AN EXPLORATION OF THE USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA AT BALL STATE UNIVERSITY IN CRISIS MANAGEMENT

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BY
SAUD ABDULAZIZ ALSULAIMAN

DR. BECKY MCDONALD, CHAIR

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

The Internet has changed the nature of interactions between people and organizations. The Internet changes the way perceptions are shaped and how relationships are built between organizations, stakeholders, and the public. Studies have found that the emergence of social media and blogs has changed the way public relations is practiced and the way organizations communicate, especially to external audiences (Wright & Hinson, 2008).

According to Bingqi & Han (2009), the availability of social media encourages organizations to respond quickly to any criticism of the organization. Public relations practitioners are considered one of the most important departments to help the organization handle a crisis (Coombs, 2007).

Public relations practitioners must control the flow of information from an organization by developing and disseminating appropriate messages for key publics and the media during a crisis (Wigley & Zhang, 2011). A crisis must be handled effectively by public relations practitioners to prevent any damages and losses to an organization (Coombs, 2007). According to Coombs (2007), a crisis is “a significant threat to operations that can have negative consequences if not handled properly”. Fern- Banks
also defined a crisis as “a major occurrence with a potentially negative outcome affecting an organization, company, or industry as well as its publics, products or good name” (p.1).

According to Coombs (2008), there is a need for information to be sent out during a crisis to all key stakeholders. A research shows that social media can be a very useful way to disseminate information and to identify any potential crisis that could impact an organization. During a crisis, an organization needs to send messages to stakeholders including, employees and customers. Therefore, incorporating social media facilitates the communication between the organization and its key stakeholder publics. Coombs (2008) said social media facilitate the interaction between organizations and publics and help organizations monitor the external environment. Coombs (2008) defined social media as “the use of technology to facilitate interaction and sharing of information”.

Coombs (2008) said that the use of social media during a crisis helps organizations to respond and answer any inquiries from stakeholders and clients. Incorporating social media during a crisis can be very effective since it helps organizations send updated information to stakeholders and clients (Coombs, 2008).

A crisis could arise at any moment and incorporating social media helps organizations to control the situation and respond effectively before the situation grows worse. Incorporation of social media into organization crisis plans equips the organization to respond effectively to stakeholders (Coombs, 2008).
Not only can a crisis strike large or small organizations at any time, but crises can also strike universities and colleges as well (Leeper, K. & Leeper, R., 2007). Many crises have occurred recently at United States colleges and universities causing financial problems and damaging reputations. Penn State is a recent example of a university crisis with the revelation of the Sandusky sexual abuse scandal in 2011. Jerry Sandusky, an assistant football coach, sexually assaulted at least ten underage boys on university property and was charged with 45 out of 48 counts. This scandal affected university finances as well as damaging the reputation of one of the most admired universities in the country. The NCAA levied several sanctions on Penn State, including a $60 million fine against the university to be applied to fighting child abuse (Huss, 2012). According to the Penn State website, the university has paid a total of $41,059,671 as of December 31, 2012, including the first installment of 12 million to NCAA and $8.1 million to the internal investigation team.

Another example of a university crisis occurred when Hurricane Katrina hit New Orleans where many universities and colleges lost tuition revenues, lost all faculty and students’ records, causing a major financial crisis (Mitroff, 2006). Tulane University, for instance, was closed for four months after Hurricane Katrina. Classes were canceled and students were sent to other universities. According to the university website, this crisis caused several physical and financial damages for Tulane University. According to the Tulane University website (2011), the university lost $650 million to repair damages in the campus that were caused by the storm. Allen (2006) stated that the university spent
$200 million to repair the campus and the university cut more than two dozen Ph.D. programs.

Ball State University experienced a crisis in November, 2003 when an intoxicated student trying to find his house was fatally shot four times by a rookie Ball State police officer. The student was trying to enter a house he believed to be his own and police were notified, resulting in a university police officer being sent to the scene. An investigation of the incident found that there was no justification for this shooting since the student was intoxicated and found at the wrong house. Ball State’s students, community, and the media were outraged and the university was criticized heavily by local news media (Adams, 2004). One month following the shooting, Ball State University announced several changes to university police department policy. At the time of the crisis, Ball State University demonstrated good public relations practices where it appeared through spokespersons’ comments that they had been well prepared. During the time of the crisis, the university also provided consistent information to the media. However, the university was criticized for some aspects of the crisis. For instance, Ball State released important information to the media that related to the victim without notifying the victim’s family (Adams, 2004).

The presence of a strong strategic crisis communication plan would have helped Ball State University handle this crisis effectively and communicate more quickly with all stakeholders. Since Ball State University is known for its technological advancements, the incorporation of social media in the university’s crisis plan is necessary for Ball State
University to open new channels of communication with different audiences before, during and after a crisis.

**Background Information**

Ball State University was established in 1899 as a small private college owned by the Ball family and the Ball brothers. The five Ball brothers purchased the land and buildings, as well as the teaching training school. They donated them to the state of Indiana and this teaching training school then became a public university in 1918. The university is located in Muncie, Indiana, one hour north east of Indianapolis. Ball State University has an enrollment of 21,000 undergraduate and graduate students; the university offers approximately 180 undergraduate programs and more than 100 masters and doctoral degrees.

Ball State University has become known as a leader in the use of new and innovative technology that serves students, faculty, staff and external businesses. In fact, Ball State University received the 2012 New Media Consortium Center of Excellent Award for engaging digital media through the university’s Center for Media Design and Emerging Media Initiative.

Ball State University has also been recognized by the Association for Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education (AASHE) for its sustainability achievements. The university was also named one of the best universities in the midwest
by The Princeton Review for eight years. Ball State University has been given a gold rating as one of the highest institutions that is tracked by (AASHE).

**Objectives and Justifications for Study**

This thesis investigated the use of social media at Ball State University and how it is utilized in the university’s crisis planning and implementation. The researcher also sought to learn how the university distinguishes between a crisis and an emergency. The researcher also sought to determine barriers to using social media in Ball State’s crisis planning.

The case study method allowed the researcher to explore and evaluate social media usage at Ball State University. The case study method helped the researcher to acquire and analyze detailed and in-depth information about the use of social media and helped the researcher to answer the “why” and “what” questions. The case study method was also useful in helping the researcher to evaluate Ball State’s policies and usage of social media in their crisis planning and how effectively it was implemented by the university. It was determined that a qualitative research method, such as case study, would help the researcher provide a rich description of the case. This knowledge will add to the public relations literature by building knowledge for further research of crisis situations (Wimmer & Dominick, 2011; Stacks, 2001).

Completion of this case study about the use of social media at Ball State University will add to the public relations body of knowledge identifying strengths and
weakness in the development and improvement of not only public relations practices at Ball State University, but for public relations problems at other universities.
CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

The Case Study Method

The case study method is considered one of the most descriptive approaches to public relations and is highly valued in public relations (Stacks, 2001). The case study method allows the researcher the ability to describe and analyze events, organizations, or a person in detail. Stacks also defined a case study as “in-depth studies of particular people, organizations, events, or even processes” (2001, p.71).

A case study is considered one of the most common qualitative research methods. A case study is usually conducted when researchers need to understand or explain a phenomenon (Wimmer & Dominick, 2011). The amount of information that can be obtained from a case study depends on the problem and the amount of data available to the researcher. Public relations case studies can be similar to business case studies, such as cases published by the Harvard School of Business (Stacks, 2001).

In fact, a case study provides rich detail by looking in-depth at certain situations, events, or organizations. A case study analysis provides the researcher with comprehensive understanding of the case being observed (Stacks, 2001). Case studies are commonly used in different disciplines, such as law, business, advertising, medicine,
and public relations. It provides researchers the ability to evaluate and offer insight about good and bad practices of the case under the study (Stacks, 2001).

Merriam (1998) said that the advantage of a case study is to provide the researcher with a holistic view of the process (Merriam, 1998). As Yin (2008) noted, a case study method enables researchers to investigate important topics that cannot be easily covered by other methods. At the same time, Yin (2008) stated that some topics are easily covered by methods other than the case study, so every research method can serve different functions. A case study intends to answer descriptive questions (what happened) or an explanatory question, such as how and why (Yin, 2008).

The case study enables the researcher to look at a wide variety of evidence to obtain information about the case. The researcher can incorporate documents, interviews, observations, and even surveys can be used in a case study (Wimmer & Dominick, 2011).

