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THE ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN CRISIS COMMUNICATION IN THE MODERN **BUSINESS CONTEXT**

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Zhaldak H. P., Kozii U. M. The Role of Social Media in Crisis Communication in the Modern Business Context

The article is aimed at a detailed study of the features of the use of social media as an effective tool for crisis communication and an analysis of their impact on the formation and preservation of the reputation of organizations in modern conditions. Social media is becoming an integral part of the communication process, especially during crisis situations, when the speed of response, transparency and honesty in the provision of information are viewed as critical. Analyzing modern scientific works and real practical cases, the authors considered in detail the main communication strategies used during crises. In particular, emphasis is placed on the importance of timely informing the public, ensuring transparency of actions and using an honest approach in the presentation of information. In addition, the article emphasizes the importance of a two-way dialogue between the organization and the audience. This approach allows you to take into account feedback, use social media as a platform for open discussion of current problems and get answers to key questions. The study also considers the role of empathy in crisis communication. It is emphasized that demonstratina understanding and empathy allows organizations to create a more trusting relationship with the audience, as well as strengthen a positive image even in the most difficult conditions. Special attention is paid to the issue of creating a single source of truthful information. This helps to avoid confusion in messages and ensures consistency in the communication process. The results of the study made it possible to identify the key factors that contribute to successful crisis management using social media. The article also identified the main advantages of using this tool for business, including its operational efficiency, wide audience coverage, and the ability to respond instantly. Along with this, the authors analyze potential risks, such as spreading false information and losing control over the discussion, which can negatively affect the company's reputation. Based on the carried out analysis, recommendations for Ukrainian companies on the effective use of social media in crisis communications are proposed. Among the key tips are: prompt response to crisis situations, transparency in the provision of information, active interaction with the audience and the formation of trusting relationships with the public. Thus, the article contributes to the development of modern theory and practice of crisis management, offering effective tools for managing the reputation of organizations in difficult conditions.

Keywords: crisis management, crisis communications, social media, crisis strategies.

Fig.: 4. Tabl.: 1. Bibl.: 21.

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Жалдак Г. П., Козій У. М. Роль соціальних медіа у кризовій комунікації в умовах сучасного бізнес-контексту

Метою статті є детальне дослідження особливостей використання соціальних медіа як ефективного інструменту кризової комунікації та аналіз їхнього впливу на формування та збереження репутації організацій у сучасних умовах. Соціальні медіа стають невід'ємною частиною комунікаційного процесу, особливо під час кризових ситуацій, коли швидкість реакції, прозорість і чесність у наданні інформації набувають критичного значення. Аналізуючи сучасні наукові праці та реальні практичні кейси, авторами було детально розглянуто основні стратегії комунікації, що застосовуються під час криз. Зокрема, акцент зроблено на важливості своєчасного інформування громадськості, забезпечення прозорості дій та використання чесного підходу в поданні інформації. Крім того, у статті підкреслюється важливість двостороннього діалогу між організацією та аудиторією. Такий підхід дозволяє враховувати зворотний зв'язок, використовувати соціальні медіа як платформу для відкритого обговорення актуальних проблем і отримання відповідей на ключові питання. У ході дослідження також розглянуто роль емпатії у кризовій комунікації. Наголошено, що демонстрація розуміння та співпереживання дозволяє організаціям створити більш довірливі відносини з аудиторією, а також зміцнити позитивний імідж навіть у найскладніших умовах. Окрему увагу приділено питанню створення єдиного джерела правдивої інформації. Це допомагає уникнути плутанини в повідомленнях і забезпечує послідовність у комунікаційному процесі. Результати дослідження дозволили виділити ключові фактори, які сприяють успішному управлінню кризовими ситуаціями за допомогою соціальних медіа. Також у статті було визначено основні переваги використання цього інструменту для бізнесу, зокрема його оперативність, широке охоплення аудиторії та можливість миттєвого реагування. Разом із тим, автори аналізують потенційні ризики, такі як поширення неправдивої інформації та втрата контролю над обговоренням, які можуть негативно вплинути на репутацію компанії. На основі проведеного аналізу запропоновано рекомендації для українських компаній щодо ефективного використання соціальних медіа у кризових комунікаціях. Серед ключових порад: оперативне реагування на кризові ситуації, прозорість у наданні інформації, активна взаємодія з аудиторією та формування довірливих відносин із громадськістю. Таким чином, стаття робить внесок у розвиток сучасної теорії та практики кризового менеджменту, пропонуючи дієві інструменти для управління репутацією організацій у складних умовах.

