THE USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA DURING A CRISIS ON CAMPUS

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Social Media

Andreas Kaplan and Michael Haenlein define social media as "a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, which allows the creation and exchange of user-generated content" (Kaplan, 2010, p. 60). Social media researcher Danah Boyd provides a broader definition and classifies social-network sites as web-based services that allow individuals to construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and view and navigate through a list of their own connections as well as others found within the system (Boyd, 2007).

Social media has become one of the fastest growing communication tools over the past few years. What started out as a simple concept for individuals to connect with friends and family has quickly transitioned into a powerful communication vehicle for a variety of entities including non-profit organizations, media outlets, higher education, and corporate America.

For example, global professional services company Towers Watson distributed a survey in May 2013 involving the use of social media tools for internal communication to 290 large and mid-size organizations from across North America, Europe, and Asia. The results revealed that just over half of the participating employers used social media tools to communicate and build a sense of community with employees (Savani, 2013). Although the revealed percentage may not appear to be a staggering figure now, Kathryn Yates, Tower Watson's global leader of communication consulting, believes these numbers will continue to rise in the very near future.
By its nature, social media is designed to build community and could help engage employees on key topics such as performance, collaboration, culture and values. As the need for global collaboration increases, we expect more companies will join those already leveraging social media to creatively communicate those messages (Savani, 2013).

*Network World Magazine* posted a blog article on its website in June 2013 with a headline that read, "Microsoft study shatters myth, says social media use increases work productivity" (Smith, 2013). The online article explains Microsoft's two-year study, which included nearly 10,000 participants from 32 countries, all of whom use a computer, laptop, tablet, or smartphone for at least 75% of their job function. Survey results showed that nearly 50% of the participants indicated that social tools at work actually help increase their productivity, and 31% of them said they were even willing to spend their own money to buy work-related social tools.

According to D'Silva (2010), social networking is now the most time-consuming activity for an Internet user. In fact, 96% of Generation Y, who are described as individuals born between 1977-1984, has joined at least one social network (Nelson, 2012). The average Internet user spends about 22% of his/her time on social-networking sites (Nelson, 2012). Smith (2013) reports that there are now more than 1.1 billion Facebook users, and a typical Facebook user spends almost eight hours a month (or 16 minutes a day) on this one social media site. This amount of time is almost equivalent to the amount of time people spend participating in sports, exercise, and recreation (19 minutes a day) and reading (18 minutes a day), according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics' 2012 American Time Use Survey (Thompson, 2012). YouTube is no longer just a video channel but is now the world’s second largest search engine on the Internet, right behind Google (Annan, 2012), and is viewed four million times everyday with more than 60 hours of content uploaded every minute (Nelson, 2012). According to an infographic with
data that was provided by Internetworldstats.com, about one in every three Internet users visit YouTube on a daily basis, while other top sites include four out of ten using Facebook, and one out of two users visiting Google every day (Top Computer Science Degrees, 2013).

The Pew Research Center’s Internet & American Life Project conducted a national phone survey in 2012 involving social-media usage. Data collected from the more than 1,800 respondents showed that 72% of adult Internet users use social-networking sites. Other highlights from the survey results reveal Internet users under 50 generally used social-networking sites a considerable amount more than participants over the age of 50. Respondents in the 18-29 age group had the highest demographic use at 89%, which was 11 percentage points higher than participants in the age range of 30-49, and almost 30 percentage points higher than those in the 50-64 age range (Brenner, 2013).

Experian Marketing Services issued a press release in April 2013 to publicize its research results that focused on just how much time spent online includes social networking. The study revealed that in the United States, Australia, and United Kingdom, people devote just over 16 minutes to social-networking sites out of every hour spent on their personal computers (Experian, 2013). This data equates to the average person spending 6.5 hours a day on social media, which is only about an hour less than an individual spends sleeping each night, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics' 2012 American Time Use Survey (Thompson, 2012). If that statistic is not staggering enough, social media accounts for 15% of a user's time spent browsing on a mobile device used in the United States (Experian, 2013). Table 1 demonstrates just how quickly technology has emerged over the years. It took 38 years for radio to reach 50 million users, 13 years for television, and just four years for the World Wide Web to reach that milestone, but Facebook managed to subscribe 50 million users in only three and a half years.
<table>
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<th>Medium</th>
<th># of Users Obtained</th>
<th># of years to reach milestone</th>
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<tr>
<td>Radio</td>
<td>50 Million Users</td>
<td>38 Years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Television</td>
<td>50 Million Users</td>
<td>13 Years</td>
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<tr>
<td>Internet</td>
<td>50 Million Users</td>
<td>4 Years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facebook</td>
<td>50 Million Users</td>
<td>3.5 Years</td>
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*Table 1.* Facebook managed to subscribe 50 million users in only three and a half years (Annan, 2012).

Social media users are now truly part of a global village because so much of the world's news and information is received in real time and distributed more broadly than ever before due to the Internet. Social media outlets enable essential information to spread at a rate that was never possible before now. Geographic boundaries all but disappear in this new digital age. People are more intertwined than ever before, and information is far less distant than it ever has been before.

As the statistics mentioned earlier in the chapter demonstrate, social media is not just a temporary fad but in fact is a phenomenon that is changing the way individuals, businesses, and organizations now communicate with friends, family, clients, media, and general public. It’s no longer an alternative communication tool; instead, it can now be viewed as one of the primary communication vehicles for delivering information, data, and messages to a worldwide audience at a moment's notice. This surge in new media makes the delivery of positive communication a great benefit for any organization but conversely places it under a much larger and more intense microscope of scrutiny and judgment in which any flaws, including a crisis, can now been seen more easily, more closely, and more frequently.
Crisis Communication

Although a crisis is nothing new to the world of public relations, what is relatively new to the profession are the various options to properly respond to a crisis: more specifically, the theory behind crisis communication and management. "Although the crisis response research is vibrant and growing, it remains in an early stage of theoretical development with the literature being largely descriptive. The extant prescriptive research is based almost exclusively on case studies or accepted wisdom" (Botan, 2006, p. 171). According to King (2002), a crisis has three primary characteristics. First, a crisis is an unplanned event that has the potential to dismantle the internal and external structure of an organization. Second, a crisis can occur at any time. Finally, a crisis has the potential to affect the legitimacy of an organization. The idea behind crisis management is to implement strategies that effectively counteract any and all negative effects of an event or action that will damage the reputation or credibility of an individual or an organization (Coombs, 2011).