**Crisis Communications**

Coombs defined a crisis as “a significant threat to operations that can have negative consequences if not handled properly” (Coombs, 2007). Researchers also defined an organizational crisis in several ways. Pearson and Mitroff defined an organizational crisis as “an incident or event that poses a threat to the organization's reputation and viability” (Pearson & Mitroff, 1993, p.49).
Fern-Banks described crisis as “a major occurrence with a potential negative outcome affecting the organization, company, or industry, as well as its publics, products, services, or good name” (Fern-Banks, 2007, p. 8).

Researchers have found that mass media is the most important communication channels for public relations practitioners during a crisis. Rapid and clear communication during a crisis increases the quality of decisions that are made by organizations. Without timely information during a crisis, the public will rely on available information even from another source or seek non reliable sources (Veil & Ojeda, 2010; David, 2011).

Fern-Banks (2007) said there is no relationship between the size of an organization and the crisis. A crisis could hit large corporations, small businesses, or an individual, so a crisis plan is needed for all types of organizations. As Fern-Banks said, “A crisis interrupts normal business transactional” and could destroy the organizations’ reputation. A crisis could be “fire”, “terrorism”, “boycott”, “product failures”, or other events that could damage the image of an organization (p. 8).

Therefore, public relations practitioners must prepare and plan for the worst that could happen to their organization. Public relations practitioners must prepare a plan with strategies and tactics in advance to be implemented before, during, and after a crisis (Fern-Banks, 2007).

Fern-Banks (2007) defined crisis management as “a process of strategic planning for a crisis or negative turning point, a process that removes some of the risk and
uncertainty from the negative occurrence and thereby allows the organization to be in
greater control of its own destiny” (Fern-Banks, 2007, p. 9).

Students of public relations quickly learn about the Tylenol case --a landmark
case in crisis management. In 1982, seven Chicago-area residents died as a result of
cyanide-laced Tylenol capsules. The makers of Tylenol Johnson & Johnson (J & J)
responded quickly to this crisis by pulling all Tylenol bottles from all stores nationwide at
a cost of $100 million for the product recall and relaunch. Mitroff said this was the
beginning of the modern field of public relations (Mitroff et al., 2006, p. 62). Mitroff et
al., commented about J&J’S reaction to this crisis:

*Thus signaling that it was putting the safety of consumers ahead of profits, served to
make J&J as an early role model for crisis management. Since then, a great deal has
been learned about how and why crises occur. Even more important, the components of
an ideal or “best practice” crisis- management program are much better understood.*

According to Banks (2007), crisis communications is “the dialog between the
organization and its public prior to, during, and after the negative occurrence” (p. 9).
However, Coombs (2007) said the purpose of crisis communication is “‘to prevent or
lessen the negative outcomes of a crisis and thereby protect the organization,
stakeholders, and industry from harm’” (Coombs, 2007, p. 5).

Public relations practitioners must communicate with the public and craft
messages with appropriate strategies and tactics to minimize damage to the image of an
organization. Public relations practitioners must also be concerned about the reputation of
their organizations when a crisis happens. Organization managers know that dealing
properly with a crisis could enhance and strengthen the reputation of an organization (Fern-Banks, 2007).

Gruing said “communication with publics before decisions are made is most effective in resolving issues and crises because it helps managers to make decisions that are less likely to produce consequences that publics make into issues and crises “(as cited in Paine, 2002, p. 2).

According to Watson & Nobel, Grunig provided four essential principles of crisis communication:

1- The relationship principle: an organization can withstand crises if it builds good relationships with key stakeholders.
2- The accountability principle: an organization should accept responsibility for a crisis even if it was not its fault.
3- The disclosure principle: during a crisis, an organization should disclose all it knows about a crisis and if it does not have enough information, it must promise to provide full disclosure of information at a later time.
4- The symmetrical communication principle: during a crisis, the public interest should be considered as important as the organization’s interests. Moreover, public relations practitioners must be able to scan the media coverage and know about any issue in order to withstand with any crisis that could hit their organizations (2005).
A research can help practitioners to anticipate any issue that could impact their organization (David, 2011). Applying research will help public relations professionals to design appropriate messages for their audiences. As Wright said: “if you don’t have research on the front end and evaluation on the end, it isn’t PR” (Stacks& Michaelson, 2010, p.16).

Public relations practitioners must understand that by acting appropriately and providing accurate information for the public and the media during the crisis, they will be better prepared to deal with any scenario they face. The public wants truthful and accurate information and providing that information will decrease any concern among stakeholders (David, 2011; Fern-Banks, 2007).

Fern-Banks (2007) identified five stages of a crisis:

1- Detection: Usually begins with “noting a warning sign”. When an organization is doing as the same business as your organization and it suffers from a crisis, it is a warning sign to your organization. It is important for an organization to be prepared and stop the crisis from happening in this stage (p.8).

2- Prevention/ preparation: In this stage an organization should already be engaged in two-way communication to strengthen mutual relationships with its key public. An organization must also communicate with the right audiences in order to prevent and lessen a crisis.

3- Containment: The efforts that are done by an organization in order to limit the duration of a crisis or “to keep it from spreading to other areas affecting the organization” (p. 14).

4- Recovery: Efforts that are made to return an organization to business as usual.
5- Learning: In this stage, an organization must examine its performance and learn the positive and negative actions that were done by the organization to evaluate it performances.

Internal communications is also considered a very important factor during a crisis, otherwise employees will act as the external audiences act (David, 2011). An organization must prepare their internal publics through appropriate channels to deal with a crisis when it happens. Communication with internal publics must be before, during, and after a crisis because they are “the principle representatives” and the most “believable spokespersons” of the organization (Fern-Banks, 2007, p. 36). Employees and other internal communications must be informed early in the “notification process” about the crisis (Fern-Banks, 2007, p. 38, Coombs, 2007).

According to David (2011), a good internal communication has several characteristics, such as honesty, openness, appropriateness (timely information), and “completeness provision of all the information needed by the members of an organization facing a crisis” (p.76).

Coombs (2006) stated that after analyzing the crisis communication/ management literature, three lessons are evident: be open, be quick, and be consistent. “Being quick” was the most recited lesson of crisis communication (p. 172). Coombs stated that most crisis experts emphasized the importance of getting information out within the first hour of the crisis. Getting information out within the first hour means letting stakeholders and the media know what type of information the organization has about the crisis (Coombs, 2006).
During a crisis, there is a need for information, and people want to know what happened. A crisis creates a demand for information, where journalists and stakeholders want to know exactly what happened (Coombs, 2006; Fern-Banks, 2007). Coombs (2006) also described a quick response as “an active response because it tries to fill the vacuum with facts” (p. 172). At the same time, he said a slow response could allow others to fill the vacuum with inaccurate information and speculations. Allowing others to provide information to stakeholders and the media increases the opportunity for people to attack the organization with inaccurate information.

The crisis response as Coombs (2007) defined “is what the top management does and says after the crisis strikes” the organization. Public relations practitioners always play a crucial role during a crisis designing and developing messages that are sent to a diversity of people (Coombs, 2007). Coombs said a crisis response has two parts:

1 - Initial response: This stage is focused on three guidelines: A- to be quick, B- accurate, C- consistent.

2- Post- Crisis phase.

Reynolds (2002) emphasized that, “In the initial phase of a crisis or emergency, people want information now. They want timely and accurate facts about what happened, and where, and what is being done” (p.8). Veil & Ojeda (2010) said it is important to encourage public relations practitioners to work with the media as a partner; this is the best practice in crisis communication. Also, it is important to provide several key implications that help public relations practitioners to build mutual relationships with the media in crisis communication (Veil & Ojeda, 2010):
1- Researchers found that organizations forthcoming with information are less likely to be targeted by mass media or the public. Organizations should engage the media during the crisis and work as a partner to solve the problem (Veil & Ojeda, 2010). According to Seeger (2006) organizations “should engage the media, through open and honest communication” (p.241).

2- Public relations practitioners must use the media not only as an information resource, but also as the manager of the resource.

3- Organizations must remain accessible to mass media during the crisis response.

4- A partnership with all parties that are involved in the situation will allow the public to gain some advantages from that cooperation.

5- Public relations practitioners must establish a relationship with media before a crisis because that will facilitate the communication between the media and organizations (Veil & Ojeda, 2010).

Fern-Banks (2007) provided several suggestions for public relations practitioners during a crisis. Public relations practitioners can use the traditional media to get their information out to large numbers of people, but with the existence of the Internet, it became much easier to communicate with large numbers of people. Public relations practitioners may also get information out through emails, Web sites, blogs etc.

