

Media relations and network information management - key issues to handling social media crisis in enterprises

Quan hệ báo chí và quản trị thông tin mạng – những vấn đề mấu chốt để xử lý khủng hoảng truyền thông tại các doanh nghiệp

Hoang Thi Huong^{a,b*}, Tran Thai Bao^{a,b}
Hoàng Thị Hương^{a,b*}, Trần Thái Bảo^{a,b}

^a*Institute of Research and Development, Duy Tan University, Da Nang, 550000, Vietnam*

^a*Viện Nghiên cứu và Phát triển Công nghệ Cao, Trường Đại học Duy Tân, Đà Nẵng, Việt Nam*

^b*Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities, Duy Tan university, Da Nang, 550000, Vietnam*

^b*Khoa Khoa học Xã hội và Nhân văn, Trường Đại học Duy Tân, Đà Nẵng, Việt Nam*

(Ngày nhận bài: 14/4/2021, ngày phản biện xong: 17/4/2021, ngày chấp nhận đăng: 20/4/2021)

Abstract

Media relations is one of the very important tools of PR (Public Relations) and also an effective tool in handling media crisis. In addition, in the current technology boom, managing - controlling information sources on social networks is a difficult job that requires the media departments of enterprises to set up strategies and enhance skills to limit the risks brought by communication crises. So, how to build a media relationship and at the same time how to manage the online "crisis" against the dangerous crowd on social networks to help businesses reduce the risks from the media crisis? The following article will discuss in more detail.

Keywords: Importance; media relations; governance; online "terrorism"; handling; communication crisis.

Tóm tắt

Quan hệ báo chí là một trong những công cụ vô cùng quan trọng của PR (Public Relations) và cũng là công cụ hữu hiệu trong xử lý khủng hoảng truyền thông. Bên cạnh đó trong thời đại bùng nổ công nghệ như hiện nay, quản trị - tầm soát được nguồn thông tin trên mạng xã hội là một công việc khó khăn đòi hỏi bộ phận truyền thông ở các doanh nghiệp phải thiết lập chiến lược và nắm bắt kỹ năng để hạn chế những rủi ro từ khủng hoảng truyền thông mang đến. Vậy, xây dựng mối quan hệ báo chí như thế nào và đồng thời quản trị "khủng hoảng" trực tuyến, chống lại đám đông nguy hiểm trên mạng xã hội ra sao để giúp doanh nghiệp giảm thiểu những rủi ro từ khủng hoảng truyền thông sẽ là những nội dung cơ bản mà bài viết này đề cập.

Từ khóa: Tầm quan trọng; quan hệ báo chí; quản trị; "khủng bố" trực tuyến; xử lý; khủng hoảng truyền thông.

* *Corresponding Author:* Hoang Thi Huong; Institute of Research and Development, Duy Tan University, Da Nang, 550000, Vietnam; Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities, Duy Tan University, Danang, 550000, Vietnam
Email: hoanghuongvn@gmail.com

1. Introduction

Communication crisis is always a potential danger that will erupt at any time, both for individuals and businesses. Especially in the current dominant social networking era, the crisis is more likely to happen and sometimes will “engulf” the reputation of individuals and businesses in just a moment. So how to control this problem? Reality has shown that not always can individuals or businesses control everything, but they can control how to solve what happens. This is the key to dealing with any crisis. Establishing “crisis handling process on the basis of building the most fundamental solution to form the most optimal and effective solutions, reducing damage to the reputation and brand of the business. Dealing with a crisis for businesses through practical lessons [2, pp.81]” is the best way to deal with a crisis. In addition to dealing with crisis, building relationships and establishing a reliable information channel between businesses and the press also plays a very important role in helping businesses get closer to the public, thereby creating many opportunities for the public to share the most positive information with businesses.

2. Content

2.1. *Some issues related to the media crisis.*

A social media crisis is a breakthrough and unexpected event that happens unintentionally, cannot be controlled, adversely affects the brand image, reputation of the organization or its stakeholders’ crests on social media or social networks.