Coombs’ (1995) typology of crises, shown in Table 2, identifies four different types of crises an organization can face. Crises can be intentionally or unintentionally caused, and their origins can be from within the organization or from the outside.

Coombs (1995) describes a faux pas as an unintentional action that an external agent tries to transform into a crisis. In other words, someone from outside of the organization, such as an activist group, challenges the appropriateness of the targeted organization’s actions by way of boycotting or protesting the brand or product.
Coombs (1995) identifies four different types of crises that an organization can face. 

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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>UNITENTIONAL</th>
<th>INTENTIONAL</th>
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<tr>
<td>EXTERNAL</td>
<td>Faux Pas</td>
<td>Terrorism</td>
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<td>INTERNAL</td>
<td>Accidents</td>
<td>Transgressions</td>
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*Table 2.* Accidents are unintentional and happen during the course of normal organizational operations. Transgressions can be classified as those intentional actions taken by an organization that knowingly place constituents at risk or harm. Terrorism refers to intentional actions taken by those outside the company that are designed to harm the organization directly or indirectly (Coombs, 1995).

Social Media is changing the way organizations, including public-relations practitioners within the field of higher education, are looking at their strategies behind communication and crisis responses to its stakeholders during the crisis-management planning process. Coombs (2011) emphasizes that the overall goal of crisis management is to prevent or lessen the negative outcomes of a crisis. The key element to managing a crisis is the communication delivered to an organization's stakeholders before, during, and after a crisis situation (Fearn-Banks, 2007).

**Stakeholders**

Colleges and universities have several stakeholders, both internal and external, to which they must be accountable. The information that is communicated to each stakeholder during a crisis plays a critical role in how a particular patron can be affected by the situation. The most obvious internal stakeholders at post-secondary institutions are the students (Duncan & Miser, 2000). They are the primary client, and many times are the individuals most vulnerable during a
crisis situation. External stakeholders, such as parents, family members of students, and media outlets, can also be affected by a crisis, or could even affect the crisis based on what the stakeholders are communicating themselves about the crisis to the public (Lowery & Kibler, 2000).

Managing an organization's response to the media and ensuring that a consistent and accurate message is provided is a very important consideration in crisis management (Coombs, 1999). For instance, Ogrizek and Guillary (1999) note that some incidents are "neither disasters nor major risk situations, but the media gave them a scale that triggered the outbreak that was without a doubt the root of the crisis" (p. 14). In this incidence, scale refers to sensationalism of potential disasters or major risk situations.

**Situational Crisis Communication Theory**

Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) comes from crisis communication expert and theorist W. Timothy Coombs and is one example of newly formed and developed theoretical responses within the field of public relations. This theory is a rigid system that matches specific responses with various crises dependent upon the specific situation that has occurred. According to Coombs (2007), the SCCT suggests that the crisis situation determines which crisis-response strategies will be most effective in protecting the organization’s reputation, which is important to any organization and is inevitably threatened by a crisis that occurs. This logic forces communicators in leadership roles to maximize the protection of their institution by using appropriate crisis-response strategies.

Given its roots in Attribution Theory, the central point of SCCT is the idea of crisis responsibility. Public-relations professionals need to look at how their stakeholders will perceive
the organization of being responsible or not responsible for the crisis. Over time, Coombs developed a system of assessment that is based on two parts. The first part involves looking at the type of crisis an organization encounters, which has been categorized into three different clusters of how stakeholders view a crisis: victim crisis cluster, accidental crisis cluster, and preventable crisis cluster (Coombs and Holladay, 2002). When managing a crisis involving the victim cluster, there is very little responsibility attributed to the organization, and in many cases, the organization can even be seen as a victim itself of the crisis. One example that falls into this category is a natural disaster. Emergency situations that fall into the category of accidental bear only a minimal amount of responsibility for the crisis because of other factors that contribute to it. One example of this type of cluster is technology failure. The last type of crisis is the preventable cluster, which can be the most difficult category to manage because stakeholders believe that the organization is responsible for the crisis. Examples that fall into this category include human error, impropriety, and indiscretion.

The second part of the assessment system involves developing an effective crisis-response strategy. An organization should not limit its focus to only identifying the crisis type, but it also needs to examine two additional factors: its history of crisis and its prior negative reputation (Coombs, 2007). Coombs' SCCT suggests that if either one of them exists within the organization, then its stakeholders will attribute a much greater responsibility to the organization for the crisis taking place.

Coombs also describes four major communication approaches. Denial, diminishment, rebuilding, and bolstering are described in Table 3, and all can be used in accordance to the threat to the organization’s reputation.
<table>
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<th>Denial</th>
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<tr>
<td><em>Attack the accuser:</em> Crisis manager confronts the person or group claiming something is wrong with the organization.</td>
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<td><em>Denial:</em> Crisis manager asserts that there is no crisis.</td>
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<td><em>Scapegoat:</em> Crisis manager blames some person or group outside of the organization for the crisis.</td>
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<td><em>Excuse:</em> Crisis manager minimizes organizational responsibility by denying intent to do harm and/or claiming inability to control the events that triggered the crisis.</td>
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<td><em>Justification:</em> Crisis manager minimizes the perceived damage caused by the crisis.</td>
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<th>Rebuilding</th>
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<td><em>Compensation:</em> Crisis manager offers money or other gifts to victims.</td>
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<td><em>Apology:</em> Crisis manager indicates the organization takes full responsibility for the crisis and asks stakeholders for forgiveness.</td>
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<th>Bolstering</th>
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<td><em>Reminder:</em> Tell stakeholders about the past good works of the organization.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Ingratiation:</em> Crisis manager praises stakeholders and/or reminds them of past good works by the organization.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Victimage:</em> Crisis managers remind stakeholders that the organization is a victim of the crisis too.</td>
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*Table 3.* A description of how Coombs (2007) describes four major communication approaches during a threat to the organization’s reputation.
This strategy increases the odds of repairing reputational damage from a crisis and are selected based on crisis type, crisis history, and prior reputation (Coombs, 2007).