Ключові слова: кризовий менеджмент, кризові комунікації, соціальні медіа, кризові стратегії.

Рис.: 4. Табл.: 1. Бібл.: 21.

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In nowadays world crisis management is the key to successful operating of business due to various and rapid crises that can occur. Crisis communication is crucial to maintain resistance to risks of company's reputation, public trust, and financial health. Furthermore, in the world where unpredictable challenges – from natural disasters to public relations blunders – can escalate rapidly, businesses must develop communication strategies that are effective and transparent. The ability to react fast, communicate coherently and address the information clearly, can help to solve the crisis and prevent it from transforming into bigger one, which eventually can make a significant harm to company's reputation and future.

Historically, businesses relied on traditional media, which includes newspapers, television broadcasts and press releases to maintain the communication with their stakeholders. The modern reality shaped the traditional view of crisis communication which was based on growing popularity of social media. The first mentioned media lacked back at that time fast reaction and transparency between company and its audience. Now social media enabled the business to interact directly with consumers and deal with occurred crisis. Therefore, new strategies should be implemented to develop resistance to new challenges.

This article *aims* to explore the role of social media in crisis communication within modern business context. It seeks to provide tools and strategies for implementing effective social media crisis communication, as well as to compare impact of social media and traditional media on dealing with crisis and challenges. The main *objectives* of this article are:

- 1) to analyze existing research and publications on the topic;
- to examine successful and unsuccessful cases of crisis communication across various companies and discuss their outcomes;
- to offer practical recommendations for domestic companies on how to enhance their crisis communication strategies through social media.

Before moving on to defining the role of social media in crisis communications, let's delve deeper into the categorical framework. For this, we need to clarify what is meant by the concepts of communication and crisis, and also identify their components. In *Tbl. 1*, we have systematized the definitions provided by various researchers who have studied the concept of communication, along with some comments on the interpretations of this term.

As evidenced by the information presented in Tbl. 1, most researchers understand communication as a process. However, we believe that by limiting communication to merely the transfer of information, one can overlook its significant role in reputation management and the development strategy of enterprises, which it currently fulfills. We consider it more appropriate to view communication as an element of the socio-economic system that ensures the creation, preservation, and dissemination of information.

Another important concept is a crisis. Translated from Greek, a crisis signifies disorder, decline, or exacerbation (political, economic, social conflicts), as well as a critical turning point in a disease, when the patient's condition either improves or worsens [21]. However, we would like to emphasize the interpretation of crisis in Eastern countries (particularly China). There, the hieroglyph for "crisis" consists of two parts. The first means "danger," while the second refers to "opportunity."

Currently, it is extremely important to understand that any crisis, particularly a communication crisis, can, with proper management and an effective crisis exit strategy, become an opportunity for change and development. Moreover, the entities that caused the crisis may evolve into reliable partners in the future.

Thus, it can be stated that crisis communications are an element of the socio-economic system that ensures the creation, preservation, and dissemination of information. This information can minimize the destructive impact of dangers and activate opportunities for preserving reputation and fostering the development of an enterprise.

The essence of the concept of "communication"

Author(-s), source	Definition	Comment
McGoldrick J. [15]	The process and result of information exchange	A concise and unified definition that can serve as a basis for infusing the concept of "communication" with specific meaning, depending on the field of its application
Pocheptsov G. G. [16]	The process of transferring information between two autonomous systems, which, in this case, are two individuals	This definition differs from the previous one only in how the author specifies the subjects between which the transfer of messages occurs
Berleson B. [17]	The transmission of information, ideas, and feelings through the use of symbols – words, images, numbers, etc.	This definition is limited due to the authors' omission of a crucial element of communication – the sender and recipient of the information – without which communication itself lacks material representation
Petruk N. K. [18]	Universal reality of social existence, an expression of the ability of a social human being to coexist, which is an undeniable condition for life	According to this definition, communication can be expressed as the subject's ability and capacity to adapt to the external environment
Reva V. E. [19]	A multifaceted process at the core of which lies communication, into which the senders embed appropriate meaning	A limited interpretation of communication as interaction
Tsurul O. A. [20]	The process of bilateral exchange of ideas and information, which leads to mutual understanding	The process of communication does not always result in mutual understanding

