website messages.

missing person

I saw a viral tweet of the Boston marathon bombing 2 minutes after it had happened.

None

Nepal earthquake- gave links to news sources & allowed me to see/hear first hand accounts and check on personal contacts

N/A

I use social media as a platform to find more information; I typically click on trusted news sources from their social media pages for more information.

As an emergency management consultant, I use social media every day to assess the news, events and how organizations may be responding to a crisis, as well as monitoring of citizen journalists to assess how much of what they share is factual.

Boston Marathon Bombings

Followed up on Ferguson through Twitter.

Always-- it's the quickest way to get information from a variety of sources, including news sources.

Boston Marathon Bombings - saw the news Twitter feed before anything else and was able to notify coworkers and contact friends in the area

The shooting and lock down at the Minnesota State University Campus

I wouldn't use social media as my primary source per se

Riots in Dinytown, roads were closed, used Facebook to find out why

road closures/accident

Never use as primary source

Boston marathon bombing

Volcanoes

Normally don't use social media as a primary source

Any events that happen in New York City (where I live) I alwaysh check social media first.

September 11th

Boston marathon bombing. I wanted to know if my husband was going to make it home from Cambridge and if some runners and spectators I knew were safe

I don't often unless someone post about something I have not heard. Then I will usual look at the link

Never as primary
Twitter is the best way to get news from a variety of media sources as it happens. Can be misleading at times because some outlets report first, check facts later
I saw the Sandy Hook shooting on TV, but then instantly went to social media to see what others were saying and sharing about the event. I used social media (Facebook) as a way to "scan the headlines" and get the most information. I almost used it like a Google search.
When Hawaii has been under hurricane or tsunami warning, I use social media to stay in touch with my daughter who lives there and follow updates as they happen.
none
I had a family member who ran Boston the year of the bombing. Luckily, my uncle was fine and we found out he was fine prior to cell phone service disruption in the area. I remember using Twitter to track what was happening and what people were saying about the event.
I used FB as a means to keep apprised of associates' status during Marathon Bombing
Updates on Ferguson - both to see what people were saying directly in response, but also to find credible new articles (from sources I trust / vetted by my friends)
For most all crisis situations, I obtain my information through Facebook, Buzzfeed, or the Daily Show
Earthquake in an area where family resided
In events that are closer to home, like the 35W bridge collapse
Anything Isis related

Statistic	Value
Total Responses	107

11. Thinking about the recent Germanwings Flight 9525 Plane Crash, how did you receive or search for information about this crisis event?
Text Response
TV newsrdia
CNN
facebook
online news webpages
I didn't search for information.
Either saw someone post on FB or I was reading new media site (NY Times, BBC News, Huff Post)
social media
online- news website
Online news source and social media
News sources on twitter
Online news sources
CNN.com
I used traditional news media
Twitter; then clicked on relevant links to news websites from tweets
news media
I received information via a CNN push notification. I then searched news organizations' websites for more information.
News media social media account
I only saw information about this crisis in passing on social media and did not seek out more info
News
Most of my information came from CNN's Facebook account.
CNN online
CNN news played on TVs at work
newspapers from around the world - internet access to the papers
google
Used Twitter
NPR
Online newspapers
Searched by the name 'German wings'
Heard about it on Facebook
I actually didn't. I don't follow the news much. I have a lot going on personally and I don't really need another thing to depress me so I avoid news in general.
CNN, twitter and facebook
news websites such as CNN, Star Tribune
I read news articles online to learn about this event.
newspaper outlet
I saw numerous updates and comments on the event on Twitter.
n/a

BBC
npr
no
Facebook, BBC news website
Watched my FB feed for links to news organizations I follow: Wall Street Journal, National Public Radio
National online media sources, some you tube,
I read it in social media, but did not seek out more information on social media
yes
from News organizations on social media (npr/cnn)
N/A
did not
T.V.
saw it on social; went to NYT online for the story.
Facebook news
MSNBC and Facebook
I am unaware of this event.
Primarily online news sources
online searches
First saw on CNN. Then followed on Facebook.
Online news, TV news, social media
Media news websites
Mainly on Twitter, some on Facebook, and more on the news
Facebook
Twitter amd other news media
not sure
New York Times online and NPR
No
News paper and tv news programs
Probably NY Times on my phone.
Google
News print
through on line news media
NPR, online news outlets (CNN.com, Yahoo News, etc.)
BBC news app
Evening network newscast (ABC World News, NBC Nightly News, etc.).
newspaper's print and Twitter
I heard about it on NPR first and followed-up with a google search of major news outlets for information.
Print newspaper
public radio primarily
I heard about it on the local news on tv.
Did not seek additional information
the Today Show and Facebook articles