The idea of engaging in social media during a crisis is still a new and undeveloped concept specifically within higher education. Because we now live in such a socially connected world, it seems as though using social media to reach a targeted audience in a timely manner during a crisis would be inevitable, but there are also risks that must be considered before making a strategic decision to use Web 2.0 to disseminate vital information during an emergency situation.

Social media is designed to encourage and foster two-way communication between parties, while crisis communication is a deliberate and intentional form of one-way communication that is intended to deliver critical information and messaging to a specific target audience. With that being said, the evolution and wide-spread use of social media into our culture has caused it to be a top news source and information aggregator for most Americans, which almost guarantees that most crises will quickly find their way onto an individual's laptop, smartphone, and tablet before ever hitting the evening news or front page of a newspaper.

As a result of the rising growth of social media use in the realm of everyday communication, the need to investigate the implementation of social media strategies into any crisis management plan is becoming more apparent and vital to the success of crisis management within higher education.

Gonzalez-Herrero and Smith (2008) suggest adding social-media-related steps to a crisis communication plan in order to strengthen a crisis response and protect an organization from triggering or exacerbating a crisis.
Faced with these fragmented, empowered audiences (online), it is clear that early identification of issues and a quick, clear, honest response is essential to preventing issues from becoming crises and facts from becoming distorted by rumors. An early analysis of web-based content might provide the early warning needed to develop appropriate plans and responses and enable them to avoid bad situations (p. 4).

Although the suggestion of including social media to a plan can be viewed as sound advice, author Donya Curie introduces one major challenge of using social media in a crisis situation, which is "a lack of confidentiality and a danger of non-verified information flashing around the globe at lightning speed. A common barrier to adopting social media in communications strategies can be the fear that too much information too soon will create panic" (Currie, 2009). Figure 1 visually demonstrates the potential harm and cause for concern of inaccurate information being disseminated on social media during a crisis situation. According to Currie (2009), adding the element of social media to the typical progression of action will implicitly yield a different result than if social media was taken out of the equation.

**University Examples**

One example of the need to implement a social media strategy into a university's crisis-communication-protocol management system occurred in 2011 on the campus of Campbell University in North Carolina. University officials issued a campus-wide lockdown after a student had escaped deputies during an arrest for stolen weapons. The campus was alerted only by way of a text message and its website because social media was not part of the university's crisis plan at that time. Despite a breach in protocol, the communications team made the quick decision to post the same information provided in the text message to the university's Facebook page.
Crisis → Assessment → Approach(es) → Result (A)

Crisis → Assessment → Approach(es) → Social media → Result (B)

(Attack the Accuser, Denial, Apology, Reminder)

*Figure 1.* Visual depiction that suggests how the use of social media in a crisis can alter the situation and potentially offer a different result.

The feedback Campbell University received from students, parents, and the community was largely positive (Liggett, 2012). However, that was not the case for another university located in the same state, East Carolina University, as officials dealt with a similar campus crisis one week later. They did not have the same positive social media experience. The university went on lockdown after there were numerous reports of a man carrying an assault rifle on campus. Although the rifle turned out to be only an umbrella, the university's communication team spent a lot of its time and energy dispelling all of the rumors that began surfacing on social media, including a situation with hostages on a bus (Liggett, 2012).

Another example of a university receiving some backlash and public scrutiny over not posting any official information to social media sites during a recent crisis situation occurred on Ball State University's campus in March 2013. Students were notified of the situation by a text message from the university that read: "Man with gun seen north of bracken library a short time ago. Avoid the area. Secure in a safe place. Visit www.bsu.edu for updated information" (UPI, 2013). The same information was also posted on the homepage of Ball State's website. Soon
after the initial text message was sent, Twitter became a hotbed of criticism over the fact that the university did not alert students, faculty, and staff to the situation on social media. Ball State spokeswoman Joan Todd says after police searched the campus and the surrounding area for two hours, the university issued an "all-clear" text message, but again, no official information was delivered through any social media channel. A Ball State spokesperson told media outlets that the university was following standard protocol and that students are instructed during freshman orientation about what emergency-alert instructions mean (Anderson Herald Bulletin, 2013).

The criticism that Ball State was subjected to was not the only chatter happening on Twitter about the incident. Students were also tweeting updates and information about the supposed gunman on campus. And furthermore, media outlets were also re-tweeting some of it as well. This type of activity leads directly into the brief exploration of concerning citizen journalism.

Citizen Journalism

Citizen journalists, who can be described as public citizens who collect and report news and information to the Internet, also influence the scope of how quickly information shows up online and how quickly it reaches an audience. This type of news dissemination also allows for the increased possibility of inaccurate and unreliable information being posted and shared online. Freelance journalist and digital media connoisseur Mark Glaser provides a simple explanation on his PBS Mediashift blog:

The idea behind citizen journalism is that people without any professional journalism training can use the tools of modern technology and the global distribution of the Internet to create, augment or fact-check media on their own or in collaboration with others (Glaser, 2006).
All of these examples mentioned in the above "University Examples" subhead, but especially the situation that arose on Ball State University's campus, are key indicators for the need to explore if and how universities utilize social media in moments of a crisis.