It is important to speak with one voice during a crisis. An organization must identify a primary spokesperson in order to “reduce the possibility of conflicting statements, organization values, or explanations being released to the media” (Fern-Banks, 2007, p. 25; Coombs, 2007). Coombs (2007) said that the idea of speaking with
one voice does not mean only one person speaks for an organization. It’s impossible to have only one person speaking for an organization especially if the crisis lasts for long. Organizations are encouraged to use multiple spokespersons and provide them with the latest information, so that the spokespersons can convey consistent messages.

Coombs (2007) suggested before the crisis, public relations practitioners must ensure that spokespersons have the proper media relations skills and training. During a crisis, organizations must focus their efforts on delivering key information to the public rather than being concerned about how to manage the media. Coombs also said that it’s important to provide the public with information after the crisis occurs especially when the crisis is related to public safety. People need to hear something during the incident in order relieve their concern (Coombs, 2007). People also want to know who is responsible for the crisis and what is being done to overcome it (Fern-Banks, 2007).

Although there are many ways to reach people during a crisis that involves public safety, Coombs (2007) said that the best way to reach people and victims during a crisis is through the traditional media. By using news media during a crisis, organizations can send information out quickly and with wide range. Though sending messages out through traditional media might reach non-target publics, speed and reach are more important during initial stage of the crisis (Coombs, 2007).

Reynolds (2002) said that leaders who are responsible for a crisis should make decisions about what, when, how, where, whom, why to release information. People want to hear consistent messages not different messages from an organization. Releasing inconsistent messages during a crisis will make the public to lose trust in official
responses and will make them question every statement or recommendation from an organization. Reynolds emphasized the importance of clearly defining the role and responsibility between all parties involved in the crisis without causing a power struggle or confused responses from organization officials.

Organizational representatives play significant roles during a crisis. They should show empathy to victims and people who are hurt by the crisis. Victims might have lost money, family, friends, become ill, injured, had to evacuate, or suffered property loss or damage. Scholars say that expressions of concern may help organizations minimize reputational damages and financial losses (Coombs, 2007). While some crises could result in serious injuries and deaths, organizations are encouraged to include stress and trauma counseling for employees and other victims (Coombs, 2007).

According to Coombs (2007), organizations are encouraged to continue to manage the crisis after the crisis because the upper management usually doesn’t pay adequate attention to what happened during the crisis. He said that crises should be given more attention even if the crisis is done. Repairing an organization’s reputation may be continued for long time, so the organization is required to follow-up communication with all victims. During this stage, the crisis manager must deliver the promises that had been given to the public during the crisis. Crisis managers have to do what they have said to the public and fulfill their promises otherwise they put the organization in risk.

When organizations do not provide additional information to the public during the post crisis phase and do not fulfill their promises, people will not trust the organization. Organizations are encouraged to provide updates and new information during the
recovery process in order to be more connected with the public. Organizations can use many ways to communicate with the public and provide them with updates through the Internet, email, mail, text messages, or via phones (Coombs, 2007). According to Fern-Banks (2007), during the recovery stage an organization needs to restore the confidence of its key publics.

While a crisis could impact an organization at any time, Leeper, K. & Leeper, R. (2006) stated that a crisis could also happen to colleges or universities. According to Leeper, K. & Leeper, R. (2006), most crisis situations at colleges and universities involve financial stability, student and personnel problems, or accreditation. Public relations practitioners are responsible for handling the situation and the media during the crisis and monitor the situation. Leeper, K. & Leeper, R. (2006) emphasized the importance of involving public relations practitioners in the strategic decision making process of university crisis planning.

Madere (2007) emphasized the importance of using the website for a crisis that affects universities. By using the website, universities can tell their side of the story, reduce the perception of uncertainty by the public, and address stakeholder needs (Madere, 2007). Mitroff, I. I., Diamond, M. A., & Alpaslan (2006), stated that universities and colleges have survived all types of crises from natural disasters to “grade scandals” but only with a proper plan. Mitroff et al. (2006), emphasized that the complexity of “institutional operations, technology, and infrastructure increases, the risks facing universities” (p. 62). Mitroff et al., reviewed university web sites and found that some are prepared for “physical disasters,” but not for reputational crises (2006, p. 62).
Mitroff noted several types of crisis that are more likely to happen on campuses. Universities are more likely to encounter many things, such as:

“serious outbreaks of illnesses, major food tampering, employee sabotage, fires, explosions, chemical spills, environmental disasters, significant drops in revenues, natural disasters, loss of confidential/sensitive information or record, major lawsuit, terrorist attacks, damage to institutional reputation, ethical breaches by administrators/faculties and trustees, major crimes, and athletic scandals” (2006, p. 62-63).

Mitroff et al., emphasized that university officials must be aware of future crises by listening “to signals that might indicate a bomb is about to explode” (2006, p.63).

Mitroff et al, also addressed the importance of having a management team that is trained and prepared for a crisis inside or outside universities. Having a management team for universities will help them recover from the crisis faster and with fewer losses (2006).

A study titled “How Prepared Are American Colleges and Universities for a Crisis” was prepared by Mitroff et al. in 2004 for the provosts of 350 major U.S colleges and universities in order to discover if universities and colleges are prepared for crises. The study found that universities and colleges generally were prepared for the types of crises that had already occurred and they said did not follow the best practice model of crisis management (Mitroff et al., 2006). According to Mitroff et al., (2006) three most common crises that universities and colleges in the United States had experienced were fires, lawsuits, and crimes. The fourth and fifth most common crises which the U.S colleges and universities prepared for were environmental disasters and athletic scandals respectively.
According to Mitroff et al., some crises have been experienced frequently by U.S colleges and universities but not prepared for, including crises of reputation and ethics. The study also found that most universities and colleges did not have a crisis management team that comprised of different administrative, faculty, and technical staff. In addition, universities that had proactive plans were more likely to handle a crisis (Mitroff et. al., 2006).

The major finding in Mitroff’s study was that universities and colleges in the United States do not differentiate between crisis management teams and emergency response teams. The study also found that crisis management is confused with planning for an emergency situation. The emergency team is usually responsible for the continuity of the business functions and services of an organization by preparing and responding to environmental and natural disasters. Nevertheless, crisis management is a process of strategic planning for a wide range of possible crises that anticipates the signals of crises before it happens (Mitroff, 2006).

The Importance of Social Media

According to Forrester Research, 75% of those people who use the Internet used social media in the second quarter of 2008 by joining social networks, reading blogs, and contributing reviews to shopping websites. The Nilesen (2012) social media report stated that, people in the United States spent 121 billion minutes using social media through
their PC and mobile phones in July 2012 increasing 37% compared to July 2011 (Nilesen, 2012).

The idea of social media goes back to Tom Truscott from Duke University in 1979 when he created the Usenet, a worldwide discussion system that allowed Internet users to post public messages. But the era of social media really began twenty years earlier when Bruce and Susan Abelson established “Open Diary” an early social networking site that allowed online diary writers to write into one community. The term “weblog” was first used then, and years later it was changed to blog. The creation of high speed Internet added more popularity to social media and encouraged people to create social network sites, such as MySpace in 2003 and Facebook in 2004. While there are many different social media sites, it can be difficult to classify those websites in categories (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010, p. 60). According to Kaplan & Haenlein, there are several types of social media, including “collaborative projects, blogs, content communities, social networking sites, virtual games worlds, and virtual social worlds.”

Kaplan & Haenlein (2010) defined social media as: “a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological functions of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of User Generated Content” (p. 61). Examples of those are, YouTube, Facebook, blogs, Twitter, and MySpace.

Social media allows people to connect with each other by creating personal information profiles, inviting friends, sending messages, and uploading photos and videos. Several companies and organizations are using social media in order to support the creation of their products and services. For instance, “the Adidas custom soccer community on MySpace allows visitors to associate themselves with one of two brands
of elite soccer cleats produced by the German sports apparel manufacturer, and to access product reviews and information on professional soccer players who play using “their” shoes” (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010, p. 64).

Kaplan & Haenlein (2010) provided several recommendations for firms that want to use social media or to be social. Researchers provided some guideline that companies should follow, including:

1- Choose carefully; choose the right application that fits with your organization’s objectives. There are hundreds of social media sites and one organization simply cannot participate in them all. Organizations should choose the appropriate applications for their target publics because each application attracts a certain group of people and the company must be active wherever their audiences present.

According to Kaplan & Haenlein (2010), it is highly recommended to choose an application that has certain features that will ensure effective communication with the public because not all applications offer same features. In 2007, for instance, the U.S. Army chose the social networking site Univision to reach the Hispanic community instead of Facebook due the fact that Univision is considered one of the most popular social networks among Latin American audiences.

