An Applied Study of Social media as an Innovative Tool for Crisis Communication in Urban India

Dr. Latika Sahni	Associate Professor, Asia Pacific Institute of Management, Delhi
Dr. Reema Chaudhury	Assistant Professor, Asia Pacific Institute of Management, Delhi

ABSTRACT

Social Media has evolved far from beyond an optimal form of communication at exponential state, strategically connecting the world. It is the microcosms of the electronic communication world and hence is an innovative tool for urban India. The fact of 2012 study states that Facebook reported to have 71 million users and Twitter 12 million registered users are testament enough for understanding the reach of this powerful medium The social media are the electronic tools that enable the user to move back and forth easily between the roles of audience and content producers. The explosions of social media and web networking have made it an imperative tool of crisis communication as it can even accelerate the emergency relief in the disaster situations. The study aims to understand the global perspective of social media during crisis. The orientation is to understand the modality of crisis communication, public sensitization, social responsibility and increasing accessibility. The study is a result of extensive literature review in the field of social media. Goldfine and Laad & Lewis researches on crisis communication had been the inspiration for this research. On personal front, being the part of the society which has faced and communicated crisis in the past decade and has observed transition from media to social media- 'A Paradigm Shift of Professional Journalism during crisis to Citizen Journalism' in urban India. In the Indian scenario, it has shown an immense impact inspite of its refrains and challenges. The undisguised focus of this study is on the attitudes, perceptions and behaviours of urban and rural population of India through survey data. The Findings will deal with the ambiguity regarding the lack of confidentially of non verified information, poor crafting of messages, conflict with traditional media, impact on organizational transparency and threats to precision regarding social media.

Introduction:

The modern age human being is studded with media 24x 7, with television in the bedrooms, phones in pockets, i-pods in ear and tablets computers in bags. It has also changed the landscape of crisis communication redefining how 'e- relationship' develop and are perpetuated Social media has emerged as a critical element in emergency and crisis response. The recent political unrest in the Middle East, Earth quake in Japan, riots in London, mass shooting at Virginia Tech and Youth protest against rape in India are clear demonstration of social media as a force that cannot be ignored. According to the latest statistics*, with about 150 million Internet users, India now has 3rd largest Internet population in the world after China (at 575m) and the US (at 275m). The rapid growth of social networking sites like Facebook, Twitter You-tube, Google plus has attracted considerable interest in the field of crisis management. It is a medium of communication that allows information to be transmitted across globe, reaching millions with the relevant information with a fraction of a minute. Social media truly breaks boundaries. It allows us to communicate with the world and know them just like our next door neighbor. Because of this ever-increasing accessibility, social media is playing a pivotal role in people's lives and serves a number of functions. Social media has undoubtedly changed communication and crisis management planning. Organizations are now increasingly implementing social media strategies as a part of their crisis management planning. Social media tools are determining how news about crisis in communicated, reactions are shared and responses are synchronized across the globe.

Literature Review:

Crisis:

In The Handbook of Crisis Communication by Coombs a crisis is defined as "the perception of the event that threatens important experiences of stake holders and can impact the organization's performance" (2010, p.100). In other words, an organization's reputation is at stake when a crisis befalls on it. Reputation is a valuable asset and hence if tarnished may drive the customers away and that will have a drive impact on the goodwill of the company. (Coombs, 2007) Although, there is no definite definition of the term crisis but few generic observations have been made about the concept. Firstly a crisis is perceptual. Stakeholders perceive crisis in a certain way and it is the organization's responsibility to alter its crisis. Secondly it is unpredictable but intelligent companies are always aware of the potential crises and ready with their back up plans. Thirdly, it disturbs the stake holder's expectation and lastly, it is important to distinguish between crisis and incidents.

Crisis types:

Within crisis communication, it is important to determine the cause of the crisis and more specifically the type of crisis (Lin, 2007). Several theories have been propounded in this field e.g. crisis clusters with the Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) framework grouping crisis into victim, accidental and preventable clusters (Coombs, 2007). Coombs also put forth a crises classification scheme in 1995, which will serve as primary source in defining crisis types. The scheme distinguishes between four crisis types: faux pas, terrorism, accidents and transgressions.