Through television news
Television news
Buzzfeed
News
I first saw it on facebook from a newspaper and clicked to read more
Twitter
I didn't
Facebook post
Twitter, TV news.
News Network APPs
Mostly televised news, limited social media in this event
I did not access information about this directly, but likely would have listened to news relayed on a TV network news source.
Read it on Yahoo.com homepage
news reports
online - google search
radio
Searched for relevant news media via Facebook or twitter
Internet news
Facebook
Online media and social media
AP news app, Twitter
Google and Facebook
Huffing ton Post, CNN, Flipboard app

Statistic	Value
Total Responses	125

12. Please select your age.

#	Answer		Response	%
1	18-25		12	8%
2	26-35		72	47%
3	36-45		26	17%
4	46-55		23	15%
5	56 or older		21	14%
	Total		154	100%

Statistic	Value
Min Value	1
Max Value	5
Mean	2.80
Variance	1.44
Standard Deviation	1.20
Total Responses	154

13. Please select your gender.

#	Answer		Response	%
1	Female		112	73%
2	Male		42	27%
	Total		154	100%

Statistic	Value
Min Value	1
Max Value	2
Mean	1.27
Variance	0.20
Standard Deviation	0.45
Total Responses	154

#	Answer		Response	%
1	Less than high school		0	0%
2	High school graduate (includes equivalency)		0	0%
3	Some college, no degree		9	6%
4	Associate's degree		5	3%
5	Bachelor's degree		68	44%
6	Graduate or professional degree		67	44%
7	Ph.D.		4	3%
	Total		153	100%

14. What is the highest level of education you have completed?

Statistic	Value
Min Value	3
Max Value	7
Mean	5.34
Variance	0.70
Standard Deviation	0.84
Total Responses	153

Study III: Expert interview transcripts

Expert Interview with Rick J. Kaufman, APR
Executive Director of Community Relations and Emergency Management for
Bloomington Public Schools

8 a.m., Monday, June 15, 2015

Madeleine Rush: Thanks for talking to me; hopefully it's a fun way to start your week. Just to remind you, I am recording this conversation so that I can include the complete transcript in my final Capstone paper. If you could first introduce yourself, and briefly describe your professional experience in regard to social media and crisis communication, that would be great.

Rick Kaufman: Okay. Rick Kaufman, Executive Director of Community Relations and Emergency Management for Bloomington Public Schools. I've spent the past 24 years working in schools in community relations, communications and emergency management. My early foundation work in the emergency management side, which ultimately includes crisis communication, dates back to the early to mid 1990s when we developed the first mock crisis drill involving an active shooter in the school for the purpose of testing an emergency response plan. I have since worked with schools on emergency management, law enforcement and emergency management agencies across the country. Then I was also a part of the crisis response team to the Columbine High School shooting in 1999, and have since consulted or counseled school districts that have had either school incidents of a large degree, including Sandy Hook Elementary School, and Marysville High School most recent school shooting incident. You always have those kinds of incidents with respect to crisis communication and I often tell my clients and training participants that communications is the foundation of any emergency management response planning recovery efforts, and social media, which is really first on the scene in terms of use in crisis communications over the last 5-6 years, we have a whole new set of tools that I will get into. But I've focused a lot of my work in the last 4-5 years in social media, its use, implications, up sides, and down sides in respect to crisis communication.

MR: Wonderful so lets get right in to the social media aspect. What opportunities and challenges do you think that social media presents in regard to crisis communication?