2- Pick the application, or make your own: sometimes there is no right application that is available for use; therefore, the organization could launch its own application. For instance, Japan’s Fujifilm, launched its own social network in order to build a community of photos.

3- Ensure activity alignment: sometimes organizations decide to use more than one social media application in order to reach the largest possible amount of people. Researchers
say that it is important to ensure that your social media activities are aligned with each other. Dell, for instance, uses multiple social media platforms in order to promote its products and services, such as Facebook, LinkedIn, blogs, and YouTube. Chrysler’s Jeep division also connects with its customers by combining photos shared on the content community platform Flickr and with groups on social networking sites such as MySpace and Facebook. Using different platforms to connect with audiences can be valuable for any organization; yet, researchers say that companies that use a combination of social media sites must ensure that there is no contradiction in their messages.

4- Integrated media plan: organizations must use both traditional and social media while connecting with the public. A great example can be seen with Coca-Cola:

In June 2006, a pair of performance artists shot a video featuring a series of geysers they created by dropping Mentos brand mints into 2-liter bottles of Coke; the clip became a major hit on YouTube. Realizing customers’ enthusiasm for this performance, Coca-Cola fostered the sensation by airing the video on late-night television and ensuring broad digital distribution across different content communities. Besides the advantage of high impact/low cost media coverage, the campaign also resulted in a measurable sales uplift (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010, p.65).

5-Access for all: organizations must ensure that all employees are capable of accessing and using social media applications. While some organizations block some social media sites, such as Facebook, sometimes organizations need to allow employees to use social media in order to interact with the external public. Many organizations work to create videos, photos, and ads in order to upload them to YouTube or other websites. To achieve this, organizations require full access for their employees to these platforms.

6-Be active: once the organization opens a social media account, the organization must continue to be active with their audiences. Social media is all about sharing benefits and interaction between the organization and the public. Organizations must engage in
discussion with their customers and try to solve any misunderstandings or problems that customers face. Moreover, organizations must provide information to customers and engage in conversation with them.

7-Be interesting: organization’s messages must be more interesting because no one will listen to or read boring messages. Organizations must listen to customers and figure out what they want and need in order to establish creative and appropriate messages. Starbucks, for example, created the “My Starbucks idea” platform which allowed customers to submit new ideas for the company. These ideas are voted on by users with the winning idea being considered for implementation by Starbucks top management.

8-Be humble: Organizations must learn the rules of using a social media application as well as the history of it. They also must spend time trying different features in order to be more familiar with them.

9-Be unprofessional: organizations do not need to spend a lot of money to design perfect pages or hire professionals to manage the company blogs. The “chairman and CEO of the Marriott International Hotel chain, uses his blog, for example, to post regular updates and stories from his travels to Marriott properties around the world—very much in the same way as would a work colleague when describing her last vacation” (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010, p.66-67).

10-Be honest: organizations must provide truthful information and respect all opinions in order to build mutual relationships between the organization and the public. To gain trust from the public, organizations must behave in an ethical way in order to close the gap.
It is important to adopt the use of social media and implement it as a tool to communicate with the public. The public can get free information from the Internet which can change the way perceptions are shaped and how relationships are built (Wright & Hinson, 2008).

According to Bingqi & Han (2009), public relations practitioners should use new technologies, such as email, group chat, websites, and other Internet media in order to reach new audiences as well as retaining current ones. Using new technologies can help organizations to strengthen its relationship with audiences. By using new technologies, public relations professionals can conveniently reach specific audiences, such as less mobile and rural population than traditional media do. Also, using new technologies can provide direct two way interaction between the organization and the public.

Organizations must open new ways of communication between the organization and the public by establishing what they call “dialogic loop” which allows the public to interrogate organizations and provide information, and for organizations to do the same for the public (Bingqi & Han, 2009, p.21).

New media has brought some opportunities for media users to participate in the process of creation of public content and the result is costumer generated media (CGM). In 2006, Time magazine selected the person of the year as “YOU” the one who controls the age of information (Bingqi & Han, 2009). Customer generated media includes new media technologies, such as blogs, chat rooms, podcasting, newsgroups, and social media which allow an organization’s public to say whatever they want on the Internet. At the same time a lot of ideas came out, such as consumer generated content (CGC), user
generated media (UGM), user generated online video (UGOV), and social media; therefore, such new technologies allow people and organizations to involve and interact with each other. Consumer generated media allows audiences to become more active participants in the public relations process (Bingqi & Han, 2009).

Free content available via social media sites can build mutual understanding between organizations and the public. Users can enter free text, upload movies, pictures, files, and animation which allow them to communicate easily with organizations. According to Wright & Hinson, who did a three year international survey of public relations practitioners’ in 2008, the results showed that social media are dramatically changing public relations practice. Results show that blogs and social media have improved and enhanced what happens in public relations. The development of new technologies have empowered public relations practitioners to share knowledge, market services, and open two-way communication with the public (Wright and Hinson, 2008).

Wright & Hinson (2008) found that the emergence of social media and blogs have changed the way that organizations communicate especially with their external audiences. The study also found that social media encourages organizations to respond quickly to any criticism (Wright & Hinson, 2008).

A good example of consumer generated media appeared in “Dell Hell” in 2006 when a customer experienced a problem with the company’s formerly flawless costumer service. The customer established a blog and went to war with Dell using his blog as a weapon to attack the company. His blog worked effectively to draw international attention. What happened as a result, Dell lunched a blog in July 2006 in order to respond actively to the issue. More important, the blog appeared in different languages, such as
English, French, Spanish, Japanese, Chinese, and so on. In February 2007, Dell went further and launched IdeaStorm which allows users to give feedback about the company and its product. Bingqi & Han (2009) said that Market Sentinel, an expert commented on that by saying:

*Dell was reaching out into the world of blogs and user-generated media. Perhaps the most potent and valuable business lesson Dell has absorbed from its experiences lies in the way the company has taken to its business methods the idea of dialogue with its consumers.* (Bingqi & Han, 2009, p.26)

Public relations professionals were some of the first people to embrace the power of social media and are continuing to be the ones who are leading the way in this social space. Since its inception, the Internet has had a huge impact on how public relations practitioners function. The impact of social media continues to change the face of public relations practice (Swallow, 2010).

Swallow conducted a study of 14 public relations practitioners about the future of public relations and how they see social media changing the PR industry. The study focused on different aspects, such as how social media would affect the future of the press release, the evolution of social platforms, current limitations and solutions for those limitations, connecting with PR professionals, cost saving, and building relationships (Swallow, 2010). Study findings said that social media is changing the practice of public relations in many ways:

The future of press release: the first press release was created by Ivy Lee in 1906 and PR professionals continue to use it. However, during the ‘90s online newswire services emerged like PRNewswire’s MultiVu multimedia release decreasing reliance on fax machines and emails for disseminating new releases (Swallow, 2010).
During the past few years, public relations practitioners have also witnessed a shift toward social media. Amanda Miller Littlejohn, founder of Mopwater Social Public Relations said that:

_While I don’t believe the press release is dead, it has been transformed, to become this living, breathing thing. If a release doesn’t have a social element — that is, a way for viewers to comment or share to their social networks — it doesn’t have legs._ (Swallow, 2010)

Vistaprint’s Public Relations Manager Jeff Esposito says that the press release will continue to evolve into multiple iterations for various audiences, channels, and situations. He also said:

_Over the next five years, I think we’ll see three types of press releases that will assist different audiences. The first is in a video format where there will be a short description followed by a link to a video giving information on the news from a company source, hitting on the five W’s and also offering sound-bites that can be used for stories or added to a news story. The second iteration will be a further evolution of the social press release that is being used today, except more brief and more focused. The final is similar to what we see now with company boiler plates, stock quotes and additional information._ (Swallow, 2010)

Lou Hoffman, CEO of The Hoffman Agency said:

_I don’t think the news release will die in the foreseeable future, say the next five years. Even if the syndication of this content has little impact on the target stakeholders, they’ll still be generating backlinks, which by themselves deliver a decent ROI. Looking beyond five years, I could see the algorithms of search engines becoming smart enough to discern whether a backlink comes from syndicated content, which in turn causes it to greatly reduce the value of the backlink. In other words, even if a news release is syndicated on The Wall Street Journal, with all the “authority” that comes with the site, the search engine figures out that it’s nothing more than a republished news release, so scores the backlink super low. If this happened, we would see the volume of news releases significantly decline._ (Swallow, 2010)
The evolution of social platform: according to Swallow, the most important platforms for public relations professionals in the future will be the ones most targeted for their clients. New sites, such as Facebook and Twitter help public relations professionals become better PR professionals and understanding their clients’ businesses and what they do (2010). Heather Whaling, founder and president of Geben Communication said that social media platforms will continue to evolve, but PR professionals’ jobs remain the same. He also said public relations professionals must choose the right platforms in order to approach effective communication (Swallow, 2010).