**Purpose of the study**

The purpose of this study is to discover if the evolution of social media is changing the process of crisis communication on a university campus. Do universities use social media to disseminate critical information during the initial communication phase of a crisis? If they do, this study will attempt to explore the reasons behind why they use it. If they don't, this study will attempt to explore why they choose not to use it. The focus of the study's research will center on public institutions of higher education in the state of Indiana, and the role social media plays—if any—during a crisis on campus. Past literature has proven that most colleges and universities have some type of "official" presence on social media for institutional marketing and promotional purpose, but there is not as much existing literature that explores the notion of higher education using social media as a way to provide information during a crisis or emergency situation. This researcher believes that there are a significant number of universities that are reluctant to use social media as an official communication tool during a crisis situation, and this study is designed to explore this hypothesis using public universities in Indiana as its geographic parameter for research and data analysis.
CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

The role of social media is changing the way universities now look at responding to a crisis. CKSyme, a strategic communications agency, and Third Sector Consulting conducted a 2012 study in collaboration with the Council for Advancement and Support of Education (CASE) that surveyed senior-level communications professionals at higher-education institutions on this topic. During the 12 months prior to when the survey was distributed, 65% of its respondents had experienced at least one emergency situation that had been reported through traditional media (television, newspaper, or radio) that was considered potentially damaging to its institution's brand or reputation (CKSYME, 2012).

The survey was sent via email link to 2,274 individuals with 219 responding, for a response rate of 9.6%. Results of the study showed that all of the participating institutions maintain an official Facebook channel and 94% have an official Twitter page, but only 62% have plans to use social media to provide official information updates during a crisis or emergency situation. Additionally, only 17% of respondents' crisis communications plans included guidelines for monitoring or responding to any unofficial institution social media pages during an emergency (CKSYME, 2012).

These statistics highlight a pattern that many institutions are well equipped to use social media to disseminate positive news and information to their target audiences and stakeholders, but there is an obvious disconnect when negative situations occur and lack of preparedness to handle an emergency situation when vital information needs to be communicated in a timely manner. The study did not delve into the reasoning behind why so few institutions have included
the use of social media as a communication tool or monitoring mechanism, which is a strong indicator as to why more research such as this case study needs to be conducted.

Another 2012 study led by mStoner and Slover-Linett Strategies, in collaboration with CASE, issued an online survey among a random sample of approximately 18,000 CASE members and received 1,187 responses. This survey was the final piece of a three-year project to research how educational institutions use social media in external relations, marketing, and advancement, which began with an initial survey and research conducted in 2010. Rae Goldsmith, vice president of advancement resources at CASE, articulated the idea behind this long-term research (Slover-Linett, 2012):

There just isn’t much data about what people are doing in advancement to better understand social media and to employ it to achieve their goals. We need a way to better benchmark where people are to help us understand their needs and determine what resources could be meaningful to them (p. 3).

The compiled data from 2012 found that 56% of the respondents felt their schools did not use social media much, or at all, during a crisis. Twenty-two percent of participants felt like their schools either utilized social media quite a bit or very extensively during an emergency (mStoner, 2012). Although its data indicated an overall increase in acceptance and use of social media by education institutions, the researchers concluded that "institutions still don’t seem to be focusing on how social media can be incredibly valuable—one might say essential—components of a crisis communications plan" (mStoner, 2012).

Effective and timely communication is a critical component of crisis communications. Social media, by its design, allows for almost instantaneous communications (Wright & Hinson, 2009). Social media tools have the potential to reach audiences more effectively than their traditional counterparts (Breakenridge, 2009). Various types of social media should be included
in the crisis-communications plan as "no single medium meets all of the informational, social, and emotional needs of citizens during a crisis" (Carey, 2002, p. 206).

One real-life situation that adds credibility to this line of thinking occurred last year. Hurricane Sandy was the deadliest and most destructive hurricane of the 2012 Atlantic hurricane season, and was the second-costliest hurricane in United States history. During the disaster, Fordham University lost access to its website and e-mail system as a result of a massive power outage. The university quickly made the decision to use its Facebook and Twitter pages in order to keep students and faculty informed of the situation (Daly, 2012). Social media became the primary—and only—form of communication university administrators utilized to keep their stakeholders successfully apprised of all vital information during the crisis until the website and e-mail system could be restored.

It seems as though social media would be a natural fit for spreading the word to the entire campus community, including students, but a recent 2012 Online Colleges survey revealed that many universities do not use social media when they need it the most—during a crisis. According to the study, 85% of schools do have crisis-communication policies, but only 59% of them address the use of social media in their plan. Of those participants who indicated that they have crisis-communication policies in place, 66% of them reported that potential reputation-damaging events were discussed within social-media channels. Despite the low figures of universities addressing social media in their plan, the study's data also revealed that there has been a 4% increase in the number of schools using social media during a crisis since 2010 (Online Colleges, 2012).

As indicated in chapter one, delivering accurate information is one crucial aspect of overcoming a crisis and protecting the institution's reputation. Social media can often be seen as
a double-edged sword when communicating critical information because of the vast outlets available and the wide range of participants who are able to upload content to the Internet for an audience to view before it ever becomes a mass media story. Effective, timely communication is critical in crisis communications. And because every crisis that an organization encounters is considered to be a unique situation unlike any other, as highlighted in the Situational Crisis Communication Theory section of chapter one, practitioners should be prepared to adapt their crisis communications plan to each situation. Early notification has become a vital and developing trend within the academic circle of higher education. "Students, their parents, and the general public are demanding that campuses notify them immediately of any danger on the campus" (Jablonski, 2008, p. 26).

Recent Examples of Timely Use of Social Media in Crises

One journal article, written in March 2012 by Gregory Bender of the Association of School Business Officials International (ASBOI), underscores the idea of delivering instant and accurate information through social media by exploring the tragedy that struck the campus of Virginia Tech University in April 2007. Bender's philosophy supports the notion of incorporating social media into a university's emergency-messaging plan as well as assigning a sufficient amount of institutional resources in order to maintain social-media presence during a crisis. This type of prepared protocol will maximize the institution's ability to keep necessary parties informed and safe with timely and accurate information (Bender, 2012).