Communication crises often happen in many ways. Even different professions will have different types of crises. According to journalist Pham Song Thu, crisis is commonly seen in four forms [6, pp.23-24]:

(1) Crisis due to product quality: This is a type of crisis from the inside and very difficult to handle, causing a lost of trust issues and easily affecting the brand name and image of the company. Some typical evidences are: The case of Pho 24 using chemicals soaked pig skin instead of beef tendon was discovered by a customer in 2012; The fly case found in Doctor Thanh Lemon Tea has caused a stir in 2014.

(2) Crisis caused by accidents, incidents: Accidents, incidents that occur often suddenly, or potentially break out for a long time. We can review a number of typical cases such as: Many customers using Pate Minh Chay suffered from the risk of death, which seriously affected the product brand in 2019; An incident when the tester accidentally stepped on the gas pedal in Vietnam Motor Show 2012 caused an accident; Customers rushed to ABC bank to withdraw money (one day to withdraw 6,000 billion dong) when information about Director Ly Xuan Hai was prosecuted and arrested for intentionally violating the State's regulations on economic management, causing serious consequences.

(3) Crisis due to advertising: Introducing and advertising so that customers know better about product quality but intuitively go against the purpose. This is the kind of crisis from advertising. Vietjet Air has led customers to turn their backs on their service when there was an offensive bikini performance on the flight to welcome Vietnamese U23 players from Changzhou to the country; advertisements that are not “wise” annoyed customers like Knorr ads.

(4) Crisis due to Third-party: This type of crisis often comes from a competitor's “conspiracy”. Building the image - branding for the unit is very difficult and sometimes takes decades, but it is lost in minutes by the tricks of the third party. Khai Silk with suspicion of

importing Chinese silk and then attach the company's label through an unauthenticated story, but the brand is seriously affected.

2.2. Media relations - a leading key in handling the media crisis

Media relations are the establishment and maintenance of relationships between the media and some organizations. "This activity includes the purposeful dissemination and communication of planned and executed messages through selective and free media to serve specific interests of an organization" [4, pp.73]. Media relation is often at the heart of a range of activities, especially in the face of crises handling - so this relationship is of paramount importance¹. No matter what level of media relations (from regular outreach exposure to selective relationships to dealing with hundreds of media outlets at a major event, the exposure to the media always plays a significant and indispensable role in the PR activities of the business.

"Fourth power" is a phrase that many people mention when talking about the media. In fact, for people doing communication work in enterprises, the press is the most effective information transmission channel. The press is both a close companion and an effective connection between businesses and the

community. It is no coincidence that journalist Pham Song Thu - expert in handling media crisis through professional practice has affirmed: "The relationship between business and the press in terms of media has a very positive meaning. The press is often warmly received and appreciated by businesses"² and is always the most effective information transmission channel for businesses.

The information that the press publishes and mentions about the business will contribute to a strong media effect. Therefore, even in any situation that "makes friends" to the press, providing the media with the most transparent information source will be a way for businesses to build their image, even "escape" easier if a communication crisis occurred. In fact, the press not only provides diverse, rich and accurate information for the community, but also warns and criticizes with many business-related contents. In addition, many newspapers also stand side by side with financial, economic, real estate experts, etc. to monitor and analyze the economic situation, promptly make forecasts and explanations to help businesses adjust operational or business strategy. The story of ACB bank is a typical example of the problem of effective communication crisis in which press relations activities play a very important role. The rumor spread rapidly on October 13, 2003 that the General Director of the Asia Joint Stock Bank

¹ In the book *Media Convergence*, published in 2004 by Pearson Education Inc, Boston, p. 408 cited by Dinh Thi Thuy Hang] Pavlik, J and McIntosh emphasized the importance of the relationship with the media. The statement goes as follows: "By developing and maintaining good relationships with the media, PR experts anticipate more success in getting their organization informed fair and positive on the media. When a negative news comes out, maintaining a good relationship with the press will give the organization more opportunities to communicate clearly and responsibly to the media. In case the media makes a mistake in reporting an article about their organization, a PR expert with good relationship and maintaining a good relationship with the media will be more effective in correcting the information properly".

