“Building Effective Crisis Response Strategies in an Omni-channel Age”

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Ragan Communications
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PRSA Nebraska

18 years in the field

Previous roles: U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, ConAgra Foods
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Previous experiences: Journalism and strategic communication in China

Teaching expertise: PR; social media; advertising and PR campaigns

Research areas: new media; crisis communication; health communication
Webinar Objectives

1. Understand the relationship between empathy tone and public social media chatter during organizational crisis communication management.

2. Understand the relationship between authenticity tone and public social media chatter during organizational crisis communication management.

3. Develop messages that incorporate effective empathy tone during organizational crisis communication management.

4. Develop messages that incorporate effective authenticity tone during organizational crisis communication management.
Brief Overview of Omaha Public Schools

• 7 High Schools, 12 middle schools, 63 elementary schools, 15 alternative programs
• 3rd Largest employer in State of Nebraska (9,000 employees – administrators, support staff, teachers, professional/technical)
• Educate nearly 1 out of 5 students in the state
• Strong community support - recent 68 percent approval on $410 bond work
The Theoretical Framework

➢ Agenda Building Theory (McCombs, and Shaw)
➢ Image Restoration Theory (William Benoit)
➢ Situational Crisis Communication Theory (Tim Coombs)
➢ Social Mediated Crisis Communication Model (Liu et al)
Agenda Building Theory

Agenda Building & Agenda Setting Conceptual Frameworks

Agenda Building
- First-Level = Media Agenda
- Second Level = Media Coverage

Agenda Setting
- First Level = Media Agenda
- Second Level = Public Agenda

*Adapted from Walters, Walters & Gray, 1996.
The First Round of Research Findings

Instructional messaging most significant in food recalls (Content Analysis)

➢ For every additional element of instructional messaging included, the news article sentiment was 4 times more likely to be positive

➢ The attributes reviewed in food recall notifications would be transferred to news media coverage

Attributes Studied:

➢ Instructional Messaging – attribute transferred
➢ Transparency - attribute transferred
➢ Acceptance of responsibility - attribute transferred
➢ Apology – thrown out; no statistical significance
Image Restoration Theory

- Denial
- Evasion of Responsibility
- Reduce Offensiveness
- Corrective Action
- Mortification
Situational Crisis Communication Theory

SCCT provides a system for matching perceived organizational responsibility with the corresponding crisis response strategy to preserve reputation.
Social Mediated Crisis Communication Model

The Social Mediated Crisis Communication (SMCC) model plays an important role in recent crisis communication theory. This model holds that in the context of a crisis, multiple “publics” or “audiences” exist in the world of social media, including:
What the literature identifies:

- Empathy
- Authenticity

Critical attributes affecting how messages are received by the audience
ROUND 1:
Can you identify the empathy? The authenticity?

This is an upsetting event to all of us here at United. I apologize for having to re-accommodate these customers. Our team is moving with a sense of urgency to work with the authorities and conduct our own detailed review of what happened. We are also reaching out to this passenger to talk directly to him and further address and resolve this situation.

- Oscar Munoz, CEO, United Airlines
RESULT:

Parent company United Continental Holdings kicks off a tough day on the street with close to a $1 billion loss in market value.
ROUND 2:
Can you identify the empathy? The authenticity?

The truly horrific event that occurred on this flight has elicited many responses from all of us: outrage, anger, disappointment. I share all of those sentiments, and one above all: my deepest apologies for what happened. Like you, I continue to be disturbed by what happened on this flight and I deeply apologize to the customer forcibly removed and to all the customers aboard. No one should ever be mistreated this way.

I want you to know that we take full responsibility and we will work to make it right.

It’s never too late to do the right thing. I have committed to our customers and our employees that we are going to fix what’s broken so this never happens again. This will include a thorough review of crew movement, our policies for incentivizing volunteers in these situations, how we handle oversold situations and an examination of how we partner with airport authorities and local law enforcement. We’ll communicate the results of our review by April 30th.

I promise you we will do better.