RK: Well I think to answer that question you have to look at the foundation of crisis communication. We live in a world today where particularly when there's a crisis, as it unfolds, you have a combination of a lack of information, short decision timing in which to respond, and when you add those two together it

creates uncertainty with our stakeholders and uncertainty with our public. So the more we can reduce that uncertainty by looking for more information, that what we believe is an increase in information seeking. In the past when organizations, including school districts, would respond to crises they usually took time to gather a whole lot of information. Many organizations use what we call holding statements, which were pre-developed, pre-designed statements or two to answer immediate or other likely questions that would come at them following a crisis. Unfortunately those became very antiquated and meant many of our communications aspects became antiquated with the onset of social media, and the fact that our communities, our stakeholders no longer wanted to be communicated to but want to be a part of the information or want to be part of the crisis if you will or tragedy. So we moved from this sort of one-way messaging to a two-way dialogue, and so as they talk about who started that because lack of information and that short decision time creating the uncertainty social media has filled the gaps for our stakeholders to get almost instant information, where in fact it we do not, and that's the challenge that we face. Social media has provided instant communication that people need to know about what's happening.

MR: Definitely. So how would you recommend social media be used in crisis communication, and what specific tools or methods would you use?

RK: I think when you're communicating in a crisis you have to be first. If you're not first as an organization, you spend a whole lot of time playing catch up, sometimes for hours, certainly days, even weeks or longer depending on the magnitude of the crisis. You have to be right. If you're not right your mistakes are often repeated, or worse, cited as the truth, and you have to be credible. If you're not right or first then you will not be credible, so when we talk about crisis communication and the use of social media its really using that tool to its advantage, which is to get information out in a very rapid quick manner, and then it begins to allow you to take hold of the messages. Even though the downside of social media is that it begins to fill the voids and the mediums that are out there for the consumer, its critical because you begin to establish a trail of communications when using things like hashtags on twitter or sharing information on Facebook and the like. You begin to control the message because you're the trusted source, and if you can get in front of that as an organization, that's what people will gravitate to even though, as I said, you have a lot of detractors a lot of others that are filling those airways through their own use of social media. So when talk to others about crisis communication or counsel them, in terms of the social media aspect of it, it's providing information as quickly as possible. Even if you have a lack of information, sometimes getting in front of that, what I call 'response statements,' is critical to at least position your organization as it is aware of the situation, its responding to it with what I consider priorities of action steps. You know, school has been locked down, we

have established a place for parents to go, and we're working with law enforcement to establish more information and so on and so forth. By doing that, what you're allowing your organization to do is be more in charge or on top of the message, and it doesn't create a whole lot of rumors and myths to go with it.

MR: That makes perfect sense. So do you think its important for an organization to already be a part of social media so that when a disaster strikes that they can use those channels?

RK: Absolutely, because I think social media has sort of radically changed the way people discover information, but its also how they consume and share it. So in essence by that nature it's changed their expectation for how, in this case we'll talk about school districts, organizations share information and teaches them, how to access that information. I think a lot of organizations, what I've found Maddie, is they continue to work with social media. Schools are primarily slow to adapt and adopt, and they're missing the fact that social media has emerged really today as the most convenient news source. We know based on studies right now that Twitter is the number one news source, the social media platform that dominates not only the dissemination news, but also information in a crisis. It's one of the quickest ways for our stakeholders or anyone's organization's stakeholders to get information in the face of a crisis, so I strongly believe that school districts or organizations must have an absolute connection to or use of social media. And it can't be when the crisis hits because if you don't have your audience or stakeholders that are following you, whether its Twitter or social media or YouTube, if they are not already there you don't even have a chance to get them when the crisis starts. They've now gone to other sources, other trusted sources, to get their information. So its important that you have that on the front end to begin with and then use it, because you need to be able to establish a situation off awareness. You need to quickly respond to fill that information void I've talked about. But you can't do that unless you have the audience or stakeholders already tuned in to you and following you in those non-crisis times. So when I talk to with school districts for training or counsel them, often I will tell them, you need to be following anyone who comments about your school system, or if they're following you, follow them. That's the only way you can get those audiences, especially stakeholders in your community, and that includes students because I think a lot of times school districts think that students don't have a voice. They've always had a voice and its even more so because of their propensity to use social media and the fact that they use it more than some of our older stakeholders in our communities.

MR: Absolutely, great point. I know we've talked so far about emergency responses, do you thinking of crisis situations that are more the PR nightmare kind of scandal situations, do you think you would use social media in the same way?