Recent research on crisis communication indicates the role of social media as a tool for managing crises in fast and strategically effective ways. T. Coombs (2014), in his work *Ongoing Crisis Communication: Planning, Managing, and Responding,* precisely described how social media shaped new form of business-to-audience communication [4]. Besides, Y. Jin and L. Austin (2022) in *Social Media and Crisis Communication*: explored the role of social media in crisis management [5].

Domestic researchers have significantly contributed to the understanding of crisis communication and social media. T. Fisenko (2021), in *Social Media in Crisis Communication*, examined the strategic use of social media during crises [1]. M. Maranchak (2021) described a crisis as a state in which a company is unable to function normally [2]. Similarly, A. Baranetska (2021) highlighted crisis communication as the process of building trustful and long-term relationships with audiences by providing essential information through online platforms [3].

In this article *general scientific method* was implemented to receive comprehensive results and different points of view as well as arguments. These methods included induction, deduction, analysis, synthesis, and systematization. They were used to examine recent publications on crisis communication and impact of

social media in it. The survey through Google form was conducted and filled by 54 respondents.

In today's digital era, the ability to respond quickly and effectively during a crisis is crucial for successful crisis management. While traditional media, such as newspapers, radio, and television broadcasts, require more preparation and lead to slower responses, social media offers a faster and more direct way to interact with audiences in real-time. This shift has fundamentally changed business communication, enabling immediate engagement with consumers and potential clients – something traditional media struggles to maintain.

Among 54 respondents, more than half (57.4%) choose social media as the most effective channel they use during crisis (*Fig. 1*). From this we can conclude that social media is an important tool in nowadays business context.

If to look from business perspective, Alberto Mattia, the Chief Executive Officer, in 2020 presented a report with results of survey he conducted in cooperation with businesses to assess their use of social media. The fundings indicate that 72% of organizations rely on social media to communicate or gather information during disruptive events. Interestingly, both big and small business predominantly use social

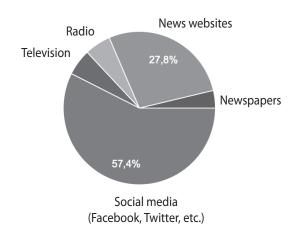


Fig. 1. Percentage of respondents using social media during crises

Source: developed by the authors.

media as a tool for crisis communication. The results are presented at *Fig. 2* [6].

T. Fisenko in her work (2021), in *Social Media* in *Crisis Communication*, states that one of the most significant advantages of social media over traditional media is its immediacy [1]. Platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram enable organizations to share updates with just a few clicks. Information is made available in real-time, allowing businesses to reach their audience with critical updates almost instantaneously. This speed is crucial in crisis situations where every second counts. In contrast, traditional media such as newspapers, television, and radio involve longer preparation times, including drafting, editing, and approval processes before publication. Even in cases where traditional media responds rapidly, it

still requires more logistical steps than posting on social media.

The immediate feedback on social media from organisations helps not only with fast interaction, but prevents from speading misinformation. Social media allows to monitor the situation. It is crucial to be able to correct misinformation as well as managing public's emotions [7].

For instance, during Hurricane Helene (2018), FEMA used its social media channels to address and stop rumors circulating online about the disaster response. As false information spread, including claims about misallocated resources and slow response times, FEMA created a "hurricane rumor response page" on their social platforms. This page became a critical tool for quickly discovering misinformation and delivering factual updates. By stopping rumors, FEMA ensured that the public had access to accurate information in real-time, helping prevent further panic and confusion. Social media allowed FEMA to interact directly with the public, making them more transparent and trustworthy during a time of crisis [8].

espite social media being a powerful and fast channel of communication, it also presents significant challenges. The rapid spread of information can also lead to increasing of misinformation, making it extremely difficult to contain or prevent. Once misinformation gains momentum, efforts to correct or stop it can be considerably more complex.