Social Media:

According to Wigley and Zhang," social media are changing the way everyone, including journalists and public relations practitioners, communicate" (2011, P.1). Social media is user-generated content distribution through the internet with the intent to be shared and facilitate conversation between users (Wright & Hinson, 2009). It is the major method of interaction around the world today (Wright & Hinson, 2009). Social Media comprises a wide range of online forums including social networking, social bookmarking, blogs, micro blogging, general intellectual property rights sharing, internet discussion boards and forums, sites containing digital audio, images, movies, or photographs, to name a few. The following is a list of all types of social media and their uses.

Type	Examples	Descriptions
Social networking,	Facebook, Myspace, Linkedin, Google Plus, Ning, Bebo	Allows users to add friends, send messages and share content, people on social networking sites group in communities of like minded interest
Social bookmarking	Digg, Delicious, Yahoo! Buzz, StumbleUpon, Reddit	Allows users to share their favourite online content with one another while also creating online bookmarks
Blogs	Wordpress, Typepad, Blogger, Livejournal Tumblr	Online journals where the author can write (blog) about any interest his/her wants. The blogger can also the blog to share content picked up from other Social Media sites (Youtube) by taking advantage of the simple embedded codes offered by those content hosts.
Micro blogging	Twitter	Allows users to send short 140 character message in real time to large audience

Collaborative Projects/Wikis	Wikipedia, Google Docs	Online content created as a result of multiple users working on the same content, but at different times, from different places
Photo sharing	Flickr, Photobucket, Picasa	Allows users to upload photos, share either privately with only selected other users or publicly
Video/ Music sharing	Youtube, Spotify	Allows users to upload or watch video content or listen to music to a site for sharing either privately or public
Presentation sharing	Slideshares.net, Scribd	Allows users to upload files as PDFs and convert to work with the online presentation applications. The presentation tools include embedding codes and email options to share the content online
Intellectual property sharing	Creative common	Licensing rights and permissions for others to use the photos by simply embedding the codes in their blogs
Meetups/Events	Evite, Facebook events foursquare	Allows users to promote and display where people are at that moment
Questions and answers	Yahoo questions, Facebook Q A formspring	Allows users to ask random questions and anyone can answer and start a conversation

* Role of social media in crisis communication by Gitanjali Laad & Gerald Lewis (2012)

Crisis Communication and Social Media:
Crisis communication is an inevitable part of corporate communications (Coombs, 2010). Crises are something corporations and organizations must be prepared to respond to; their response is known as crisis management (Coombs, 2010). Studies of crisis communication, and its intersection with social media, explore ways to incorporate social media into crisis communication plans. Social media is seen as an outlet to detect issues that can become crises, a means to communicate during a crisis, and a way to continue communication after a crisis (Borremans, 2010; Semple, 2009). In the field of public relations and elsewhere, crisis has been given numerous definitions and criteria (Adkins, 2010; Coombs, 2010; Heath, 2010). In the simplest terms, a crisis is something that can cause harm to any one thing, person or corporation (Heath, 2010). A crisis typically has high stakes and a tight deadline to act quickly. It is also important to note that a true crisis is an event that requires a great amount of attention and resources by those involved (Coombs, 2010). Crises can occur internally or externally to an organization and require action of the organization that is outside normal day-today activities (Adkins, 2010; Coombs, 1995). These aspects of crises describe not only an organizational crisis, but also a natural disaster.

Crisis management is the larger umbrella that covers crisis communication (Coombs, 2010). Crisis management allows an organization to possibly prevent, prepare, respond to and analyzes a crisis before, during and after the crisis has occurred (Coombs, 2010). Crisis communication is the collection of information, followed by processing that information into knowledge, and finally, the sharing of information with others throughout a crisis situation (Coombs, 2010, p. 25). Crisis communication has been studied for over 30 years. The bulk of that study has emerged from the field of public relations and has received heightened attention in the past decade (An & Cheng, 2010; Coombs, 2010). Crisis communication research is practical. The bulk of that study has emerged from the field of public relations and has received heightened attention in the past decade (An & Cheng, 2010; Coombs, 2010). Crisis communication research is practical and meant to be put to use in order to improve crisis management practices and crisis communication (Coombs, 2010).