The majority of public relations practitioners now are using social media as a broadcasting tool for dissemination of press releases and news. The next generation of public relations professionals will use social media as a listening and communicating tool. Many public relations believe that using social media like Facebook and Twitter are useful for them but they confront some difficulty in finding the right target publics. PR experts say “In the future, directories with the ability to search for target demographics across a broad range of social networks would make the process of finding the best platforms with the right audiences much easier” (Swallow, 2010).

Moreover, many public relations professionals say that social media platforms help them to save time. Social media allow public relations professionals to communicate and give advice to each other through different platforms, such as Facebook and Twitter. Social media allows public relations professionals to discuss their problems with each other which make them find best solutions for any problem. Social media also helps companies save money through enhancing traditional and online campaigns. For example, INgage Networks’ company saved $270K annually in expenses by relying on
social media. The company had previously paid $250K annually for an external public relations agency and $20K for events, traveling, and promotion expenses. The company saved all that money by bringing their PR in-house and focusing on social media (Swallow, 2010).

Most public relations professionals believe that social media help companies to build relationships with their stakeholders. In fact, social media helps PR professionals to build mutual relationships with their audiences. PR professionals interact with the public about their companies and that forces public relations professionals to respond quickly to any inquiry or issue (Swallow, 2010).

Many public relations professionals believe that using social media can build brand loyalty and turn customers into fans of their company. They say that creating a Twitter account allows them to sponsor giveaways and hold promotions and monitor Twitter conversations to target consumers. Josh Jones-Dilworth, the founder and CEO of the PR and marketing consulting firm Jones-Dilworth, Inc. said that “it’s fairly easy to measure conversations and engagement on an empirical level, putting that analytical data into context so that it can be evaluated as cause and effect is considerably more difficult”. He continues saying:

*Right now we are doing a lot of work to mash up social data with business data to get cause and effect. Some products are starting to support this action — but only a few. I think this is the next big wave. You’ve got to be able to tie causes to effects, and that is the big challenge right now, what all our clients want, and what is frankly the hardest to accomplish. (Warren, 2010)*

Moreover, using social media can help public relations professionals to strengthen crisis communication. There is an old saying “If you’re not quick, you’re not relevant.”
Public relations professionals must learn how to manage a crisis in 140-character bursts of information. That means public relations professionals must continue their education in social media, monitoring search terms and key words, being responsive, dispelling the misconceptions, and communicating the facts (Whaling, 2011).

There are many successful PR campaigns that have used social media to promote awareness of their products. One example was seen when Healthy Choice (ConAgra Foods) sought to increase its Facebook fan base and increase engagement with consumers and reinforce the brand’s reputation for value. Therefore, the company started by putting progressive coupons on their Facebook page. The coupons began as low value ($0.75 off) and increased as people “liked” the page and signed up for the coupon, ultimately reaching a “buy-one-get-one-free” deal. During only two weeks the Healthy Choice Facebook page grew from 6,800 to 60,000 fans and the company distributed more than 50,000 buy one get one free coupons (Black, 2011).

Phillips (2001) said that there are several key points that can help public relations practitioners know how many people reach certain websites. Those factors are:

1- References in newsgroup.

2- Hyperlink to the site.

3- Ranking with the search engines.

4- Online media awareness of the websites.

5- Speed by which information is carried across the Internet.
Public relations practitioners can also use tracking tools that allow them not only to monitor the site but also to know where hits originated. A public relations professional who uses this technique in Australia stated that they have a tool that allows them to monitor site activities and to know the origin of hits (Watson & Nobel, 2005).

Avery, et al. studied (2010) more than 281 public relations practitioners in public health departments serving four different sizes of community (urban, suburban, large town, and rural) in 48 states. The purpose of study was to examine the extent to which social media was adopted by public health agencies and moderators. There were significance differences based on the size of community. The study found that the urban communities were more likely to adopt social media followed by suburban, large town, and rural areas. 17% of practitioners indicated that they use social media to disseminate health information. The study found that the most commonly used tools were social networking sites followed by the new media release, blogs, and discussion boards. Evidence among professionals is mounting that public relations leads other communication activities within organization in the realm of social media. Researchers say that social media is like the basis of public relations itself, it builds relationships with the public (Avery & Lariscy, 2010).

Social media are inherently communicative, interactive, and social. Some researchers say that there is diffusion of social media across different companies. A study was done among public relations practitioners to study social media adoption and found that high technology firms are among the earliest adopters of all new technologies. The research found that public relations practitioners who embrace new online technologies
are more likely to have more power and influence within their organizations than others (Avery & Lariscy, 2010).

Overall low adoption of social media documented in a study that surveyed 283 public relations professionals in major metropolitan area and found that practitioners are more likely to be more comfortable with using established and institutionalized tools, such as email and the Internet. Yet the study found that public relations practitioners are slower to adopt new technologies that have complicated tools, such as text messaging, social media, and virtual worlds. The study found that of 283 public relations practitioners, only 68 practitioners (24%) used social networking media, and 51 practitioners (18%) used wikis in order to communicate with their audiences (Avery & Lariscy, 2010).

The same study also found that using social media led to more effective health campaigns. They found that public relations practitioners who used blogs are more likely to have power than others. Many studies have been studied both public relations and journalists for their uses of blogs and other social media. The study found that journalists were more likely to rate blogs as more credible that public relations practitioners do. Blogs play significant role in the journalists’ source mix. In studies of the relationship-building of blogs, researchers found that users rated blogs more positively than Web sites. Researchers also found that public relations practitioners who read blogs are more likely to avoid crisis than others. Many studies provide powerful evidence for positive impacts of using interactive social media comparing to websites (Avery & Lariscy, 2010).
Smith (2010) said that social media technologies have shifted the power of communication from public relations practitioners to social media users who may not even have any interest in the organization. Researchers said that social media “empower public relations functions”, “provide tangible measurement metrics”, and “facilitate environmental scanning”. Social media networks allow people to interact with the organization, exchange information, and solve problems. “Social media users collaborate in content creation, are proactive of searching information, and value control in social media participation” (Smith, 2010).

Most organizations use social media in order to increase interaction with the public through inputs and outputs in order to build mutual relationships. Researchers found five ways that websites can facilitate a relationship between organizations and the public, which are “usefulness of information, feedback loops, ease of interface, conservation of visitors and generation of return visits” (Smith, 2010).

Smith, (2010) also stated that there are two online relationship strategies: communicated commitment and conversational human voice. Communicated commitment means that organizations communicate legitimacy and openness while conversational human voice means that organizations connect personally with the public. Moreover, researchers found that both communicated commitment and conversational human voice relate positively with public relations outcomes (Smith, 2010).

A study found that most public relations practitioners use social media daily. They found that public relations practitioners who write or maintain blogs are more likely to have prestige power and expertise power than who do not (Sweetser & Kelleher,
According to Sweetser & Kelleher, public relations practitioners who use social media networks, such as Twitter are more likely to be involved with public than others. The study also found that 41 of 70 public relations practitioners are described as everyday users of social media networks (2010).

The Social Media Reality Check 2.0 Survey was done by Canada Newswire and Leger Marketing of public relations practitioners found that only 39% of PR professionals used social media in 2009. The same study repeated again in 2011 and found that the number of Twitter usage among public relations practitioners has jumped to 76%. Moreover, the study found that the number of organizations that have a budget devoted to social media have doubled since 2009 from 15% to 32% in 2011. The study stated that the major objectives of using social media among public relations practitioners were awareness by 66% and dialog by 59% in 2009. However, in 2011 visibility has become in the top by 73% and awareness by 70% (Canada Newswire, 2011).