The results of survey, presented in *Fig. 3*, highlite that for 68.4% of respondents the biggest disadvantage of social media is rapid spread of misinformation.

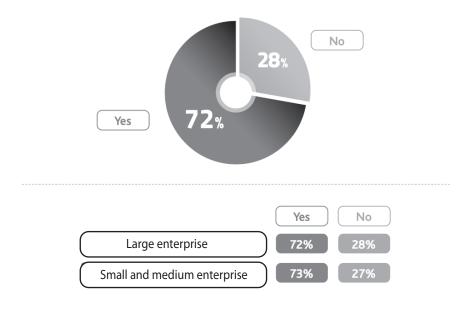


Fig. 2. Percentage of enterprises using social media during crises

Source: Social Media and Crisis Communications Report 2020," RTI International, 2020 [6].

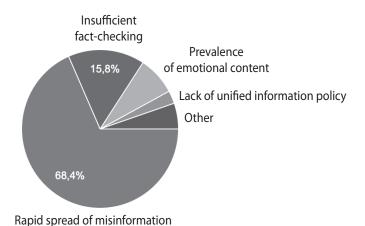


Fig. 3. Perceived disadvanages in using social media during crisis

Source: developed by the authors.

In this case, businesses must be prepared to face these challenges and communicate effectively during a crisis. To achieve this, they should develop and implement a robust crisis management strategy within the company, which we described later in this article.

TRANSPARENCY AND COHERENCY IN CRISIS COMMUNICATION

To achieve the communication where crisis can be prevented or solved quickly and effectively, organizations should follow a transparent model of communication to gain trust from its audience. While speed is crucial, the manner and quality can significantly change public perception and long-term brand reputation.

Transparency is the key to effective crisis communication. It involves being open and sincere with stakeholders about the nature of crisis, what actions are going to be taken and what are further plans. T. Coombs examined in his work that transparency in communication allows organizations to control the narrative by providing accurate information. When a company is transparent about what has occurred, audiences are more likely to perceive the brand as trustworthy and responsible [9].

Consistency in messaging is equally critical. Mixed or unclear messages can escalate the crisis and lead to confusion or distrust. Organizations should look for coherent communication across all channels, ensuring that each message reinforces the same narrative and key points. This requires careful coordination among teams and clear guidelines. Research by K. Fearn-Banks (2017) suggests that coherent messaging reduces public uncertainty and allows for more effective crisis management [10].

Alongside, crisis communication should go beyond just facts and figures; it should include emotional

intelligence and human engagement. People are more prone to trust and support brands that show empathy and humanity. Social media offers the perfect platform for this kind of interaction due to its conversational nature.

Messages that acknowledge the emotional impact of a crisis on the community, express genuine concern, and show the organization's commitment to resolving the issue can humanize the brand and build a stronger connection with the audience. According to F. Wilson, enhancing interaction with the audience effectively increases the trust bond between organizations and their followers. Social media has allowed businesses to evolve from one-way communication to interactive exchanges where both sides actively participate in dialogue. For instance, during COVID-19 health organizations held live sessions to answer to question and interact with audience in real time. This helped to reduce the fear and panic among audince and biuld trust towards the [7].

B. Liu, L. Austin, and Y. Jin exemined that adding a personal touch to crisis communication, such as addressing comments and responding with compassion, significantly enhances the audience's perception of the organization [12]. For example, using videos or statements by company leaders or employees that includes sincerity and emotion can have a powerful effect.

An example of effective crisis communication which included transparency, coherence, and human-to-human interaction was the response by Airbnb during the COVID-19 pandemic. The company maintained clear and consistent communication through email and social media, providing updates on their policies and how they were supporting both guests and hosts. CEO Brian Chesky addressed users directly through social media and virtual town halls, acknowledging the financial and emotional impact the

pandemic was having on their community and detailing the measures Airbnb was taking to support them. This transparent, coherent, and empathetic approach earned the trust of users and helped the company navigate through challenges [13].