Crisis communication research includes a substantial amount of theoretical research (Coombs, 2010). Crisis communication theory includes: reputation management, attribution of responsibility, and communication response based on crisis type, among many other theories. These areas have been developed and theorized to apply to crisis communication and its best practices. Experiments as well as observational analyses have also become more prevalent in the study of crisis communication (Coombs, 2010).

METHODOLOGY
Social media and its impact on crisis communication is a comparatively recent phenomenon, so has its limitation on the empirical studies. To measure the attitude, perceptions and behaviors of the urban and rural population in the study, a hypothesis and research questions have been drawn. The factors are analyzed through survey data.

H1: The Urban population perceives the social media as an innovative and effective tool for crisis communication.

The following research questions will be addressed:

RQ1: How does age affect the people's attitude towards social media?

RQ2: Does the gender have any effect on the behavior towards social media during crisis?

Quantitative data was collected through a survey of 236 respondents, 120 Urban and 116 Rural adult respondent between the age group of 20-40yrs, who had access to social media, was collected by random sampling. Attitudes were analyzed using 16 five-point Likert-Type scale statements ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). To determine the significance of the difference between group means, Independent-samples t-tests were used for Likert type survey questions relating to the impact of social media on the respondent, in accordance with crisis communication.

Data Analysis
Statistical analysis for this study included descriptive statistics and a t-test. Test were considered significant if $p<.05$. The study respondents were 120 adults from NCR region and 116 from Nainital Distt. in India. 58% were male 42% were female. The respondents were in the age bracket of 20yrs to 40yrs. Attitudes and behaviors towards social media during crisis were analyzed. The participants from rural and urban sector, all had the access to social media and had the gadgets which gave them the facility for the same. The respondents were asked to rank the three media sources for news during crisis or disaster. The participant's top five sources are listed in Table1.

Table1 Highest Ranked Media Sources For News During Crisis

Name of Media	URBAN Below 30yrs	URBAN Above 30yrs	TOTAL	RURAL Below 30yrs	RURAL Above 30yrs	TOTAL
TELEVISION	76%	94%	85%	88%	76%	82%
NEWSPAPER	46%	89%	67.5%	64%	86%	75%
ONLINE PAPER	34%	21%	22.5%	14%	01%	7.5%
SOCIAL MEDIA	88%	63%	75.5%	48%	38%	43%
RADIO	27%	36%	31.5%	27%	47%	37%

Television, newspaper and social media were ranked highest. Television is the most popular media resource in both the sections of India, but social media has taken over in the urban sectors, especially with young respondents. The sources of social media used were Facebook and Blackberry Messengers in Nainital and In Delhi-NCR Twitter and What's Up was equally used to communicate Crisis.

The growing impact of social media has made it imperative during the time of crisis for its convenience, transparency, availability and connectivity. To address these issues, one Hypothesis and two research question were posited by the researcher. 16 statements are scaled on five-point Likert Scale ranging from strongly agree (5) to strongly disagree (1) has been designed to measure the attitude towards social media. Independent t-Test was used for the 16 likert-type statement to determine the significance of the difference between group means. The findings of the research were in accordance with the hypothesis and the research questions.

The Statements are;
1. Complimentary with traditional media
2. Low Cost tool to communicate crisis
3. Widespread ,bring the boundaries closer
4. Global connectivity
5. Transparency, Non Manipulative
6. Directly from the reporter
7. Fast pace
8. Convenience, ease to use
9. Technology in hand, availability
10. Improved networking
11. Bridges Age gap
12. Essential for working class
13. Authentic, holds credential
14. Impact on organizational transparency
15. Crisis communication a Professional field
16. Measure impact on attitude towards social media.

Findings:
In 16 survey statements, it was reported that urban population has a very positive concept of social media use. As illustrated in Table2 the hypothesis was supported by the means. All 16 statements depicted the higher mean in Urban sector, stating the reluctance of people in rural areas to use new technology

H1: The Urban population perceives the social media as an innovative and effective tool for crisis communication.