Wigley & Zhang (2011) conducted a survey with 251 members of Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) exploring social media and crisis planning. Approximately half of respondents (48%) reported that they have incorporated social media into their crisis plans. Also, Wigley & Zhang found that most respondents indicated that they have incorporated Twitter as a primer tool for distribution purposes in their crisis planning. The study also found that public relations practitioners whose organizations rely heavily on social media in their crisis planning are more likely to have great confidence in their organization’s ability to handle a crisis (2011).
According to Veil, Buehner, & Palenchar (2011), social media platforms, such as Twitter were used during a variety of crises in order to get information out to stakeholders (2011). Twitter was used in 2007 and 2008 in California wildfires in order to get initial information and updates out to the public. Twitter was also incorporated to get information out, such as Mumbai Massacre, the crash of the US Airways flight 1549 in 2009, the Haiti earthquake during 2010 etc. (Veil et al., 2011). New media encourages people to engage, prepare, and interact during a crisis “by making the topic visual and interactive” (Veil et al., 2011, p. 112).

It is important to incorporate social media during a crisis to dialogue with the public and educate them regarding the risk of the crisis. Organizations could also use social media during a crisis to post video and audio since “interactive media are often preferred source of information” (Veil et al., 2011, p. 113). More important, social media helps organizations to monitor external environment and seeks for warning sign which helps organizations to prevent a crisis (Veil, et al., 2011).

Based on results from the review of literature, the researcher posed with the following research questions that would determine the use of social media at Ball State University. The goal of this study was to explore how Ball State incorporates social media and whether social media is incorporated into their crisis planning or not.

**Research Questions**

This case study sought to answer the following research questions:

RQ1- How is Ball State University using social media?
RQ2- How is Ball State University incorporating social media in their crisis planning?

RQ3- What does Ball State consider a crisis and an emergency?

RQ4- What are the main reasons of using social media at Ball State University?
CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

The following case study defined, explored, and analyzed the use of social media at Ball State University. This research methodology was particularly useful to help the researcher to collect in depth data about the use of social media at Ball State University. This case study was also useful to explore and illustrate the main reasons of using social media at the university and how it used into their crisis planning. This case study was useful to help the researcher to learn how Ball State University defines a crisis and an emergency. Also, the case study would determine the perceptions of public relations practitioners about the use of social media at Ball State University. The researcher used an exploratory case study type since this type of case study is used to explore a situation in which the intervention has no specific or clear outcome (Yin, 2008).

Under the case study, the researcher incorporated Ball State’s website, online survey, and interviews in order to obtain in depth information about the use of social media at Ball State University.
Sample and procedure

Online Survey

The researcher incorporated an online survey that sought to collect data from 25 public relations practitioners to explore their perceptions about the use of social media at Ball State University. The researcher did a census from the directory of Ball State University by searching job titles. The census included Ball State University staff members titled as “Media Relations Manager, Communications Assistant, Directory Communications, Associate VP for Communications, Marketing Communications, Communications Manager, Communications Specialists, Marketing Communications Manager, and Directory of Public Relations”.

An online survey offers some advantages, such as low cost, does not consume time, has no geographic limitations, easy to use, fast to reach the population, and respondents have no limit time to complete the survey. Moreover, the online survey can be more flexible in using and collecting the data. The website google.docs.com was used to host the survey and each practitioner was emailed a link four times to answer the questions because there were delays in responses from most practitioners. The questions were both multiple-choice and Likert-style questions. The aim of the questions was to evaluate the perceptions of public relations practitioners at Ball State University about the use of social media during a crisis and to determine the main reasons for using social media at Ball State University.
**Interviews**

The researcher examined the use of social media at Ball State University by conducting an email interview with the Associate Director of Web Development who is responsible for incorporating social media at Ball State University. The researcher asked her several questions regarding the use of social media and the main reasons for using social media at Ball State University. The purpose was to see whether Ball State incorporates social media, such as Facebook and Twitter into their crisis planning or not and the types of messages that are posted in their official pages.

Next, the researcher conducted a personal interview with the Director of Marketing who is a member of the crisis management team at Ball State University. The researcher sought to determine how social media is incorporated at Ball State and if it is used in their crisis planning. The researcher also tried to obtain in depth information of how Ball State defines a crisis and an emergency. The meeting took place at the Director of Marketing’s office and lasted 30 minutes.

**Ball State’s website**

In this case study, the researcher also incorporated Ball State’s website and documents to obtain detailed information about the study. A Ball State Crisis Management Protocol document was investigated to see the university crisis plans. This protocol was obtained from the Ball State University website at [www.bsu.edu](http://www.bsu.edu) on 3/13/2013.
CHAPTER IV: RESULTS

Survey

The following results were based on the 7 responses from public relations/communication practitioners at Ball State University. Of all 25 public relations/communication practitioners at Ball State University only 7 people responded to the questions, for a response rate of 28%.

Study Demographic

Gender

Figure 1.1 showed that the gender distribution of the survey was (7) respondents (43%) were male and (57%) were female.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 1.1: Distribution of study sample according to gender
Age

Four people out of 7 stated that they ranged from 35-44 (57%) and 3 people stated that they ranged from 45-54 (43%). In Figure 1.2 the respondents were divided to two groups. The first group ranged from 35-44 and the second group ranged from 45-54 years.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>35-44</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45-54</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 1.2: Distribution of study sample according to age

Level of education

According to Figure 1.3, 57% of respondents reported that they hold a bachelor degree while 43% hold masters degrees.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Educational level</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High school</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Master</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doctorate</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 1.3: Distribution of study sample according to educational level
Experience

As is shown in Figure 1.4, when practitioners were asked how long they have been practicing public relations, (3) respondents (43%) indicated that they have practiced public relations for more than 10 years. (3) Respondents (43%) indicated they have practiced public relations for 3-5 years. (1) Respondents (14%) indicated they have practiced public relations for 5-10 years.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of years</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3-5 years</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-10 years</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than 10 years</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 1.4: Distribution of study sample according to number of years in the practice of public relations

When practitioners were asked does Ball State incorporate the use of social media into their crisis plans, there were different answers. (2) Respondents (29%) indicated that Ball State incorporates the use of social media into crisis plans and (3) respondents (43%) indicated that Ball State does not use social media into their crisis plans, while (2) respondents indicated they did not know. When practitioners were asked how many people at Ball State are responsible for incorporating the use of social media, all respondents (100%) stated that there are several people incorporating the use of social media at Ball State.
As seen in Figure 1.5 when asked to what extent do you agree with each statement, 3 respondents (43%) agreed that they use social media to communicate with traditional media, such as television or newspaper while the other (3) respondents (43%) strongly agreed with the statement. However, only one respondent answered neutral. (4) Respondents (57%) strongly agreed and (2) respondents (29%) agreed that they use social media to listen to what people are saying about the university, while (1) respondent (14%) disagreed. The majority of respondents (86%) agreed and (1) respondent (14%) strongly agreed that they use social media to communicate with students and faculties. Moreover, (4) respondents (57%) agreed and (2) respondents (29%) strongly agreed that they use social media to identify potential problems or issues before they become a crisis, while (1) respondent (14%) were neutral. (3) Respondents (43%) of public relations practitioners at Ball States University agreed and (4) respondents (57%) strongly agreed that they use social media to disseminate information out.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I use social media to communicate with members of traditional media such as newspapers or TV</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>14% (1)</td>
<td>43% (3)</td>
<td>43% (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I use social media to listen to what people are saying about the University</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>14% (1)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>29% (2)</td>
<td>57% (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I use social media to communicate with students and faculty</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>86% (6)</td>
<td>14% (1)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As seen in Figure 1.6, when asked to what extent do you think that Ball State relies on each form of social media for crisis planning, there were different answers. (2) Respondents (29%) strongly agreed and (1) respondent (14%) agreed that Ball State incorporates Facebook into their crisis planning while (1) respondent (14%) disagreed and (1) respondent (14%) strongly disagreed with that. However, (2) respondents (29%) answered neutral. Practitioners also indicated that Twitter is incorporated into crisis planning where (2) respondents (29%) strongly agreed and (1) respondent (14%) agreed. (2) Respondents (29%) indicated they were neutral, (1) respondent (14%) disagreed, and (1) respondent (14%) strongly disagreed. (3) Respondents (43%) were neutral about the use of Flicker and the others disagreed by 29% and strongly disagreed by 29%.