Another example of how a crisis can be first revealed on social media occurred in March 2012 during the NCAA March Madness basketball tournament. Members of the University of Southern Mississippi's pep band shouted, "Where's your green card?" at an opposing player who
is of Puerto Rican descent. This comment blew up on Twitter and became a hot topic of conversation on a variety of social-media sites. The university did not have the luxury of spending a lot of time crafting a press release because they needed to respond responsibly to the situation at the same speed that everyone else was already tweeting about it. An apologetic statement from the university president was quickly crafted and then posted to their blog, Facebook page, and Twitter account. The overall response to the university's quick approach was very positive, including tweet responses such as, "That was fast!" and "Thanks for doing the right thing" (Talon, 2012).

However, as Coombs (2007) points out, not every crisis that occurs on a college campus involves shootings, bombs, or other types of attacks. Natural disasters and other weather-related emergencies can also strike fear in a community and can put lives in danger. In 2012, an unexpected snowstorm hit Seattle University that caused the university to have to shut down for almost a week. Severe and rapid changes in weather led university officials to turn to the power of social media to offer its quick and continued communication with its faculty, staff, students—and their parents. Many people flocked to the university's Twitter and Facebook pages to find out the latest updates and cancellations, which proved to be vital sources of information sharing as well as real time communication (CASE, 2012).

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, Hurricane Sandy took out Fordham University's Website and e-mail system in October 2012. Although this created a tremendous challenge for the university to continue communicating vital information to the public, university officials turned to the institution's Facebook page and Twitter account (along with text messages and phone messages) as its primary communications tool. The university had previously been using social media—which was also part of its crisis communication plan—but not as one of its
primary communication vehicles. Fordham officials took it one step further responding to as many questions and comments as they could, which began flooding the social media sites soon after the Website and e-mail systems went down (Daly, 2012).

Figure 2 is a small sample of some of the actual two-way communication dialogue between Fordham University and a few of its Facebook page followers during the natural disaster crisis.

Despite the fact that using social media is now a prominent part of people's daily lives and a staple activity for most individuals, the researcher of this case study believes that universities are somewhat reluctant to adopt the use of social media as part of their crisis-communications strategies. Academic literature and professional examples shared earlier in this chapter to support this statement. In order to explore this further, empirical research and data analysis was conducted with the intention of adding to the academic findings centered on the questions of how and why universities use social media to disseminate critical information during a crisis. These are this study's overarching research questions.
Figure 2. Actual posts between Fordham University officials and Facebook users during Hurricane Sandy crisis in 2012 (Daly, 2012).
CHAPTER III

DISCUSSION OF METHOD

This case study explores the state of Indiana's seven public institutes of higher education and examines their use of social media during a crisis situation, utilizing an IRB-approved survey consisting of both qualitative and quantitative data. Case studies are used by researchers to study a phenomenon within the context of a single issue, using specific historical events, in order to better understand the overarching problem and develop appropriate application to a related situation that has not yet been investigated or researched to its full potential.

Case Study

Quantitative research provides data to a broad audience that garners significant results, which can then be easily replicated in an effort to demonstrate the exploration and implications of an individual issue to a more specific target audience. Qualitative research such as a case study provides more rich descriptions that allow the researcher to explore topics in more depth and detail, and is gathered in order to compliment the reasons behind the results of any quantitative research that is discovered (Benoit & Holbert, 2008).

According to Yin (1994), "a research design is the logic that links the data to be collected, as well as the conclusions that can be drawn, to the initial questions of study" (p. 18). In other words, the overall general progression of how a researcher is able to draw final conclusions of a study begins with having a solid base of accurate data that has been collected and validated and can be linked back to the initial questions the researcher is attempting to answer.
Yin’s (2003) general definition of a case study is:

...an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident. It also copes with the technically distinctive situation in which there will be many more variables of interest than data points, and as one result relies on multiple courses of evidence, with data needing to converge in a triangulating fashion, and as another result benefits from the prior development of theoretical proposition to guide data collection and analysis (p. 13-14).

Case study research should be significant. It needs to deal with a general area of interest (such as crisis communications) but must also focus on a relevant issue or topic (such as social-media utility in crises). The research should also look for an alternative perspective on a particular topic, and it should not just reiterate issues that have already been extensively researched with similar findings and results. Case studies must provide evidence that is timely and is delivered in a way that engages interest and discussion within academic and professional experts within the related field of study.

Yin (2008) identifies several types of case studies. The first type mentioned is the Explorative Case Study, which investigates whether a hypothesis is sound or can be proven. The second type of case study is the Explanatory Case Study, which can be defined as a way to uncover a situation or phenomenon. The final type is the Descriptive Case Study, which is used to describe an intervention or phenomenon and the real-life context in which it occurred.

This case study falls into Yin's category of an explorative case study because of the researcher's intent to discover if public institutions of higher education in the state of Indiana use social media to disseminate critical information during the initial communication phase of a crisis, which was outlined in chapter one.
Yin (2003) notes that a case study design should be considered when either the focus of the study is to answer "how" and "why" questions, or when the researcher is looking to cover contextual conditions because he/she believes they are relevant to the phenomenon under examination. These designs need to maximize four conditions related to design quality: construct validity, internal validity, external validity, and reliability. Construct validity requires the researcher to use the correct measures for what is being examined. Internal validity is important in demonstrating that all of the various conditions of the study can be linked together to form a chain of evidence that is consistent throughout the entire case study. External validity helps to ensure that a case study can be generalized enough for other researchers to use the findings when exploring similar issues with different variables and parameters. Reliability refers to the stability, accuracy, and precision of data collected for the case study.

Collecting data through qualitative research is best conducted through the concept of source triangulation. This concept focuses on using multiple sources of evidence, which is essential for increasing the study's validity and allows the researcher to assert the notion that the data collected does indeed measure the specific phenomenon that is being investigated. In this case study, data was collected from seven different sources (i.e., public institutions of higher education in the state of Indiana). The participating universities have both common denominators and differentiators through a series of parameters that the researcher established, allowing the data to be analyzed in such a way that can be broken down into various categories.