RK: I think it should be used in all aspects. It's a tool for us to assess how our community is doing in general, even when you don't have crisis. By and large organizations, if we take school districts or individual schools, they deal with crisis fairly regularly. Certainly not to the level or degree that makes national news or even statewide news, but those that do, having that audience in place is really important. Having followers even in the good times is very positive too and that's the upside of it. I think we sometimes get scared off of social media because of instantaneous information sharing and we feel like we lose control of the message. It's sort of that 'throw in the towel, there's nothing we can do about it.' There's absolutely a lot we can do about it, and establishing those stakeholders in the front-end better suites you when the time comes for those crises. Whether it's internally or whether it's an incident that is happening in your school. We can't shy away from bad news; it's a fact of nature, it's a reality. I think sometimes organizations and school districts stick their head in the sand. Thinking, 'this too shall pass,' is really old thinking. That thinking is not in the way of the world today, and so the better and quicker we can get on any kind of incident, whether it's our own generated or we've kind of had a misstep. We humans have a propensity to forgive and forget as long as the organization is willing to apologize and really talk more about not letting it happen again, and what we will do to fix it, and that's important to our stakeholders as well.

MR: Wonderful. Well was there anything else that you wanted to share with me, or anything that you think I should consider?

RK: Well, I just think in terms of reinforcing when we use social media, sometimes it's being more specific. What I'm seeing is the school districts and organizations that are starting to get into social media, they are sort of seeing the benefits of it and understanding and being respectful of the down sides to it, but now they're kind of taking that next step forward to say, 'oh okay we have it now, how do we use it to our advantage?' So things like when we focus on the importance of hashtags if you're using Twitter that provides a way to group information for easy following, finding or sharing things. It keeps all of your communications organized, and I think one of the benefits to us is that it really documents post-crisis for us as organizations. That's really important for what I call the end step with crisis response, is going back and archival looking at what we said, what we shared, and we use that as a tool to learn. Same thing with Facebook, you go back and look at what you posted and Facebook has really evolved to include some other analytics. In kind of wrapping this all up, when I train or counsel folks I say that crisis communications, whether you're using social media or all the other types of mediums out there, because frankly you need to because our audiences are very diverse and very different, you need to respond immediately to stakeholders in the onset of the crisis. Social media provides a tremendously valuable platform in which to do that and maintains a credible two-way dialogue.

And again, social media allows you to do that as long as we're monitoring that information that's either being shared by folks that are stakeholders, folks that are supporters, our key communicators, as well as others. Listen to concerns that others put out there, and be accountable to the public, because that's what they're demanding, by not holing up and not sharing information. You know the big thing? Don't be afraid of social media. It is here to stay, and I think organizations that are not using it are putting themselves at a disadvantage.

MR: Well thank you so much, those are all definitely very good insights and I appreciate you taking the time to help me out.

RK: Sure, any time and best of luck to you.

MR: Thank you. I don't actually finish my capstone until July, but I'll be sure to keep you posted if you're interested in seeing the final result.

RK: Absolutely, I get a lot of those calls from doctoral students and students that are doing what you're doing and I always love to read the capstone projects or their doctoral dissertations if they're related, because you know we're all learners and we learn from those as well.

MR: Absolutely, well thanks so much for your time.

RK: Thanks Maddie, take care.

MR: You too, goodbye.

RK: Goodbye.

Expert Interview with Steven Henneberry
Assistant Director of the University News Service, University of Minnesota

2 p.m., Tuesday, June 16, 2015

Madeleine Rush: Hello Steve, just to let you know I'm recording this conversation too so
that I can have the complete transcript for my Capstone project.

Steven Henneberry: That's just fine.

MR: Great. Thank you for being volunteered to talk with me today.

SH: I was volun-told to do it, which is just fine.

MR: Excellent.

SH: Happy to help. I know that I'm going to need people to do the same for me when
I do my Capstone next year.

MR: I know, it's nice to have a little community. So I just have a few questions, it
shouldn't take too long here. But first could you start by introducing yourself
briefly and describing your professional experience, how it relates to social
media and crisis communication?

SH: Sure, so my current title I guess is the Assistant Director of the University News
Service here at the U, so the University News Service is part of university
relations, which functions as a central PR office to the university. Part of the role,
my role specifically, is to be the public information officer for the University of
Minnesota. So when there's an emergency crisis situation, a chemical spill or
shooting or fire, an accident or those kinds of things, my role would be to help
craft the statement or provide the information that is publicly available. From
working with our emergency response folks, the police or fire, then we have an
emergency management department and others. So I do many other things but
in this role that is probably the biggest thing. Then I also have the control in
those situations of our social media accounts so that we can communicate that
way as well.

