

The Role of Social Media in Various Stages of Crises and Disasters Management

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Abstract

Although natural disasters are in their natural path, but when we expose ourselves to them and their negative effects, causes damage in our lives, its negative side becomes bold. While today's science has reached the point that the heart of nature, is natural and also uncontrollable. So it is not possible to prevent its occurrence, but some arrangements are needed to decrease its destructive effects and with a so-called correct planning, make the environment coordinated with these disasters and manage it. Disaster management is not a subject that can be performed alone and because its range of effects is extensive, so needs a wide solution and cooperation and also interaction with several organizations is needed, because each plays its role next to the others, until at last by interaction and recognition each other, the event and environment the risk of the event reduces. Media as a collection which plays an important role in action plan performance in informing, recognition and warning, are very important. On the other hand, crises management is a process that needs to be directed and needs on time declaration to be performed with specific description of duties in different parts and a suitable schedule determination. With accuracy in this process, the role of total factors in several parts can be seen. In this article, the effective role of medium set in several stages of crisis management is going to be considered and different sides of this subject will be explained to a have better performance.

Key words

Social Media, Crisis Management, Natural Disasters

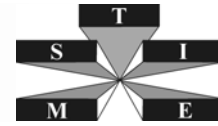
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1. Introduction

1.1. Crisis

The word Crisis has Greek roots and means assembling, judgment and critical point of contention. Crisis is defined as a sudden change in the course of a disease trait and it usually comes into existence after accidents. The figurative meaning of crisis is dangerous circumstances and lack of confidence. Crisis mode is the process of transferring from balance to unstability which is unavoidable circumstances.

After the oil crisis of the mid-1970s, crisis management became as a new skill for decision makers and managers in companies. In this decade the analysis of whether the activities of the companies are economic became more important and this analysis needs specific skills such as crisis management.

Crisis condition is suddenly arise and resulted from abnormal conditions or natural events or human actions in the community. In fact in these conditions difficulties and unusual problems and damages are impose to a community and operations and emergency response plans is required to remove these difficulties and damages.

1.2. The Purpose of Crisis Management

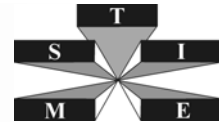
The main objective of crisis management is to achieve an appropriate method to removing abnormal conditions and return society to normal situation with is based on principles and values. Meanwhile, the overall goal is to use the set of tasks to remove crisis in optimal ways and reduce the crisis damages to the minimum effectively and immediately.

Although the principles of crisis management are following a specific framework, different methods and means can be used to strengthen this framework, which the most important one is social media. Social media has a great impact on efforts before, during and after crisis which will increase the effectiveness of the crisis management process significantly.

In all natural disasters and major events sharing information and data by social media is vital. Therefore, the role of media in emergency response plan is significant and highlight. Based on a comprehensive crisis and disaster management system, especially in the earlier stages of the crisis and disasters by provide appropriate training and public education, community awareness about crisis will be raised. This Aspect should be carryout by another important aspect of media's role which is their duties in reporting the occurrence of natural disasters and the social and emotional impacts of disasters on peoples. Social media is the only organization that can best perform these two tasks simultaneously.

In 1999, in his speech, the UN former Secretary-General Kofi Annan mentioned that all efforts to prevent disasters and crisis, have more effective result than other strategies and not only will save billions of dollars, but lives of many people will be preserved. He also emphasized that creating a culture of prevention is not easy due to fact that prevention costs must be paid at the present time while the benefits can be achieved in the future. Moreover, the benefits of this investment are not tangible because the crisis and disasters are not occurred yet.

His recall is still valid. Therefore all of crisis and disaster managers should use the power of the social media to deliver the correct message to call for help to do real actions to help communities in disaster preparedness.



2. Crisis Management Process

Crisis management process consists of seven sections:

1-Normal conditions: At this point, the condition is normal.

2-Prevention: This phase of the process will seek to reduce the likelihood or impact of the **crisis**.

3-Preparedness: At this stage, the readiness to crisis will increase.

4-Response: The response phase is main part of crisis management process. At this stage of the Process crisis must be addressed. All details and practical skills required to perform at this step.