² When discussing the relationship between business and journalism, journalist Pham Song Thu made this judgment on the basis of analyzing actual events that took place. The journalist pointed out that thanks to the good media relations, the Miss Vietnamese World pageant (although it was only 2 years old) was widely reported on media before, during and after the event. Meanwhile, the Miss Vietnam 2010 contest organized by Tien Phong newspaper (already 10 years old) in Tuan Chau, Ha Long took place at the same time as the Miss Vietnam World pageant, but information was reported modestly.

was arrested, making this banking system shake on October 14, 2003. Customers rushed to withdraw money at this bank and then fear spread to other banks. However, the Governor of the State Bank promptly denied the false rumors, affirmed and pledged to support ACB if the customer still insists on withdrawing money. Then the Governor along with the General Director of ACB quickly appeared in the online exchange with readers of VnExpress to provide more information about healthy operations at ACB as well as the entire banking system. This crisis handling combined with the press very timely helped reassure the depositors, making the situation quickly stabilized. Similarly, the story of BIDV and Maritime Bank in 2016 also shows the influence of the press on the problem of handling the communication crisis.

Besides establishing a relationship with the media, maintaining this relationship is also a matter of respect and honesty. The nature of the media is to seek and reflect information, so businesses should not be afraid to promptly share information with the media (including bad information, because if deliberately hiding it when it is discovered, it will spread badly). In order to tighten media relations, businesses should meet and exchange regularly with the press, pay attention to the press on important events such as June 21st, Tet, holidays; advertising - sponsorship; press conferences and preferential regimes, membership cards for journalists, etc.

Another noteworthy point is that when building relationships with the media, businesses need to focus on key issues such as:

(1) Relationship with the subjects that are the leaders of the newspapers. They are the deciding factor about whether to post or not to post. When businesses have problems and crisis outbreaks, if they have a good relationship with

the press leaders, it will be very convenient in resolving the crisis. This advantage does not mean that the business "bribes" for them to use their power to cut off the posting of information, or to redirect false information that they can ask reporters to further verify the source believe. If there is a need to reflect information, the article will have a "tone" to limit criticism, sometimes even timely explanations to help "cool down" the situation, contributing to redirection comment.

(2) Relations with the press management agency. This is the relationship with the super press. Often the press regulators will distribute information oriented to the media leadership levels. Therefore, establishing this relationship will be one of the remote backup plans when a business crisis occurs. If all measures have been taken when an incident occurs at the unit / business is not effective, the last resort is to ask the press management agency to intervene. However, this approach is not a good strategy and avoids abuse. Many businesses made a mistake from the beginning when they applied this tactic to solve the problems in their units, so intuitively not only losing their image to the public when they were discovered, but also deeply hurt to newspapers / journalists.

(3) Relations with social networks. This is one of the relationships that needs to be paid special attention when currently social networking is considered as the "fifth power" agency, gradually replacing traditional media channels. With a huge number of interactions, dizzying ability to reach the public, spread information, social networks will be a very effective advertising channel for businesses; but the opposite has also created serious crises that are difficult to control. Having a good relationship or good governance on social networks will help businesses establish advantages and control crises. However, what

should businesses do? How we will continue to analyze more in the next section of this article.

2.3. Network information management - the next key issue and also the optimal strategy to handle communication crises

As mentioned, social media is outperforming traditional media. With a spreading rate that is difficult to control when there is any source from social networks, it will create a great challenge, requiring urgent and reasonable resolution of businesses. If there is no satisfactory solution, the prestige, brand name, image of individuals and businesses are really threatened. A concrete demonstration of the power of social media is the fact that First drink contains flies. Since December 3, 2014, a restaurant owner found out that there was a foreign object in Tan Hiep Phat's first water bottle that resembled a fly and he contacted the company asking to give it to him 500 million in exchange for silence. After many negotiations, Tan Hiep Phat enterprise agreed to give money to the owner, but while the two sides were doing transactions, the police came and caught him with the crime of extortion and rape property... Although in the position of "the victim", but Tan Hiep Phat enterprise fell into communication crisis. On social networks, there were many people who said that Tan Hiep Phat had trapped consumers and called for a boycott of this enterprise's products. This incident took place continuously for more than two months and has seriously affected the brand reputation and revenue of the business, estimated losses of more than 2,000 billion VND. The above incident has shown the terrifying "power" of "5th power" [8].