MR: Okay great, thank you. So what opportunities and challenges do you think that
social media presents when communicating during a crisis?

SH: You phrased that question correctly; there are pros and cons to using social
media. Actually, as Al mentioned, one of my projects for his class with a
coworker of mine was on social media in crisis situations. We found that the
opportunity is there to be able to tell people what you're doing, tell people what

they can do, tell people what you know and tell people what you don't know. That was kind of what the approach has been after 9/11, and that's just a really nice sort of four boxes to put things in that people can easily understand. I think on the opportunity side that's one way, and I think it's obviously and immediate way to reach the people that you need to reach. You also reach people you don't actually need to reach. At Purdue University, they have their own Twitter handle for emergencies, its called @purdueemergency so if you follow that account, its guaranteed that you'll only get emergency-related information whereas if you follow the main university account. We just have the one account here, but when there is an emergency they will text you in addition to using social media. So that's the difference. The bad, I think the con here, is that people always want more information than you're going to be able to provide. No matter how quickly you notify people, it's not quick enough. While with social media it's possible to have a two-way conversation, a lot is lost in 140 characters or in a Facebook comment thread. So we have found it quite challenging to... you really have to think about the words that you're using and the different ways that people understand it. So we might have one sort of common definition among the emergency professionals of what 'shelter in place' means, but that may mean a whole host of different things to people. There's really no way using social media can ensure that the meaning that you want people to understand is how they're going to take it. That can lead to confusion. In the adrenaline rush when you want the information out, you need to make sure that you're accurate, you need to make sure that what you're... you can delete a tweet but you really can't because the damage is kind of done and the worst thing in a crisis situation like that is for you unintentionally to create more fear among the campus.

MR: Exactly. So, how then would you recommend using social media to communicate during a crisis? I've heard you mention Twitter, are there any other tools that you would use, is Facebook still important or Twitter kind of where you're headed?

SH: When we have an emergency and we think through what channel we can use, Twitter is the first one that we use, and that's just because we have the most number of our followers for the information there. We also post it on Facebook but we've found that the people that follow us on Facebook aren't necessarily, they're not looking there for that sort of emergency situation, they're more looking at Twitter. We also use our University homepage and we put definitive things about emergencies there. We'll put a banner up there that anybody can use and we have a separate homepage called homepage lite that strips out all of the content that takes long too load, and it's sort of a stripped down version of the homepage, so that people that are going there looking for updates can get that immediately. We use that and I don't know if I mentioned the Text-U system, we have that. But in terms of social, I think Twitter is usually our number

one way and we try to provide multiple updates so that people know that there's a situation going on. In a couple hours, we give them two or three or four different updates so they know. We know that you're never going to give enough updates in those situations. You may think that five or six tweets over the course of three hours is more than enough, but some people are like, 'why didn't you tweet ten times or twenty times' or whatever. So I guess Twitter would be number one. But we would certainly cross-post that to Facebook, just in case there's anyone on there not on Twitter.

MR: Okay great. I think you kind of touched on this too, but what benefits do you see to using social media to communicate during crisis situations?

SH: Definitely the ability to quickly get your information out to folks. It's always amazing to see one tweet get retweeted over and over again, and all of a sudden within two minutes you reach a huge cross-section of the people that you need to reach. So that's definitely a really nice benefit. There's a part of me that really has an appreciation for the folks who thought of Twitter and the 140-character limit. It really forces you to think about the words that you're using. Sometimes you have to get creative in how you spell, but I really think that society and professionals we like to go on and on. I'm guilty of that as much as anyone else. When you're in a crisis situation and you only have 140 characters, it actually makes things easier I think. It focuses you more, especially because you know you have only a certain amount of characters to play with. It also creates challenges if you have a multi-prong message. I think to keep it simple is the best method in those situations. People who are going to be reading your tweets in a crisis situation, whether they're getting evacuated from a stadium because of a bomb threat, or there's a shooter on campus, or there's a major chemical spill in the building or something, their ability to kind of take in and process this information is going to be limited because they're going to be in a state of panic. The simpler that you can make the message, it become more action-oriented, you can make it easier to follow, and you can get people to respond better. Meaning that they'll do what you tell them to.