The majority of practitioners strongly disagreed that Ball State incorporates MySpace into crisis planning by 71%, while 29% were neutral. When asked about YouTube, 43% were neutral, 14% disagreed, and 29% strongly disagreed. When asked about Blogs, 57% were neutral, 14% disagreed, and 29% strongly disagreed.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social Media</th>
<th>14%</th>
<th>14%</th>
<th>29%</th>
<th>14%</th>
<th>29%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Twitter</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flicker</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MySpace</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YouTube</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blogs</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 1.6: The use of social media into crisis planning at Ball State University**

In addition, practitioners were asked if Ball State incorporates the use of social media into their crisis plans, 29% didn’t know, 43% answered No, and 29% said Yes. The majority of practitioners (71%) think that using social media during a crisis at Ball State increases the amount of confidence employees have in the university’s ability to manage a crisis, while 29% don’t. In the same time, 71% of practitioners think that using social media improves the effectiveness of Ball State’s crisis plan and 29% didn’t. 4 out of 7 stated that they supervise the work of others by 57%.

**Ball State’s website**

After analyzing Ball State’s website, the researcher found that the University Marketing and Communication Department is in charge of Ball State’s emergency preparedness and crises. The crisis management team plans and develops best practices to handle a crisis and emergency at Ball State University from the beginning of the crisis to the end. The crisis management team conducts a training and exercise regularly. According to the Ball State crisis management protocol a crisis is defined as “any unplanned event that significantly threatens the health and welfare of multiple members
of the Ball State community; causes operational disruption; or causes physical or environmental damage and harm to the university’s public standing”.

During a crisis, the primary source of information for Ball State is the website and the alert emergency system. Ball State University uses a variety of channels during a crisis to send information out, such as Ball State’s website, email, text messages, and the local media. Campus voice mail also is considered as a part of disseminating official information to campus voice mailboxes.

The website of Ball State University is the main source of information during a crisis. The website has full lists of all potential crisis and incidents that the university could have with comprehensive of explanations and instructions to all audiences of Ball State. The university website explains variety of crises that the university could encounter, such as earthquakes, fire, bomb threat, shooting, fire, gas leak and explosion and etc. Ball State website provides detailed information and instructions of how the public should act during a crisis and what are they supposed to do during a crisis. Moreover, important phone numbers and email are posted in order to receive and answer any inquires about the situation. The website is well organized and provide in depth information about each crisis.
Interviews

First: the researcher conducted a personal interview with the Ball State Director of Marketing who is a member of crisis management team at Ball State University. The researcher asked the following nine questions about the use of social media in crisis planning at Ball State:

1- Is Ball State incorporating social media into their crisis planning?

Yes, Ball State incorporates social media into their crisis planning.

2- How is social media used in the Ball State crisis planning?

During an emergency which Ball State considers as the first phase, Ball State University does not incorporate social media. They use their website, text messages, and voice mails to approach their specific group of people who are in harm’s way. In this stage, the main concern of Ball State is the public safety. After the emergency phase ceases, the next phase which called a crisis begins. During this phase, Ball State incorporated social media platforms especially Twitter to give updated information about the crisis, such as the press conference time and location.

3- Does Ball State monitor the social media use of students to learn warning sings to prevent a crisis?

Ball State does not monitor students Facebook pages directly, but they do monitor what people are saying about Ball State University in social media and try to respond to that. Monitoring the social media and social environment in Ball State is a group work where each member in the Department of Marketing and Communication is assigned for
specific tasks. Ball State listens to what people are saying about the university especially through Twitter.

4- **Does Ball State monitor social environment to learn crisis problems at other universities?**

Yes, when other universities encounter a crisis, Ball State tries to learn from their experiences toward the crisis by looking at their website, mass media, and their responses during the crisis. In fact, Ball State University has a partnership with many universities especially in crisis management where Ball State works side by side with their partners to overcome the crisis. When Ball State has a crisis they work with their partner and get their consultations to help overcome the crisis and vice versa.

Ball State also arranges visits with their partners and informal partners to exchange experiences about how to handle a crisis. For instance, a specialist in a crisis management from Virginia Tech University visited Ball State to exchange experiences in the field of crisis management.

Many universities obtained Ball State’s permission to use their social media policy, such as University of Tennessee, Wake Forest State University, and Valdosta State University.

5- **Does Ball State separate crisis planning from emergency preparedness? If so, how?**

Yes, Ball State responds to the emergency in the first phase which requires immediate response to preserve the university functions. During the emergency, the main target for
the university is the public safety. On the other hand, Ball State deals with a crisis via long lasting plan that covers different aspects of the university, such as reputations and finance.

**6- What does Ball State consider a crisis and what does Ball State consider an emergency?**

An emergency is an acute situation that required an immediate response to preserve the organization functions. However, a crisis in Ball State is a situation that last for long term and affect the reputation of the university. In fact, Ball State University defines a crisis in their website as: “any unplanned event that significantly threatens the health and welfare of multiple members of the Ball State community; causes operational disruption; or causes physical or environmental damage and harm to the university’s public standing”

**7- How does Ball State handle the different audiences during crises?**

During a crisis, Ball State concerns about the victims, parents of students, community, state, and perspective students. Ball State incorporates different channels to communicate with different audiences, such as mass media, press conference, social media, and the university website. Ball State aims to provide updated information to everyone involved and affected by the crisis.
8- What do you see the value of social media with crisis communication?

Using social media during a crisis facilitates the way communication between the university and the public. Social media helps to communicate with a wide range of stakeholders quickly compared to other tools. For instance, Ball State emails just reach Ball state employees, faculty, and students. Texts messages also reach people who sign up while social media can reach people who are even outside the Ball State community. Incorporation of social media allows Ball State, for instance, to open two way communications with journalists and alumni and get their feedbacks.

9- What are the main reasons for using social media at Ball State University?

At the beginning, Ball State’s Twitter account targeted journalists, reporters, and the media to build and increase the reputation of the university. In recent years, the Twitter account has became more popular and general since more people have followed the university Twitter account. Facebook on the other hand, is for general audiences and usually the university posts general content for their followers.

Second: the researcher conducted an email interview with the Associate Director of Web and Development who is a responsible of social media at Ball State University. The researcher asked the following questions about the use of social media:
1- When did the University officially start using social media?

The university launched its official Facebook page and drafted its social media policy in 2009.

2- What are the main reasons for using social media at Ball State?

The University Marketing and Communications uses social media to communicate with Ball State’s audiences about news, events, and people/topics that are interesting, important, and can create engagement with audiences.

3- What types of messages are posted in Ball State Facebook and Twitter pages?

Information regarding news and events, along with interesting information that would be fitting for social media, like photos of interesting people and situations that would increase engagement with our audiences.

4- Do you have different Twitter feeds for different audiences? For instance, does the Alumni Twitter feed contain different content? If so, what types?

The alumni Twitter feed would be more targeted to the alumni audience, so it would contain more focused information for that audience versus a more general audience base.

5- Do you have different Facebook feeds for different audiences? For instance, does the Alumni Facebook feed contain different contents? If so, what types?

The alumni Facebook page is dedicated to alumni communication. The page contains more targeted posts and information for that specific audience.
CHAPTER V: DISSCUSSION

The results of the survey in this study are not generalizable but they do provide insight of how public relations practitioners at Ball State University are using social media during crisis situations. When practitioners were asked how often do public relations practitioners at Ball State use social media, 57% indicated they often use social media while 29% indicated they always use social media. However, only 14% reported that they rarely use social media at Ball State University. This result is consistent with Wigley & Zhang’s 2011 study when they found that 76% of public relations practitioners indicated that they often and always use social media.

Looking at the first research question “How is Ball State using social media?” it appears that Ball State uses two types of social media. Ball State relies on Twitter and Facebook to communicate with stakeholders. As stated by the Associate Director of Web and Develop, Ball State uses social media to communicate with stakeholders about news, events, and topics that are interesting to stakeholders. Ball State has many Facebook pages and Twitter accounts that target specific group of people. For instance, Ball State’s
Facebook alumni feeds as well as Twitter feeds contain more focused information for alumni group versus more general audience base.

When Ball State started using Twitter, the university focused to communicate with the media, reporters, and journalists. However, Facebook pages are designed for the general public by posting general topics. Moreover, Wigley & Zhang (2011) found that 43% of organizations indicated that there are several people who are responsible for using social media while 100% of respondents at Ball State University indicated that there are several people who are responsible for using social media.

Looking at the second research question “How is Ball State University incorporating social media in their crisis planning?” from the interview with the Director of Marketing who is a member of crisis management team, it appears that the university incorporates social media during a crisis to send updated information. A Ball State official indicated that the university does not use social media to send warning signs, yet they use it to provide updated information about the crisis. Precisely, Ball State incorporates Twitter to communicate with stakeholders during the crisis.