The concept of reliability is also an important factor of data collection and analysis. Reliability relates to the researcher's claim regarding the accuracy of the data. Problems within reliability can arise when the researcher overstates the importance of data that is drawn from a
sample that is too small or too restricted. The researcher of this study will further address this problem later in chapter five.

The purpose for administering the survey was to produce descriptive statistics (i.e., qualitative or numerical descriptions) about certain aspects of the studied population. Generally, in case-study research, information is collected from only a fraction of the overall population, and this study represented a small sampling of the postsecondary schools in Indiana, but it included all of the state's public institutions of higher education.

**Parameters**

The researcher's survey was created via SurveyMonkey, an online survey software and questionnaire tool, to public-relations practitioners representing Indiana's public institutions of higher education. These colleges and universities included Ball State University, Indiana State University, Indiana University, Ivy Tech Community College of Indiana, Purdue University, University of Southern Indiana, and Vincennes University.

The researcher selected this particular population because of the natural parameters—geography and state-funded status—that were in place. These universities also fall into the category of being the only institutions of higher education in Indiana bound by the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA), which "allows any person the right to access information from a federal agency through a written request. Government agencies are required to disclose the documents, unless they can be lawfully withheld under the specific exemptions written into the Act" (The Center on Congress at Indiana University, 2013, para. 4). Because private colleges and universities in Indiana do not have to adhere to the FOIA, it seemed logical to narrow the overall sample to this specific population in order to retrieve and analyze comparable data.
It is important to note that even though private institutions are not obligated to observe the FOIA, all universities are legally obligated to provide timely warnings to the campus community during any emergency or dangerous situation involving an immediate threat to the health or safety of students, staff, or surrounding community under the Jeanne Clery Act (Summary of the Jeanne Clery Act, 2012). This Act:

…is the landmark federal law, originally known as the Campus Security Act, that requires colleges and universities across the United States to disclose information about crime on and around their campuses. The law is tied to an institution's participation in federal student financial aid programs and it applies to most institutions of higher education both public and private. The Act is enforced by the United States Department of Education (para 1).

**Delivery**

The researcher sent the online survey through email with the intent to have respondents complete it within 10 days. The researcher's rationale for a short turnaround was to ensure that all data was collected during one specific time period, so the researcher had an adequate amount of time to compile the answers and analyze the results of the survey. Three subsequent e-mail reminders were sent during the 10-day period before the researcher closed the online questionnaire.

Sampling is the process of selecting a smaller portion or segment of participants that will be used to represent a larger population. The number of participants selected and the thought process behind how the participants are selected are both key components in the sampling process. This is an important step because the sample chosen will be the basis of the study's data that is collected and thus forms the boundaries for the researcher's findings.

The researcher used a single-stage sampling procedure when choosing the targeted population by identifying the specific individuals who fit the job descriptions of a public-
relations practitioner or a chief communicator for the public institutions of higher education within Indiana included in the case study. The researcher identified these individuals using a simple Internet search of university websites. Some universities had more potential participants than others based on the overall size of the university as well as the size of its public relations and communications team.

Data was collected through a series of 17 questions that was administered through SurveyMonkey, which generated the results and reported them back to the researcher as descriptive statistics, graphed information, and open-ended answers from which the results could be explored for further analysis.

According to Wimmer and Dominick (2006), survey research is the most frequently used method. When developing a questionnaire, Wimmer and Dominick (2006) caution researchers to always pay close attention to the physical design of the questionnaire as well as the specific wording used to formulate the questions. These are important considerations because surveys and questionnaires can be seen as subjective forms of data collection, so researchers need to attempt to create them in a way that minimizes the researcher's own bias. Adhering to these guidelines will provide the best opportunities for the survey participants to answer questions in a manner that will "describe the current conditions or attitudes" and "can be used to investigate problems in realistic settings" (p. 179).
CHAPTER IV

DATA ANALYSIS

This chapter reports the data analysis and questionnaire results for this study. Included in this chapter are response rates, the questionnaire findings, and related statistical tables. The chapter concludes with a brief summary. As indicated in chapter one, the purpose of this study is to discover if the evolution of social media is changing the process of crisis communication on a university campus. Do universities use social media to disseminate critical information during the initial communication phase of a crisis? If they do, this study attempts to explore the reasons behind why they use it. If they don't, this study attempts to explore why they choose not to use it.

Response Rate

An email, which included a link to the online questionnaire administered through SurveyMonkey, was sent to 49 individuals who work in the communications or public-relations offices within the seven public universities in Indiana. The number of individuals from each university who were sent the questionnaire varied depending on the size of the institution and the number of employees who work in its communications or public-relations office. This is a point of distinction worth noting because despite being state funded, not all public universities are equal in physical campus space, student enrollment, or in the number of employees working in these offices that are assigned to handle a crisis on their campuses.

The participants who were selected were thought to have some administrative access—limited or full—to at least one official communications tool their university uses during a crisis based on the information that was provided on each university website. These tools could range from traditional electronic communication such as e-mail, text messaging, and website display...
banners, to social media sites such as Twitter and Facebook. Establishing such criteria is a key component of research in order to maintain as much credibility, reliability, and transparency as possible when discussing the findings of quantitative or qualitative research.

Yin (2003) lists five major components to consider when looking at case study research design: the study’s questions, propositions, units of analysis, logic linking data to the propositions, and criteria for interpreting the findings. He surmises that following this type of design structure will assist in linking the collected data and conclusions that have been drawn from it back to the initial questions the study is attempting to answer.