MR: Got it. Have you ever used a hashtag during your crisis communication responses? Or would you consider it helpful?

SH: I don't know…I'm like 99% sure we have. Basically we haven't had too many major crises that we would speak about, but we will use some of the hashtags that are associated with us, so hashtag UMN, there's one in all caps. If we notice a hashtag… so, I don't know if this was an emergency, but during the Dinkytown disturbances after the Frozen Four last year, when there were 1,000 kids in the intersection in Dinkytown, the hashtag being used was #Dinkytown or something, so we used that in our tweets to get our message into that hashtag feed. We haven't created our own hashtag, but we've certainly tried to use other

hashtags that are being used by other Twitter users, and Facebook too now with their hashtags, just to try to feed into that.

MR: That's really smart. So far we've mostly kind of talked about crises situations that can be categorized more as an emergency response. Do you think that social media has a place in crisis communication that is more of the PR nightmare, the scandal type of situation?

SH: I think that… I'm probably going to give you another long answer, you're probably sick of those.

MR: No, that's great.

SH: I think the short answer is no. We deal with a lot of issues every day, given the amount of things the University is involved in. We have a social media manager which is great, but she doesn't have a PR background, and she monitors conversations, and we will check in form time to time about issues that are kind of going on. Her advice, and I have always agreed with it, is that it really doesn't do you any advantage in those conversations. Correcting facts is about the only time that I would advocate for that. We do a lot of thinking about how do we use that @UofMNnews, which is our official university twitter account, what is the appropriate way or appropriate time for that account to weigh in. Because people don't see that as one person behind it, it's the university, which is kind of intangible, responding to them. In a positive way that could be really great. I love Chickfila, and Chickfila could retweet one of my tweets and I'll say, 'oh that's really cool, that's awesome' and we have students who founded a water bottle company, and for the UofMN to retweet their tweet or favorite, that's really cool. In terms of issues management, just recently we had a lot criticism on our human research subject program and had people inside and outside of the university criticizing us on social media. If we can't get our points off at 140 characters, as much as we'd like to, it just opens to door for more conversation that we need to think of a better way to have that conversation. I think we certainly have, we can think differently about how we us social media, our official account for every college on the campus. But how do we use those accounts to have those productive conversations. I think there's a way to that, it's often though way more challenging than people think. Its harder… its just a sort of 'you can ask me anything' sort of an approach on Twitter or reddit or whatever, it quickly can turn to attack mode. It can turn into a social media mob and when you have an issue, often times we're trying to explain contexts around things. It doesn't do us any good to engage. We'll try to do that and we'll put our FAQ on our websites and we'll try to address the questions, the popular questions that people are asking, and then we'll tweet 'ask questions about this' thing, read our Q & A, or something like that. So that's sort of a risk-free or low-

risk way to get your point of view through into the conversation without having to engage.

MR: Got it, that makes sense.

SH: Does that make sense?

MR: Yes, it does make sense to me. That's actually my last question here, unless there's anything else that you had thought about that maybe you wanted to add.

SH: I guess I would just say that I think being at a university and in a higher education setting, I also think we're a little bit more… we do a lot more thinking about these things. Not to say that other companies don't do that, but we're sort of a consensus place around here. We like to get a lot of opinions about things before we make decisions, which is both good and bad. We have tried and continue to try, that in a crises situations are sort of have as streamlined a process as possible, because our ultimate goal really is get the right information out to our campus communities as quickly as possible so that they can take action and we can avoid additional injuries if at all possible. I think we're on a good track, but I try to make sure that we continue to focus on it and that we certainly have some sort of purpose. I think as social media continues on and people learn how to use it, there's a lot of room for growth and crisis communication realm for what are the best ways, what are the best practices to be able to effectively use social media. Often when you hear about situations you wish those conversations were done so that you knew what to do.

MR: Absolutely, hindsight is always 20/20 in those sorts of situations.

SH: Definitely, I don't think we've ever had a crisis where we came out of it thinking, 'perfect!'

MR: I know, like, 'that one went exactly planned.'

SH: But that's job security right?

MR: Absolutely.

SH: If you have any other questions feel free to give me a call, I'm happy to fill in or explain in more in detail.

MR: Okay great, and I can let you know when I'm done and when my final Capstone is together, I can make sure that you get ahold of that too.

SH: Sure, I'm interested in a very similar thing so it would be nice to see how it all turns out.