Although there were differences in practitioners’ answers, Twitter, in fact, is the social media platform that is most used in crisis planning at Ball State according to the Directory of Marketing who is a member of crisis management team at Ball State. Not only Ball State officials indicated that Twitter is the social media platforms that is most used during a crisis but also Wigley & Zhang’s (2011) study indicated that most public relations practitioners in their study are using Twitter during a crisis.
Nevertheless, neither Ball State’s website nor Ball State’s crisis management protocol mentioned that the university incorporates social media in their crisis planning. Both Ball State’s website and crisis management protocol state that the main sources of information during a crisis are the website and the alert emergency system. However, Ball State’s crisis management protocol indicated that the crisis management team determines strategic communication plans during a crisis depending on the situation. Therefore, the researcher might conclude that there is a possibility of using different channels to communicate with the public during a crisis including social media.

Even though Ball State does not incorporate social media strategically during an emergency to send warning signals, people might talk about the incidents through personal or university’s Facebook or Twitter pages. Hence, there could be a chance for rumors on Ball State’s social media platforms where people talk about the incident. Ball State should actively monitor these platforms before, during, and after the incidents to take control of the situation by providing official feedback and updated information to stakeholders. Although the university decided to not use social media for an emergency, it might be helpful to do so. Many people, especially of younger demographics, spend much time on social media and get their news from it, so it should be a good idea to use social media to warn the public in the time of emergency. People will talk about the emergency situation of the university in social media anyway, whether the university uses social media to warn people or not. Therefore, incorporation of social media strategically to warn people could help the university to stop rumors or at least decrease them. It opens a two-way communication where stakeholders could communicate and get feedback.
from the university. In fact, any organization sometimes encounters a situation where there is a need to warn a wide range of people of specific threats, and social media has the ability to reach large numbers of people quickly.

Research question 3 asked “What does Ball State consider a crisis and an emergency?” From the interview with the crisis management team member who explained what Ball State considers a crisis and an emergency, it seems that Ball State clearly understands what a crisis and an emergency are. While Mitroff et al (2006) stated that most colleges and universities in the United States were confused between crisis management and an emergency situation, Ball State to some extent differentiates between crisis and an emergency. Ball State understands that a crisis is a long term of strategic planning that covers different aspects of the university, such as reputations and finance while an emergency is an immediate response to certain situation which aims to preserve the functions of the university. However, using social media during an emergency is also crucial and there is no harm in using the social media to inform the public even in an emergency situation, such as severe weather or any campus malfunction. Actual harm is in the misidentification between emergency and crisis and that result inadequate reaction or release of information.

Looking at the fourth research question “What are the main reasons of using social media at Ball State University” it appears that the main reason of using social media at Ball State is to send information out and to listen to what people are saying about the university according to Ball State officials. 86% of respondents to the survey strongly agreed that they use social media to listen to what people are saying about the university,
while only 14% disagreed. Also, 100% of public relations practitioners at Ball State University agreed and strongly agreed that they use social media to send information out. Incorporation of social media at Ball State also aims to increase engagement among Ball State’s audiences. The interviewer in this study discovered that Ball State incorporates social media to send information out, to listen to what people are saying about the university, increase the engagement between Ball State audiences, and increase the university’s reputation through Twitter.
CHAPTER VI: SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

In this study, the researcher conducted a case study method to explore the use of social media at Ball State University in crisis management. The researcher incorporated an online survey, interviews, and Ball State’s website to obtain in-depth information about the case under the study.

In previous research, many researchers stated that social media should be used during a crisis. Incorporations of social media during a crisis is indispensable because it’s provides many benefits for universities, including opening two-way communication with stakeholders and informing them quickly with updated information. The results of this study provide evidence that Ball State University is using social media in their crisis planning. The university to some extent differentiates between a crisis and an emergency. The results of this study show that the main purpose of the use of social media at Ball State University is to provide the public with news and information to increase their engagement. The study found that Ball State University is more likely to use Twitter to send information out and to listen to what people are saying about the university than other platforms. The results also show that the university incorporates social media especially Twitter during a crisis to send updated information to stakeholder publics.
However, the study found that the university does not incorporate Facebook during a crisis, but to post information regarding news and events that would increase engagement among Ball State’s community.

Limitations of the Study and Suggestions for Future Research

One of the limitations of this study is that there are not enough scientific studies about the use of social media at universities. Another limitation is the evaluation in a time period without a major crisis to observe. Further research is needed to examine the practice of social media at Ball State University at the time of an emergency or a crisis to determine the university’s responses through social media over a long time period. Another suggestion for further research is to study other university crisis management programs and to compare it with excellent crisis management practices.

A content analysis method that examines the messages that are posted on the university’s social media platforms during a time of crisis could be helpful for further research. To minimize the limitations for further research, the researcher recommends communicating with practitioners on a one-to-one basis to get better understanding of the practice of social media at Ball State University.

The following observations have been made based on the findings of this study:

- Ball State University has a well prepared website which includes comprehensive information about all types of crisis and instructions to the public.
• Ball State University has a trained crisis management team with expertise in crises, emergencies, and social media.

• Ball State University has partnerships with many universities especially in crisis management where Ball State works side by side with their partners to overcome the crisis.

• The crisis management team at Ball State does a training and exercise regularly once or twice a year.

Recommendations

• Ball State needs to address the incorporation of social media clearly into their crisis planning through their website or in their crisis management protocol.

• Ball State University should incorporate social media, such as Facebook and Twitter during the time of an emergency to send warning signals in cases, such as severe weather or other kind of campus malfunction.

• Emergency text messages notifications should be mandatory for all Ball State’s communities not voluntary.

• Ball State should increase the university knowledge of needs of faculty, students, and staff in receiving crisis information.
CHAPTER VII: BIBLIOGRAPHY


http://www.instituteforpr.org/topics/crisis-management-and-communications/

http://www.instituteforpr.org/topics/crisis-communication-and-social-media/


Appendix A: Survey Instrument

1- How often are public relations practitioners at Ball State University using social media?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Always</th>
<th>Often</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Rarely</th>
<th>Never</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

2- To what extent do you agree or disagree with each statement below regarding the use of social media at Ball State University:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questions</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I use social media to communicate with members of traditional media such as newspapers or TV</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I use social media to listen to what people are saying about the University</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I use social media to communicate with students and faculty</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I use social media to identify potential problems/ issues before they become a crisis</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I use social media to send information out</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3- To what extent do you think that Ball State University relies on social media for crisis planning:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Don’t rely on at all</th>
<th>Rarely rely on</th>
<th>Sometimes rely on</th>
<th>Regularly rely on</th>
<th>Heavily rely on</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Facebook</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Twitter</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4- How many people do you think is/are responsible for using social media in Ball State University: (Please check one of them):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>None</th>
<th>One person</th>
<th>Several people</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

4- Does Ball State University incorporate the use of social media into their crisis communication plans?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>I don’t know</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

5- Do you agree that using social media improves the effectiveness of Ball State crisis plan?

☐ Yes  ☐ No

6- What is your Gender?

☐ Male  ☐ Female

7- What is your age range?

☐ 21 and Under  ☐ 22 to 34  ☐ 35 to 44  ☐ 45 to 54  ☐ 55 to 64  ☐ 65 and Over  ☐ Decline

8- What is the highest level of education you have completed:

☐ High School  ☐ Bachelor degree  ☐ Master  ☐ PhD

9- How long have you been practicing Communication/Public relations?

☐ 1-3 years ☐ 3-5 years ☐ 5-10 years ☐ more than 10 years
10- Do you supervise the work of other employees?

☑ Yes ☐ No

Appendix B: Interviews Questions

Mailed interview questions:

- **The Associate Director of Web Development:**
  1- When did the University officially start using social media?
  2- What are the main reasons of using social media at Ball State?
  3- What types of messages are posted in Ball State Facebook and Twitter pages?
  4- Do you have different Twitter feeds for different audiences? For instance, does the Alumni Twitter feed contain different content? If so what types?
  5- Do you have different Facebook pages for different audiences? For instance, does the Alumni Facebook feed contain different contents? If so what types?

- **The Marketing Directory (crisis management team member)**

  1- Is Ball State incorporating social media in their crisis planning?
  2- How is social media used in the Ball State crisis planning?
  3- Does Ball State monitor the social media use of students to learn warning signs to prevent a crisis?
  4- Does Ball State monitor social environment to learn crisis problems at other universities?
  5- Does Ball State separate crisis plan from an emergency preparedness? if so how?
  6- What does Ball State consider a crisis and what Ball State considers an emergency?
7- How does Ball State handle the different audiences during crises?

8- What do you see the value of social media with crisis communication?

9- What are the main reasons of using social media at Ball State University?