Of the 49 individuals who were invited to participate, 17 of them actually completed the questionnaire, giving the researcher an overall response rate of 34.7%. According to the Instructional Assessment Resources (IAR) page on the University of Texas' website, this response rate falls within the acceptable range. The IAR, a comprehensive resource that offers assistance in assessing student learning, classroom teaching, and instructional technology, states that 30% is the average response rate of a survey administered online (Instructional Assessment Resources, 2007). In terms of university participation, there was at least one individual from each university who completed the questionnaire, which gave the research a 100% institutional response rate. The fact that every university was represented in the study could be seen as a bit misleading since two of the institutions only had one participant and the overall pool of universities was limited in its numbers. The researcher believed this information was crucial to reveal in order to maintain complete transparency and credibility with the study's findings. Table 4 provides a breakdown of the study's 17 participants and their university affiliations.
**Table 4.** A breakdown of the number of individuals who participated in the questionnaire and their respective university affiliations.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institution</th>
<th># of Participants</th>
<th>% of Participation Pool</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ball State University</td>
<td>7 Participants</td>
<td>41.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indiana University</td>
<td>3 Participants</td>
<td>17.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indiana State University</td>
<td>2 Participants</td>
<td>11.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purdue University</td>
<td>2 Participants</td>
<td>11.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ivy Tech Community College of Indiana</td>
<td>1 Participant</td>
<td>5.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Southern Indiana</td>
<td>1 Participant</td>
<td>5.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vincennes University</td>
<td>1 Participant</td>
<td>5.9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Although there is no proof for validating this deduction, it can be surmised that Ball State's overwhelming response is due in large part to the fact that the researcher is a graduate student at this university and is also employed by its marketing and communications office.

**Questionnaire**

The questionnaire consisted of a series of questions, some of which asked only for a simple "yes" or "no" answer, while others required the participants to choose an answer from a list of provided answers. A few questions prompted participants to provide a longer open-ended response in an essay-style format. The idea behind the open-ended questions was to provide the researcher with more in-depth information that was specific to a particular university's crisis communication protocol involving social media. The more generalized questions were asked in
order to provide data that was relevant to the demographics and overall university structure as it pertains to social media. The appendix reveals the questions posed to the selected participants.

Summary of Results

There were 17 individuals who responded to the questionnaire from all seven of the public institutions of higher education in Indiana. Ball State University had the most participants (seven), while Indiana University had three. Purdue University and Indiana State University each had two, and Ivy Tech Community College of Indiana, University of Southern Indiana, and Vincennes University all had one participant complete the questionnaire.

More than half (52.9%) of the participants were between the ages of 30-50, one individual (5.9%) was under the age of 30, and seven of them (41.2%) were older than 50 years old. The age demographic is important to acknowledge because it allows the researcher to look at the comparison of the respondents’ ages to the high percentage (96%) of Generation Y who use social media networking sites which were described in chapter one (Nelson, 2012).

Seven out of 10 public-relations practitioners who are responsible for communicating official messaging during a crisis for all seven of the public institutions of higher education in Indiana are not part of Generation Y. This discovery could be an indicator that social media would not be a supported communications tool. However, the researcher's data actually proves this to not be true. Social media is visible in crisis-communications protocols. One conclusion that could be drawn from this discrepancy could be the fact that a university's primary audience—its students on campus—is closer to the age Generation Y. Thus, their use of technology and dependency on social media is much greater than other generations, so older crisis-communications professionals might see the benefit behind social-media inclusion.
There were eight participants (47.1%) who held a bachelor's degree, while seven individuals (41.2%) had a master's degree, and two participants (11.8%) had completed doctoral degrees. The fact that all of the participants hold at least a bachelor's degree is another point of distinction worth noting because these results are consistent with a 2012 survey conducted by the Pew Research Center’s Internet & American Life Project, where 72% of the 1,802 participants who use social-media sites had some type of college degree (Duggan, 2013). One limitation about this statistic to consider is the education requirement that most institutions of higher education expect an employee to have when applying for public relations and university communication positions, as evidenced by a review of positions with job descriptions similar to those of crisis-communications professionals, which indicated that a bachelor’s degree was almost always required, but a master’s degree was preferred.

The results of the survey conducted by the Pew Research Center's Internet and American Life Project are also consistent with the data results of the researcher's questionnaire. Fifteen of the 18 participants (all of whom have at least a bachelor's degree) indicated that universities—in general—should be using social media during a crisis situation if resources (e.g., money, knowledge, personnel, etc.) permit it.

All of the participants from the researcher's study indicated that their university had an official account with some type of social-media outlet. Facebook was the only social media outlet that was mentioned by every university, and Twitter was utilized at six of the seven public institutions of higher education in Indiana—with Vincennes University being the only university to not have an active account at the time the researcher collected data. Additional social media outlets actively used included YouTube, Pinterest, Google+, LinkedIn, as well as an internal Web student forum. Table 5 breaks down the various social media accounts that the participating
universities use as official tools to communicate with their target audiences and the general public.

**Findings**

The most prominent takeaway from the questionnaire responses involved question 10: Is social media part of your university's crisis communication protocol? Six out of seven universities responded that social media was part of its crisis communication protocol, with only Ball State answering "no". Of the seven individuals from Ball State who responded to the questionnaire, six of them also indicated their rationale for not including social media as part of its crisis communication protocol. Table 6 shows their responses.

Although it was already mentioned in chapter one, it is worth reiterating Ball State University's recent crisis situation, which involved a supposed gunman on its campus in March 2013. Because the university does not currently include social media as part of its crisis communication protocol, it received some public backlash on social media (mostly on Twitter) about not communicating this emergency situation via any social media channel.

The screenshots of the Twitter chatter shown in Figures 3 and 4 depict the concerns and dangers for not posting official university messages on social media during an emergency situation. Many individuals take it upon themselves to play the role of citizen journalist by reporting what they have read or have been told from third-party sources.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social Media Tool Utilized</th>
<th># of Participants</th>
<th>% of Total Sample</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Facebook</td>
<td>17 Participants</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Twitter</td>
<td>16 Participants</td>
<td>94.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YouTube</td>
<td>8 Participants</td>
<td>47.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>4 Participants</td>
<td>23.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 5.* Social media venues and the number of participants (and percent of sample) who indicated usage at universities to communicate with target audiences and the general public.

The responses indicating students would have been left "in the dark" if not for others tweeting about the supposed gunman, or that Ball State's communication of the situation was "embarrassing" are just a couple of examples of the backlash that a university can face if it does not respond to a crisis in a timely manner using a communication platform that its targeted audience and stakeholders are accustomed to using.