So businesses need to learn and practice crisis handling skills regularly. According to journalist Phan Minh Cuong, some issues that businesses need to pay attention to are as follows:

(1) Develop processes and methods for dealing with crisis

(2) Build core messages and manage the communication for that message in the crisis handling phase.

(3) Limiting the spread of scale and the impact of the crisis for businesses.

(4) Recognizing the importance of PR work, factors affecting the relationship between the press and the media department of the business.

(5) Grasping a number of characteristics in the functions, organization, operation and operational methods of press agencies.

(6) Master some skills for working with the press and deal wisely in front of the media.

Once the communication units of the business have well implemented the above-mentioned instructions, it will inevitably control the situation, limit to fall into a passive position when dealing with the crisis.

In addition, in order to handle a crisis, businesses must first of all be able to identify the crisis. The sign to identify is the occurrence of an incident that affects the image and brand of the enterprise rampant in the media, especially social networks. When the fire is spreading rapidly on social networks, businesses must really calm down to find ways to put out the fire. However, this also does not mean that we have the right slowly to be burned to ash. The way to put out the fire at this time should be especially concerned with the crowd's feelings, the customer's feelings. All the right and wrong arguments will be mentioned later because once emotions take the throne all explanations are meaningless. Standing on the side of the crowd, paying attention to their feelings, defusing with sincere apologies and promising to give reasonable explanations as soon as possible are the best way to solve the problems.

Along with the crisis identification is the calm - not panic attitude of the business. When we panic, we often confuse, make mistakes. Therefore, controlling one's own emotions is a point to note in order to embark on effective crisis handling.

To control the attack of social networks, to minimize the influence of the corporate image, some notable issues in the way of conducting are:

(1) Determine the level and cause of the crisis and quickly set up a crisis response unit to come up with a solution to deal with every second, not every minute.

(2) Apply necessary measures to reassure internal corporate psychology. When network information broke out, company leaders had to organize emergency meetings and give accurate and transparent information about stories being "rumored" by three unsuccessful stars being posted on social networks. When employees have all the information, call for calm; limit negative gossip and comments, unite to overcome the crisis facing businesses. Pay special attention to assigning a unified channel of speech, screening information sharing and personal opinions with the media without the permission of the company's leaders.

(3) Quickly have a coping strategy to put out the fire, to limit the spread outside. Regardless of the strategy to apply, the attitude of the company's leaders at this time is one of the most important key points in determining the outcome of the treatment. Calmness, listening, apologizing, and making an effort to correct the problem ... are what businesses need to show in this situation. Furthermore, to prevent the spread of crisis information as much as possible, company leaders need to send out an official message to relieve the curiosity of the crowd and promise to quickly handle the case. Initially reassuring public opinion by social networks

because this action shows a willingness to connect, ready for dialogue between businesses and the public. At the same time, actively invite customers to participate in exchanges and dialogues on social networks, corporate fan pages. This move helps to find common sympathy for the business, especially in the situation where the business is played badly by competitors without errors in the crisis.

(4) Immediately convey press releases on the website, fanpage and social networking sites. The content of the press release must be consistent, honest and accurate, attached to documents, data, etc. to illustrate the issues related to the crisis. This notice is also considered as an official statement to affirm the "truth" and to make transparent the information distributed on the internet.

(5) Must contact local authorities in the direction of lobbying so that the authorities can take timely action to handle the aggressive crowd, competitors take advantage of social networks to harm the image and brand of the business. Reality shows the degree of danger when businesses are "terrorized" online. If there is information intentionally woven, malicious, seriously affecting the reputation, honor, image and brand name of individuals and businesses, the involvement of the government is very necessary. There are even cases where the police have to step in to directly investigate and handle.

(6) Organize a "counterattack" on social media if it is identified as necessary and especially when having collected sufficient data / evidence to show the crisis of the publishing company from outside, from competitors, from conspiracy to harm the business.