5-Remove the Crisis: At this stage the symptoms disappear.

6-Reconstruction and rehabilitation: Include activities to improve the conditions of society to become normal.

7-Return to Normal Condition: At this point, society finds normal conditions with the exception that the crisis has passed.

The chart below illustrates details of the various stages of crisis management. This diagram shows the basic framework that can be used in any type of crisis management. It is noteworthy that in all the stages of this process the media has an important, influential and constructive role.

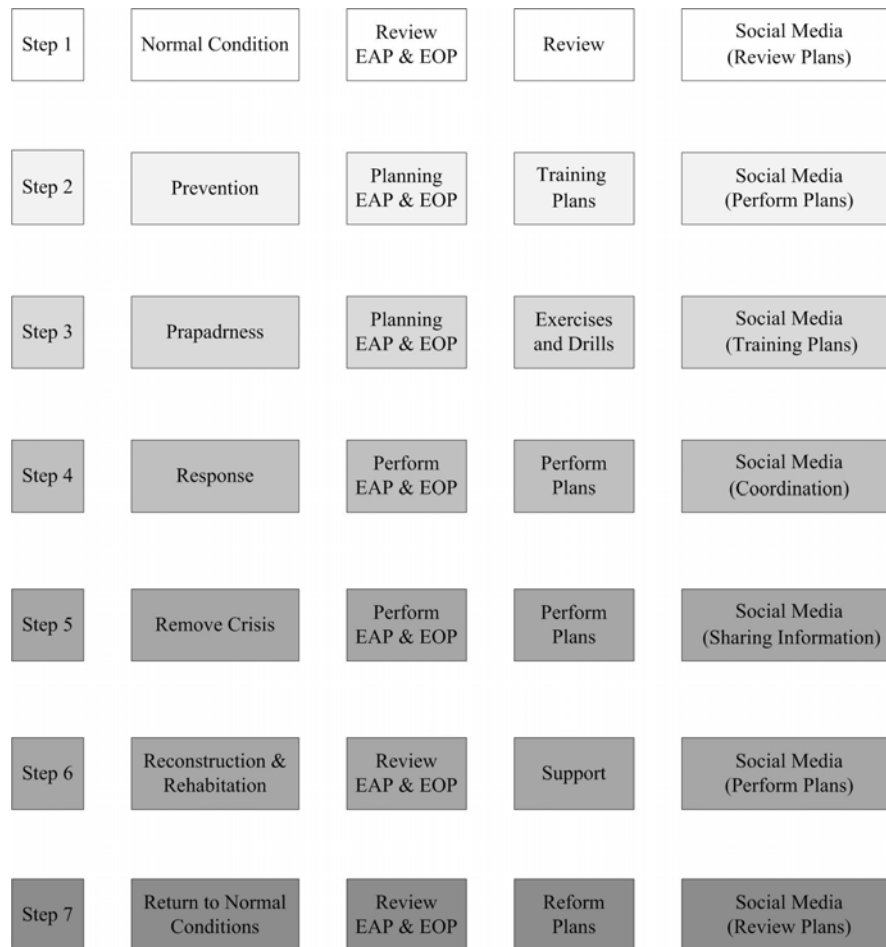
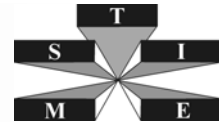


Chart 1. Disaster Management Process



3. The Importance of Social Media in Disaster Management

The importance of informing people by the social media in the face of crisis and disasters is so obvious. Today, if the warning and data about crisis come from various sources, people will refer to social media to confirm details and more information about crisis and disaster. Therefore, It can be claimed that the social media is an important strategic tools during the crisis and disasters, both domestically and internationally. Even we can say that the issue of crisis management is the responsibility of the social media.

Due to critical role of media in crisis and disaster management, it is so important to crate an effective mechanism to direct and lead social media to cooperate on goals of crisis management not create much more crisis by them. To achieve this goal, we must consider some steps to involve social media in the process of crisis management such as establishing disaster management teams with social media, public awareness plans, and est.