CRISIS COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES

Nowadays well-established crisis communication strategy is crucial in rapidly changing business world. While speed is important, as discussed earlier, transparency, coherence, and emotional intelligence also play key roles in ensuring that the message is received clearly and effectively. However, all of these components can be not enough to solve the upcoming crisis if an organization does not have a clear crisis communication strategy.

The unpredictability of a crisis, combined with the fast pace of social media, means that businesses often face pressure to respond quickly. But without a strategy, the response can lack coherence, transparency, and humanization, which might escalate the crisis. As highlighted in earlier sections, the immediacy of social media can work both for and against organizations. A strong strategy, however, can help ensure that communication is handled in a way that minimizes damage and retains the public's trust.

According to J. Thompson, organizations should start their crisis communication strategy by creating plan, which includes following steps:

- choose a crisis management team;
- → assess the problem;
- → determine the goal;
- **→** establish an internal communication process;
- → identify your target audience;
- → decide on how you are messaging [14].

These steps lay the groundwork for a solid crisis communication strategy. To refine this approach, it's essential to consider what the public values most in a crisis response.

A survey conducted for this article asked respondents how companies should interact with their audience during a crisis (*Fig. 4*). The findings revealed that most people prioritize providing timely and relevant information (75.9%) and responding transparently and honestly (74.1%). These results serve as a clear reminder: businesses must focus on speed, clarity, and openness when addressing crises.

Based on these insights, we prepared some *actionable recommendations* for companies:

- ★ Respond quickly and factually. Timely updates can prevent rumors from spreading. Even if all the details aren't available, acknowledge the situation and commit to providing updates.
- → Be transparent and honest. Admit mistakes if they occur and avoid over-promising. Audiences value authenticity and accountability over polished but insincere responses [14].
- → Engage in two-way dialogue. With 59.3% of respondents highlighting the importance of listening to feedback, businesses should use social media tools like polls, comments, or live Q&A sessions to respond to concerns directly.
- → Provide a single source of truth. Although fewer respondents (22.2%) highlighted consistency through a single spokesperson, having one trusted voice can help reduce confusion and keep the message clear and consistent.
- → Show empathy. Even though only 27.8% emphasized using an emotional approach, showing understanding and compassion can strengthen your connection with the audience and humanize your brand.

By aligning crisis communication strategies with these priorities, businesses can build trust and effectively navigate difficult situations.

CONCLUSIONS

In today's fast-paced and interconnected world, a well-made crisis communication strategy is essen-

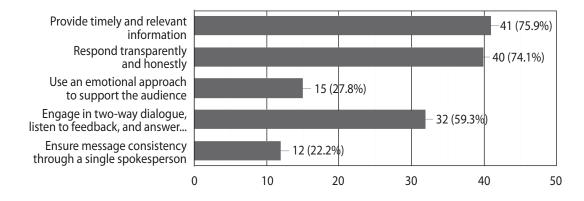


Fig. 4. Prefered ways for companies to communicate during crises

Source: developed by the authors.

tial for businesses to navigate unexpected challenges. The rise of social media has changed how companies communicate during crises, creating both opportunities and risks. As businesses are pressured to respond quickly, effective communication during a crisis can make the difference between recovery and reputational damage.

This article examined the core principles of crisis communication, emphasizing the importance of speed, transparency, honesty, and emotional intelligence. It also highlighted the unique role of social media, which can also escalate a crisis if not handled carefully. Without a clear strategy, companies risk responding in ways that lack coherence, transparency, and humanization, which can worsen the situation.

Based on insights from the survey, we gained valuable feedback on what audiences expect from companies during crises. The survey revealed that more than half of consumers choose social media as an effective communication channel during crisis. Furthermore, 75.9% of respondents prioritize quick, factual responses, highlighing the importance of timely communication.

In conclusion, we recommend Ukrainian companies to prioritize crisis communication strategies, we mentioned before in this article, and integrate them into their overall communication framework to be better equipped to handle crises and maintain trust with their audience. Crisis communication isn't just about managing the immediate situation; it's about preserving long-term relationships and ensuring that the company is seen as a responsible and transparent organization. Effective crisis communication can ultimately transform challenges into opportunities for growth and stronger customer loyalty.

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