The above are suggestions for crisis handling. In addition, some ways and attitudes towards reality should also be noted as follows:

- Do not have a harsh attitude towards the online community, but always have an attitude of desire, calm, and softness; do not speak out about issues outside of their expertise, understanding and incorrect with their position or role; Do not try to delete comments, delete unfavorable articles, etc.

Besides, should respect the truth, cooperate regularly with the media and social networks; bravely accept responsibility for the incidents that happened and sincerely apologize in time; always use all their abilities to evoke humanity, sense of community responsibility, national spirit so that the public can partly realize their civic responsibility to behave more culturally.

Thus, social networks have given the crowd enormous powers. However, if businesses recognize the focus of crisis, be more aware in preparing and preventing risks early; Listening to social networks (Social Listening)³ related to reputation, prestige, brand will surely minimize damage when a crisis occurs.

2.4. Some recommendations

Unlike bachelor training in other social sciences, vocational skills training is always the first priority in media training institutions. Therefore, based on the actual situation of dealing with media crisis in the above mentioned enterprises, it is necessary to give suggestions in training methods and teaching methods of some Journalism modules. Media crisis, especially in dealing with media crisis at Duy Tan University as follows:

- Strengthen the model of cooperation between training institutions and reputable press agencies, experienced journalists and media. The transformation of the traditional media under the development of modern

science and technology will create new media and media trends and trends. This is a challenge but also requires journalism training institutions, not only need to study trends, but also update professional knowledge, new teaching methods to meet the needs of human resources new social context.

- Strengthen the combination of theory and practice in the communication crisis management module. Even in the design of the training program, it should be necessary to integrate 2 contents: the theory will be carried out by an academically trained instructor, while the practice will be done by a communication crisis specialist at a business share industry. With experience in dealing with real situations, crisis handling specialists in enterprises will produce more suitable and practical solutions and strategies than applying theoretical frameworks when teaching.

- Implement cultural behaviors in the process of receiving and handling information sources at schools and other units. When receiving information, each staff, lecturers and students in the school need to verify the source, verify the reliability. When not thoroughly understanding, it should not distribute information and each individual in the school should adhere to the principles of being a spokesperson. Even on social networking sites, be very careful in posting and sharing news sources.

3. Conclusion

In short, in the context that the press has to compete with social networks, reeling from artificial intelligence, the journalism training must maintain the core value of human training, with a solid knowledge base, intensive intelligence, accurate reporting, humanism, community service. Due to the fact that the media crisis is always a danger that any

³ Social Listening can help businesses prevent media crisis before it happens because most crises are unpredictable and also difficult to prevent before it happens

individual or business can face, it is important to train the journalists and future media to identify the cause of the crisis and start a war. Strategy which is based on the fact that a specific roadmap and implementation plan is necessary. Controlling social media and media relations, and good public relations is an extremely important skill in the strategy of handling a media crisis that any individual or business should pay attention to minimize the damage.

References

- [1] Do Quy Doan (2014), Media Development and Management in Vietnam, Information and Communication Publishing House, Hanoi.
- [2] Phan Minh Cuong (2018), Online "terrorism" management and effective communication crisis handling, General Publishing House, Ho Chi Minh City, pp.81.
- [3] Philip Henslowe - translator Trung An & Viet Ha (2007), The basic secrets to success in PR, Youth Publishing House, Ho Chi Minh City
- [4] Dinh Thi Thuy Hang -(2009), Public Relations and Media, Labour and Social Affairs Publishing House Hanoi, pp.73.
- [5] Do Dinh Tan (2017), Press and Social Networks, Tre Publishing House, Ho Chi Minh City.
- [6] Pham Song Thu (2020), Win-Win Communication, Hanoi Publishing House, Hanoi, pp.23-24.
- [7] Hoang Tuan (2011), Understand and apply public relations for businesses, Youth Publishing House, Hanoi.
- [8] <http://phuoc-associates.com/vi/khung-hoang-truyen-thong/>
- [9] <http://www.slideshare.net/letranbaophuong/ky-nang-giai-quyet-khung-hoang-crisis-management-rt-hay>.