MR: Great, sound good. Well, thanks again.

SH: Good luck and I'll talk to you soon.

MR: Thank you, goodbye.

SH: No problem, bye.

Expert Interview with Matt Kucharski
Executive Vice President of PadillaCRT in Minneapolis

5 p.m., Sunday, June 28, 2015

Madeleine Rush: Hello Matt, it's Madeleine Rush.

Matt Kucharski: Hi, how are you?

MR: I'm well, thanks. I have you on speakerphone, and I'm recording this call so that I can have the transcript for my Capstone paper, if that's okay with you?

MK: Okay, that's fine. Thanks for letting me know.

MR: Absolutely. Well to get started, if you could introduce yourself briefly and describe your professional experience how it relates to social media and crises communication, that would be great.

MK: Sure. So just a clarification, are you looking for social media only in the context of crises, or are you looking at social overall, like crises overall?

MR: I'm looking at them together.

MK: Okay great. So, I am, as you know, I'm an Executive Vice President of PadillaCRT for public relations and reputation management. One of the roles I played in it, well for a while I led the crises practice, and now I am one of the senior team members in the crises practice. So basically helping clients deal with crises in critical issues that might arise and effectively direct those. That could be through traditional media, that could be through meetings, that could be through social media, or that could be through any other communication channel possible to help them manage that and improve or protect their reputation during that critical issue.

MR: Okay great, so the first question I have is what opportunities and challenges do you think social media presents in regard to crises communication?

MK: Well it pretty much changed the game, because you used to, with crises and critical issue communication, and I'll discuss both of them, because crises tends to be perceived as something where it kind of goes 'boom,' it's an event that everybody knows it when they see it. But you can have just a much of a challenge with a critical issue, something that is a lingering issue that goes on for a while, as opposed to something that, you know it when you hear it, see it, smell it. So when you think about crises, when I talk about crises, I talk about the crises and critical issues. So it used to be in communications around crises, you

either dealt with the issue directly or the stakeholders directly. You would always try to deal with them directly if you could. If you couldn't deal with them directly, you might use a third party intermediary like the news media. Well, social media creates a whole new channel, it has created a whole new channel, for communicating during a crises and critical issue. That also creates a whole new channel for the detractors as well. So it's not just a matter of you telling your story to a reporter, and the reporter going out and maybe finding some alternative points of view and publishing your story. Now, it's all of your opinions and points, as well as all of your detractors'. And it's happening at a much quicker pace, and it's happening without a journalistic filter.

MR: So then how would you recommend using social media to communicate during a crisis? Are there specific tools or methods you would use?

MK: It's a little bit of a broad question, I just consider it like saying, how would you use web? How would you use paper communication? Social media is just that – a medium – it's not a thing into itself. But when you're thinking about going back to the basics of who is your audience? What's the message you're trying to communicate? What's the behavior you want? And are you listening to whether this impacts it. So the first thing is, with social media and crises or critical issues, is seeing what's being said out there right now. Do people know about it? Are they aware of it? What are their outwardly opinions about it? Identify the groups of people on social media who might care, because not everybody in social media's going to care about the issue that you're dealing with. It's going to be communities within social media that are going to be the most interested. Then determine whether or not you wanted to outwardly communicate to them or overtly communicate to them, or whether or not you're just going to wait and see what they say when they do hear about it. You always have the opportunity of saying are we going to use social media to inform people of this problem, or are we just going to wait and see what people think when they do find out about it, and then we'll correct anything when that comes up? That's a fundamental question. And then you want to make sure you're listening to what people's reactions are. Including access to who they're communicating to, but also to the detractors, people who maybe are on the other side of the issue, what are they saying? And are people believing what they are saying? And then you adjust accordingly; you determine whether or not it makes sense to participate in the conversation to clarify. Or sometimes the communities are self-regulating and they're kind of figuring it out for themselves and dealing with it, and you can kind of sit back and let the conversation flow because it's all going fine, people are correcting each other and it's okay. Or you might have to take more drastic action and go out and do some more aggressive communication to your social media to different target audiences.

MR: So both to monitor and to add to the information sharing?

MK: Yeah you don't necessarily always have to add to the information, but monitoring is a must. Sometimes when monitoring you're watching the groups of people who are communicating and realizing that they're actually all pretty much on the same page, and the communication that's happening is clear, and there's no reason for us to jump in. If we jump in to the conversation where it's not necessary to do so, it could actually make the problem worse.