Table2. Attitudes of Urban and Rural population using social media as a tool for crisis communication

Statements	Urban Mean scores	Rural Mean scores	t	df
Complimentary with traditional media	3.60	3.24	2.84	236
Low Cost to communicate crisis	4.13	3.12	3.47	236
Widespread ,bring the boundaries closer	3.86	2.67	2.89*	236
Global connectivity	4.73	3.41	4.81**	236
Statements	Urban Mean scores	Rural Mean scores	t	df
Directly from the reporter	3.91	3.86	3.87**	236
Fast pace	2.73	2.41	2.14*	236
Convenience, ease to use	3.50	3.07	2.01*	236
Technology in hand, availability	4.30	3.54	3.67**	236
Improved networking	4.66	4.45	4.21**	235
Bridges Age gap	4.90	4.55	4.69**	236
Authentic, holds credential	4.11	3.23	3.61*	236
Impact on organizational transparency	3.81	3.53	-2.01**	236
Crisis communication a Professional field	2.22	4.17	2.44*	236
Measure impact on attitudes and behaviors	4.59	3.20	4.63**	235
.Essential for working class	2.00	2.15	2.31*	235
*=p<.05**=p<.001. standard deviation appear in parentheses below means				

The young respondents in small town or rural area also have a positive inclination and perceive it as a new technology in hand [RQ1] is proved, Age has a major role in choosing the media .Table 2 includes responses to the statements, which demonstrated statistically significant mean differences of Urban and Rural respondents

Table 3. Gender Discrimination in Attitudes of Urban and Rural population using social media as a tool for crisis communication

Statements	Urban Female Mean scores	Urban Male Mean scores	Rural Female/ male Mean scores	Rural Female/ male Mean scores
Complimentary with traditional media	2.19	3.65	3.97	4.64
Low Cost to communicate crisis	3.12	3.76	2.08	2.39
Widespread ,bring the boundaries closer	2.39	4.70	2.67	3.69
Global connectivity	2.38	3.41	2.73	4.12
Transparency, Non Manipulative	3.12	3.77	2.41	4.30
Directly from the reporter	2.01	3.86	2.06	3.89
Fast pace	3.23	4.90	1.15	2.99
Convenience, ease to use	3.50	3.67	1.97	3.67
Technology in hand, availability	3.26	4.61	2.85	3.42
Improved Networking	2.90	4.95	2.54	3.09
Bridges Age gap	3.21	4.05	2.43	4.15
Authentic, holds credential	4.00	4.14	3.11	4.13
Impact on organizational transparency	3.14	3.26	3.23	3.02
Crisis communication a Professional field	2.22	4.17	2.61	3.76
Measure impact on attitudes and behaviors .	2.16	3.20	2.36	3.87
.Essential for working class	2.00	3.59	2.41	2.89

Gender
The study compared attitudes toward social media among female students and male students. Results on individual statements suggest that males tend to view social media more positively than females. Female correspondent held significantly less positive views of social media than males and the results of these statements had the statistical significance between mean difference among male and female participants The results indicate that gender does have an impact on the perceptions of social media in India. RQ2 proved, in India, gender also plays a major role.

Future Implication
Crisis can be managed successfully by using social media. Facebook, Twitter, You-Tube, instant messaging, video-conferencing, web meetings: These and many other collaboration and social media platforms are now an everyday part of people's lives around the world. They are also finding their way into enterprise communications and management strategies. America has been the trendsetter and Urban India is following it. The target should be to use social media during all crisis and disaster situations. This can be done by building a collaborative culture, establishing more effective two-way communication, Improving employee involvement and engagement, Collaboration and social media tools can reduce the time an organization needs to navigate large-scale change programs. This, in turn, builds a foundation for employees to be more continuously change capable in the future.

Based on numerous experiences with corporations and government agencies that have successfully pioneered social media solutions, social media technologies if properly planned and implemented, can support more rapid and reliable source to handle crisis.