Sincerely,

Oscar
RESULT:
After apology issued and Munoz pledges to conduct a review and release, the stock recovers. Market value still down $250 million.
Study hypotheses

➢ H1: The tone of (a) news media coverage and (b) public social media chatter is more likely to be positive if organizational crisis communication includes a higher level of empathy.

➢ H2: The tone of (a) news media coverage and (b) public social media chatter is more likely to be positive if organizational crisis communication demonstrates a higher level of authenticity.

Recent research on authenticity shows that organizations that are truthful, transparent, and consistent generate more trust. Hence, a high level of authenticity should also be associated with positive media coverage.
Analytical Strategy

➢ All data were imported into Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count (LIWC) 2015 for analysis.

➢ Used the “posemo”/positive emotion category to measure the positive tone of news media coverage and public social media chatter,

➢ Used a summative score of the “I,” “we” and “you” categories (referring to first and second person references) to measure empathy of organizational communication (Krieger, Neil, Strekalova & Sarge, 2017).

➢ Used the “authenticity” category in LIWC to measure authenticity of organizational communication. When people reveal themselves in an authentic or honest way, they are more personal, humble, and vulnerable. Algorithm derived from a series of studies where people were induced to be honest or deceptive.

➢ Authenticity is a measure of how personal and honest a person’s language is. People who are more authentic tend to use more I-words (I, me, mine). Authentic people also tend to use fewer she-he (he, her, his) words and discrepancy words like should, could, and must.
The findings...
The Findings...

“Showing empathy in crisis communication induces a positive sentiment in both news coverage and public chatter. Authenticity in crisis communication increases positive sentiment among public chatter only.”
The Findings...

H1. Empathy Effect

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organizational crisis comm channel</th>
<th>Media &amp; Public Sentiment</th>
<th>Pearson Correlation (sig. at p &lt; .05)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Website</td>
<td>News media: print</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Website</td>
<td>News media: social media</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Website</td>
<td>Public chatter: social media</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
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The Findings...

H1. Authenticity Effect

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Website</td>
<td>News media: print</td>
<td>n.s.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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Response strategy options?
“Your true/primary audience is your victim/impacted audience. Sit in the seat of that audience. Speak to that audience.”
“Conduct public relations as if the whole company depends on it.” – Arthur Page

“Crisis response is not just what you say. It’s what you do!” – Monique Farmer
### “Empathy Effect” Messaging Strategies

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<th>Talk directly to the impacted, victim audience. BE EMPATHETIC!</th>
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**Example 1:** "We are in the process of notifying the families of those involved and ask for your patience, your prayers and your privacy as we allow the time for those families to be notified and time for them to grieve."

Nine airmen from the Puerto Rico National Guard killed in plane crash

*The Formula: First and second person references; “I,” “We” “You”*
### “Authenticity Effect” Messaging Strategies

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**Example 2:** “Like you, I continue to be disturbed by this incident...I want you to know we take full responsibility and we will work to make it right...It’s never too late to do the right thing.”

United Airlines PR crisis statement, Day 2

*The Formula: Personal, humble, vulnerable, “I,” “Me” “Mine”*
Rewind

- **Empathy messages transfer** (more positive sentiment) from the organization through to other channels.
- **Authenticity messages primarily transfer** (more positive sentiment) from the organization through to the social media chatter.
- “I,” “we” and “you” wording and using first and second person references helps demonstrate empathy in messaging.
- **Authenticity** - When people reveal themselves in an authentic or honest way, they are more personal, humble, and vulnerable. Algorithm derived from a series of studies where people were induced to be honest or deceptive. **Authenticity** is a measure of how personal and honest a person’s language is. People who are more authentic tend to use more **I-words (I, me, mine)**. Authentic people also tend to use fewer **she-he (he, her, his)** words and discrepancy words like **should, could, and must**.
- Remember to communicate to your true/primary audience, the victim/impacted audience. **Sit in the seat of that audience. Speak to that audience.** Remove yourself and the organization.
Additional Readings to Consider:


Thank you.

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