Chapter 4
Reputation Management Techniques and E-Collaboration:
UAE Public Relations Communication Strategies During Crises Management

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ABSTRACT

Public relation is one of the significant communication methods in any organization. It leads the internal and external communication strategies, especially during crises. Some of the main goals of public relations are to create, maintain, and protect the organization's reputation, and—ever-increasingly—e-collaboration plays a vital role in accomplishing this goal. The aim of this study is to explore the approaches that help an organization rejuvenate its reputation after damage caused by various crises. It is important to know which PR approaches best engage stakeholders because companies must maintain healthy relationships with all stake-holding entities in order to survive. Qualitative case study was conducted to explore what circumstances can compromise a company's image and what role a PR department would optimally play in rejuvenating it.

INTRODUCTION

Current public relations incline to be obvious as performing within the management of the organization. "As public relations has shifted from an emphasis on the technical role of the communicator to the strategic communication role of the manager. Management theory has defined organizational effectiveness in a number of ways" (Okafor & Malizu, 2015).

Public relations play a vital role during crises and is critical to their effective management. Turney (2008) posits that PR practitioners typically have daily responsibilities identical to those during crises, such as "maintaining and improving their organization's relationships by effectively communicating

with its target audiences. Public relations practitioners are not normally responsible for resolving the underlying problem(s) that created a crisis situation" (p. 1). Therefore, PR practitioners cannot (and should not) exercise their roles independently or direct the organization's actions without considering and adhering to the organization's overarching goals.

Out of necessity, an intense amount of internal scrutiny is directed towards reputation during times of crisis. Rather than seeing this as a negative, Turney (2008) points out that times of crisis can be turned into opportunity for strengthening and growing a company if they are managed well, saying that "Effective crisis communication can actually enhance an organization's reputation" (p.1). Jennex (2004) defines crises and disasters as unexpected circumstances or situations that demand a swift and effective response that is "different from their normal operating procedures" (p. 86).

Even though in any crisis, PR is always looking to manage the immediate reactions, maintaining a longer-term perspective that focuses on increasing ongoing communications with targeted populations is good practice, and contributes to a better overall outcome. Latonero and Shklovski (2011) discussed the importance of quick responses during crises, and they agreed that "the general goal of risk and crisis communication...is to inform the public of potential or current events and to persuade the public to adapt their behavior in ways that would improve health and safety" (p. 5).

Occasionally, situations require immediate damage control, in which case an appropriate set of actions must be quickly devised in order to manage the situation. In the concise and memorable words of Brigulio (2004), during times of crisis, organizations must "tell the truth, tell it all, and tell it fast." According to Shaw (2006), crisis management is:

…the coordination of efforts to control a crisis event consistent with strategic goals of an organization. Although generally associated with response, recovery and resumption of operations during and following a crisis event, crisis management responsibilities extend to prevent awareness, prevention and preparedness and post event restoration and transition (p. 66).

A longtime public relations scholar and professional leader, the late Farlow (1976), compiled almost 500 definitions for the term "public relations." From these, he then identified the major common elements in an attempt to arrive at a cohesive definition of "public relations." His resulting definition encompasses both conceptual and operational elements (Farlow, 1976). In essence, public relations can be defined as a professional field concerned with maintaining public image for high-profile people, organizations, or programs.

Public relations practitioners help others establish and maintain effective relationships with third parties. This work is usually performed through a public relations firm or an agency, independent consultants, or as a part of the communication staffs of corporations, not-for-profit organizations, or government agencies (Latimore, Baskin, Heiman, Toth & Van, 2004). To establish a holistic understanding of the public relations function, the following definition serves well (Seitel, 2004):

Public relations is a leadership and management function that helps achieve organizational objectives, define philosophy, and facilitate organizational change. Public relations practitioners communicate with all relevant internal and external public to develop positive relationships and to create consistency between organizational goals and societal expectations. Public relations practitioners develop, execute, and evaluate organizational programs that promote the exchange of influence and understanding among an organization's constituent parts and public. (p. 5)

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