Discussion and Conclusion

The purpose of the research was to find the implications of social media on Crisis communication. The social media revolution had a resounding impact on the public relations industry, especially during crisis or disasters. It offers new opportunities and new requirements for successful public relations practices. The pressing need for social media expertise in public relations has led to the creation of new careers, and practitioners must be aware of how social media marketing can be used for corporate communications.

Social media is an extremely effective tool for the public relations industry, as it offers new channels for the necessary communication between an organization and its publics, and new opportunities for this communication to be meaningful and mutually beneficial. While the basic principles are the same, social media tools offer practitioners new ways to implement the traditional elements of public relations practices. Research is a crucial stage in the development of a public relations campaign or program, and social media offers new opportunities for research to be conducted.

This industry shift from traditional corporate communications practices to public relations utilizing social media is unprecedented. The speed with which this shift has occurred has led to a split within the industry, separating early adopters from those who are slow to join the social media age. How companies are responding to the social media revolution is an indicator of future success. Companies that are too slow to adopt these new technologies and practices are going to be left behind. Consumers are communicating with one another via social media, even if the companies that are their topics of discussion are late to join the social media game.

Social media is going to continue to develop and change, and corporate communications practices are going to change with it. Social media has already proven an invaluable tool to the industry, and the future holds a wider teaching and implementation of these tools. The advent of social media has resulted in the evolution of corporate communications. From unchanging, traditional practices, the public relations industry has evolved rapidly to accommodate constant change and new tools, creating opportunities for meaningful conversations, successful campaigns and realizing industry ideals Crisis communication is better known for its ability to change at a moment's notice and for its immediate communication with the stake holders. Social media is an upcoming field. The intersection of these two fields is a great interest to communication researchers and strategists.

REFERENCE   1. Anderson, M.L. & Taylor, H.F. (2006). Sociology: Understanding a diverse society. (4th | Ed.) Bellmont, CA: Thomson Learning, Inc. | 2. Bernoff, J. (2009, July 20). Advertising Will Change Forever. Message posted to | http://adage.com/digitalnext/post.php?article_id=138023. | 3. Birnbaum, M.G. (2008). Taking Goffman on a tour of Facebook: College students and | the presentation of self in a mediated digital environment. Retreived from | ProQuest Digital Dissertations. (AAT 3320071). | 4. Blakeman, R. (2007). Integrated Marketing Communication: Creative Strategy From | Idea to Implementation. Lanham, Maryland; Rowman & Littldfield Publishers, Inc. | | 5. Coombs, W. T. (1995). Choosing the right words. Management Communication Quarterly, 8 (4), 447. doi: Article. | 6. Coombs, W. T. (2007). Crisis Management and Communications. Institute for Public Relations. Retrieved from http://www.instituteforpr.com/essential_knowledge/detail/crisis_management_and_communications/ | 7. Coombs, W. T. (2010). Parameters for Crisis Communication. In W. T. Coombs & S. J. | 8. Dougherty, D. (1992). Crisis communications: what every executive needs to know. New York: Walker. | 9. Goldfine Erica, Best Practices: The use of Social Media throughout Emergency & Disaster Relief by School of Communication, American University Washington, D.C. April 28, 2011 | 10. Holladay (Eds.), The Handbook of Crisis Communication (pp. 17-53). United Kingdom: Blackwell Publishing. | 11. Palen, L., Vieweg, S., Liu, S. B., & Hughes, A. L. (2009). Crisis in a Networked World: Features of Computer-Mediated Communication in the April 16, 2007, Virginia Tech Event. Social Science Computer Review, 27(4), 467-480. doi:Article | 12. Seeger, M. W. (2006). Best Practices In Crisis Communication: An Expert Panel Process. Journal of Applied Communication Research, 34(3), 232-244. Doi: Article. | 13. Semple, E. (2009). Update Your Crisis Communications Plan With Social Media. Strategic Communication Management, 13(5), 7. Doi: Article. | 14. Ulmer, R., Sellnow, T., & Seeger, M. (2007). Effective Crisis Communication Moving From Crisis to Opportunity. SAGE Publications. | 15. Wimmer, R. D., & Dominick, J. R. (2006). Mass Media Research: An Introduction (9th ed.). Belmont, CA: Wadsworth. |