The most important part of crisis management is community awareness and preparedness in the face of crisis. If the community has enough knowledge about the various crisis that will happen, we can hope that it will respond appropriately in crisis situations. The most important consequence of this response by community is reduction of damage and lost.

So, it is important to inform and bring all important and necessary knowledge about crisis and disaster to community which will lead to suitable response. Chart 2 illustrates this process.

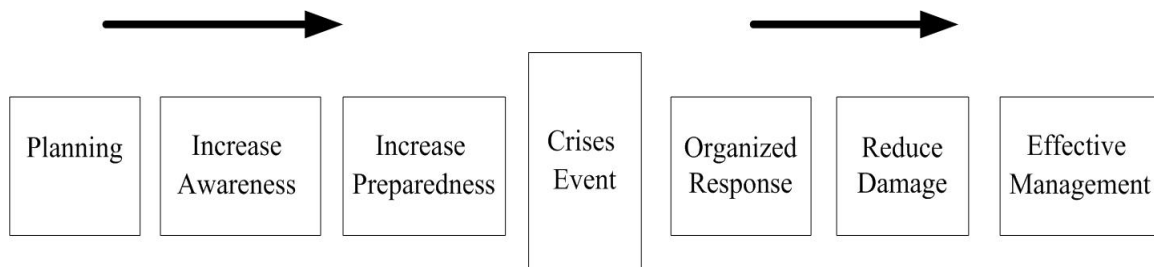
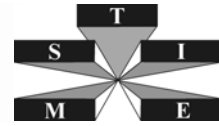


Chart 2. Crisis Management Process from initial planning to Effective management



4. The Role of Social Media Organizations in Different Phases of Crisis Management and Control

Although the media can help to minimize the effects and manage the crises they may also create different other crises in different levels. They can make a faithful milieu in the crisis affected population and society or put the public in panic.

Generally, media has different roles in different phases of crisis management:

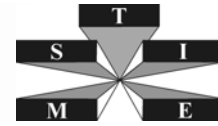
1. Pre-Crisis (before crisis) phase
2. Acute-Crisis (during crisis) phase
3. Post-Crisis (after crisis) phase

4.1. Role of Media: Before Crisis

The most important role of media in this phase is “education”. Though, this phase is called “education phase”. Public education increases the knowledge of the people and helps them to react better during the crisis. In this phase the media can enforce and augment the preparedness for response to crisis. Media can create a correct image from what will be happening by using different methods to provide the different information and data about the crisis to their audience. This phase is the best time to review the actions and instructions which should be taken and considered during crisis phase. Practical public education (prepared primarily by television and secondarily by radio and written media) can help people to save themselves by simulating the activities which have learned from media.

Educational activities should cover three critical aspects of issue:

- **Recognition the Crisis:** recognizing the problem is essential for preparedness and response planning. Recognizing the crisis and its effects and complications encourages and motivates people to seek more education and additional information in next steps.
- **Preparation:** Preoperational activities and issues should be noticed in public and liable organizations levels. In before crisis phase, media can sensitize both the public and responsive organizations to review their roles and responsibilities during crisis phase. In fact the regulatory role of media is more practicable in pre-crisis period of time.
- **Response to Crisis, Search, Relief and Rescue:** these educational efforts include the forms and methods of crisis confrontation in pre-crisis phase (to decrease the crisis intensity and its damages), during crisis (to illustrate what should people do in acute phase of crisis) and post-crisis phase. Providing suitable practical educations and trainings in calm and quiet phase can help people to have a better planning to decrease the damaging effects in chaotic disordered phase of crisis.



4.2. Role of Media: During Crisis

The climax of crisis management is seen in acute phase of crisis. This role of media is different in predictable and non-predictable crises:

- **Predictable Crises:** When a crisis is predicted, concurrent with emergency situation announcement and preparing the public and officials, valid information about the extent of crisis and its destructive effects should be prepared by media. If the predicted crisis has significant destructive effects, the proper response plans should be designed and the mental power of people which can facilitate the process of responding to crisis should be augmented.
- **Unexpected Crises:** Responding to such crises is more complicated and rarely, the first crisis can trigger the other one and it is crucial to restrict the extent of such crisis as soon and effective as possible. In this phase, media has two critical roles: recruiting the public helps and resources to affected areas, calming and consoling the injured and affected people to reduce their and their pain and providing security for survivors.