MR: Right, exactly. So then what do you think is the greatest benefit is to using social media in crises communication?

MK: Well you might need to communicate something that the news media doesn't think is newsworthy. But to news media, and look I'm obviously a huge fan of the news media, with news media you have to rely on them wanting to cover the news and then hope that what they say is what you intended them to say. So, you gain some credibility but you lose some control, not just over what's covered, but over the timing for when the message is delivered. For instance, let's say you're a medical products company and you've got an issue that you need to communicate to doctors about, but the media really isn't interested in the issue. Well, how are you going to communicate those doctors? You're kind of stuck. Social media gives you maybe another outlet that you didn't have before to communicate through, to help get to stakeholders.

MR: So do you think it's important to already have those channels kind of established ahead of time?

MK: Well, the worst time to figure out all of this stuff is when a crisis is happening. You've got to have it established ahead of time, and if you don't have it then you're going to be sorry.

MR: And do you think that Twitter is kind of the main tool when you think crises communication?

MK: Not necessarily, I don't think you can make that generalization. It's certainly is one of them, but Twitter, remember, is a notification tool. I mean no one ever solved a problem through Twitter. Twitter is always connecting somewhere else, almost always. For the most part, you're not doing 140 character tweets to solve a problem. You're connecting people on Twitter with information elsewhere. Whether that's on a website, whether it's in a blog, whether it's a news article, whatever that might be, that is connecting you to content. But there are lots of other social media channels out there that you have to consider. For instance, in some professional associations there are some private blogs, and user groups, and discussion groups that happen that are completely independent of Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and Linkedin. So you need to look up the social media channels that are used by that group of audiences, and design your crises

communications around that. That's what we're working on one right now for a company that it's on social media, and the whole thing popped up on Twitter. But it popped up in more independent, more industry-specific discussion groups.

MR: So knowing your audience is critical.

MK: Yes, knowing your audience is critical, and knowing where they go for their information is critical. What are their information consumption sources?

MR: Absolutely, so I've been looking into the difference in how social media is used in crises situations that are more emergencies versus what you described as critical issues, I've been describing as PR nightmares. Do you think there's a primary difference in these cases and how social media should be used?

MK: Well, I think one of the big things you see in what I call the 'boom crisis,' it's the fact there's different waves of information covered, or information sharing that happens. Let's take an example, we did this in my class a few years ago, remember the shooting at Virginia Tech? There were the shootings on campus that happened at like one o'clock in the afternoon, and my class was at 5:30. So that afternoon I said to my class, 'okay what do we know about this issue and where did you learn about it?' So we know that 20 people were shot, that there might have been two gun men and that it happened 'x' minutes ago. Where did you find about this? Well, we learned about it on Twitter. Ok great, so we wrote down everything we knew about this. Then we took off little snapshot of it. Two days later we had class again and put the whole list back up, and we were able to erase more than half that information that we found out wasn't really true. What happens is the first wave of information out there is a lot of notification and speculation. Then, the 24-hour news stations come in and give us more of an interpretation. Then, the analysis stage comes in after that, and then there's the retrospective phase of what's going to happen going forward? So what social media has created, it has created a new phase of evolution of a crisis on the front end. So you have to manage that new phase and watch the information that's coming out immediately after the event happens, and try to correct anything that looks like it's a misconception or just false information. If not, it will just perpetuate.

MR: Right, absolutely. So then in the critical issue phase, is that more of a monitoring use of social media, or maybe putting statements out?

MK: It's monitoring but also correcting folks, and it might be directing people to the right place. You could be in a spot where it's like, 'well, wait a minute.' That is, they may not believe you. It's you saying, 'well, I'm from the company and this is the accurate information.' There's a lot of distrust in companies out there, particularly companies who are in this crises.

MR: Great, well that is my last formal question. Is there anything else you wanted to add, or anything else you think I should be considering?

MK: Well I just think you're going to want to make sure that you look broadly what social media really is. And to look at different categories of social media that are out there, because each one of them that play a different role in a crisis.

MR: Great, well thank you so much for talking with me. I know it was kind of a last minute, but I really do appreciate it.

MK: No problem, call me or email me if you need anything else.

MR: Thanks so much, have a great night.