4.3. Role of Media: After Crisis

This is the final phase of crisis management, when the conclusions should be achieved. The most important role of media in this phase is proper and timely announcement about the reconstruction programs and planning. Although the people should continuously be informed about the extent and depth of damages and destructions, but this process of the data and information transfer should be done cautiously without any manipulation or distortion in information.

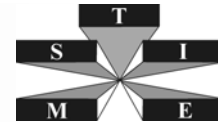
In repair and reconstruction phase, media should remember the importance of coordination in planning and implementing the reconstruction and rehabilitation programs and they should notice to their role as an audit in clearing the implementation status of reconstruction program and plans.

This is a good opportunity for media to evaluate the weak and strength points of crisis management efforts to appraise the undertaken activities and prepare suggestion and proposals to support the organization involved in response to probable future crises. And education should be based on the characteristics of audiences, scope and goals of professional activities of media and structure of news and messages.

5. Decision Making and News Management of Media Organizations in Crisis

Proper decision-making is the cornerstone of the crisis management both in situations which need immediate actions or do not need immediate actions (situation in which no actions more than guidance and control is possible).

Undoubtedly, proper decision making needs essentials information, data, analysis and processing. The more accurate and detailed information leads to better decisions. In fact the results of installed programs in preparation and prevention stages are practically correlated with decisions made in this phase of crisis management.



In comprehensive crisis management system the proper decision making occurs when the potential risks are assessed alongside the available resources and facilities. Available resources and potential risk should be balanced. The ways of crisis control depend on these decisions. The hastily unconsidered decisions not only worsen the social condition but also may cause hidden potential crises complicating the crisis management process and activities. Peter Dracker says in his book about crisis management: “it is better for you to be in relation with real acts and decisions than just studying and assessment the situation”.

There are many different ways to approach the chaotic situation in crisis and manage the disordered condition by managing the news and information exploration. It is emphasized that correct management brings us to correct options. The best way of obtaining additional credits for each media is news management during crisis. The crisis time is a dangerous time and neglecting the new complicated situations may have many negative consequences.

Broadcasting is the fastest way of distributing the information and improper media control on (true or false) published news may cause other sorts of problems for community. Media management necessitates the followed consideration to prevent the false news publication and increase the coverage of different aspects of crisis to attain the public attention:

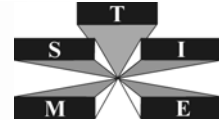
- 1- Crisis recognition
- 2- Crisis confrontation
- 3- Essential data and statistics gathering
- 4- Determining the proper media channel
- 5- Choosing the news and preferred media channel
- 6- Distributing the codified news from preferred media channel

6. Conclusions

Because of the major role in distribution of information and guiding the public courtesy, social media channels can be the main tool in controlling or augmenting the crisis. Social media is like the blood in the vessels of crisis management activities which should be circulated from beginning to end in all steps and processes as the main way of distribution of information in community. Recognizing the nature and competence and proper usage of social media is an essential component of every comprehensive and effective crisis confrontation program.

It is proposed to consider the role of social media in all stages of developing and implementing the emergency action plans (EAP) and emergency operations plans (EOP) and it is emphasized that the media also should try to play their role well in different detailed stages of their mission.

Media organization should also have strategic planning for crisis confrontation in coordination with other organizations and structures. It should be cleared that which action and activity is performed by each part of media organization and the relationship of media and the affected community will be managed by which measures and tools.



It is necessary for the social media to track its predefined goals according to a comprehensive practical action plan and to have emergency action plans even for non-predicted unexpected situations. Social media managers should identify all potential crises and prepare individualized response program for them. Different factors like organizational goals, dimension of activities, characteristics of audiences and crisis situation determine the appropriate media channel to both manage the messages and help the affected people and community.

At last it seems that trusting and proper usage of social media and its capability in rapid distribution of information, correct planned leadership and management and training the experienced academic human resources are some of major basic tools in crises management in all communities and countries. It means that social media organizations have a pivotal role beside the command and control center.

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