In the case of Ball State University, all of its primary and secondary communications come solely from its Web site homepage, text messages, and e-mails. Additionally, only Ball State students, faculty, and staff members have the ability to sign up to receive these electronic messages, and they must opt into the system. This type of practice eliminates the option of family members of students or the general public to receive any official electronic notification of a crisis unless they check the university's website. In fact, the university's policy, which can be found on its website, clearly states that "Ball State does not use social media as a form of official communication in the event of an emergency or public safety situation" (Ball State University, 2013).
"An inordinate amount of resources would be required to monitor social media to insure [sic] that the information being shared is accurate."

"There are numerous documented cases of emergency hoaxes starting on college campuses and in other large facilities. If the only official place for official information is the campus website, then the campus community can be trained to always go to that bonafide source for information. An exception: there is value in monitoring social media (particularly Twitter) for misinformation and using Twitter to enter those erroneous conversations back to official information at the campus website."

"Here was our rational (published online) for why we did not use social media: Be aware that the university does not use social media as a form of official communication in the event of an emergency or public safety situation. In a crisis situation, accuracy and timing are critical, and the public needs to rely on one official, accurate source for its information. The primary source for Ball State is our website, www.bsu.edu, and our emergency alert system. Again, in light of some recent events, we are now reevaluating that strategy."

"This rationale appears to be changing after the last incident mentioned above, i.e., the supposed gunman incident, but the rationale has been that the interactive nature of social media can give the "stamp of official approval" to rumors and false information."

"We are in the process of adding use of social media—specifically Twitter—to our protocol and assigning specific staff to that role."

"We are looking into the best way to incorporate social media to refer users to official sources."

*Table 6.* Questionnaire responses from Ball State University participants articulating their rationale for not including social media as part of its crisis-communication protocol.
Figure 3. Tweets posted during Ball State University's crisis situation involving a supposed gunman on its campus in March 2013.

Figure 4. Additional tweets posted during Ball State University's crisis situation involving a supposed gunman on its campus in March 2013.
However, Ball State, as previously indicated this chapter, is the only one of the seven universities surveyed that currently does not use any social media platform as part of its communication during a crisis. In contrast, the other six institutions include Facebook as either a primary or secondary strategy, and four of them also use Twitter as a communications tool as well. These results are consistent with the other examples, mentioned in chapter two, of many other higher-education organizations around the country actively using social media during a crisis. And the fact that Ball State University is seriously considering adding Twitter to its crisis-communications protocol is added proof that social-media is a valuable and effective tool to communicate to a particular audience in a time-sensitive situation.

Another interesting finding is in the responses to question nine of the questionnaire: In your professional opinion, do you think universities—in general—should be using social media during a crisis situation if resources (e.g., money, knowledge, personnel, etc.) permit it? As shown in Figure 5, there were 15 individuals who answered "yes" and only two individuals who responded "no". The two respondents who answered "no" are employed at Ball State University, which leaves five public-relations practitioners from Ball State who believe universities should be using social media during a crisis situation. This data is consistent with respondents’ indications about the university beginning to now explore using social media as part of its official communication during an emergency situation.

Another finding pertains to which social media tools are being utilized by universities during an emergency situation. Each university that utilizes social media as an official communications tool during a crisis (excluding Ball State University) uses Facebook. Twitter was second, with four universities using it to disseminate official university messages—with the only exceptions being Vincennes University and Ivy Tech Community College of Indiana.
In your professional opinion, do you think universities—in general—should be using social media during a crisis situation if resources (e.g., money, knowledge, personnel, etc.) permit it?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer</th>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>88.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>11.8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 5. The results for question nine of the questionnaire.*

Both of these universities use only Facebook. Purdue University is the one institution of those investigated that indicated using YouTube as one form of official communication during a crisis. However, although Purdue University listed YouTube as one of its social media crisis communication tools, the researcher could not find any videos that had been uploaded to its YouTube channel that could be linked to any on-campus crisis.

One additional takeaway from the data is that 10 out of the 17 participants answered "yes" to question 10—Is social media part of your university's crisis communication protocol? However, only five of them actually included utilizing social media (Facebook and Twitter) in their responses to the hypothetical situation—"A call has come into your university's police department that there is a man with a firearm who has been spotted outside of a dormitory. Please explain the initial steps and processes that your university takes in order to communicate this information to all audiences."

Although there were respondents representing six out of seven universities, with the exception of Ball State University, who answered question 10 with a 'yes" response, only four universities were represented (one respondent from University of Southern Indiana, one from Indiana University, one from Purdue University, and two from Indiana State University) out of the five respondents who mentioned using social media as part of the hypothetical situation. None of the participants from Ivy Tech Community College of Indiana or Vincennes University
offered any form of social-media action (Facebook and Twitter) in their responses to the hypothetical situation.

These findings anecdotally support the researcher's original hypothesis that public universities in Indiana are reluctant to use social media at all, or they use it sparingly, as an official communication tool during a crisis situation, despite the fact that it is a part of crisis-communications protocol.
CHAPTER V

IMPLICATIONS

As indicated in chapter four, key findings emerged throughout the research-gathering process and subsequent data analysis concerning whether and why universities use or exclude social media as an official communication tool during a crisis.

Summary

There is not just one social-media communication tool that can be used to connect with a target audience during a crisis, although this research shows that Facebook is considered to be the most commonly used social-media tool by these university participants. This is consistent with other research involving the overall use of social media. One example is a 2013 study, conducted by The Pew Research Center, which showed that 94% of teens and 67% of adults use Facebook. These percentages were three times higher than Twitter use, the second leading social-media platform, which is used by 26% of all teens and 18% of all adults (socialmediatoday.com). As highlighted in chapter four, the researcher found that social media is part of the crisis protocol for all of the public institutions of higher education in Indiana, except in the case of Ball State University.

Before this study, the researcher believed that universities were still generally reluctant to use social media as an official communication tool during a crisis situation, but data results, at least those pertinent to the parameters of this case study, indicate otherwise. Findings reveal that six of seven of the universities investigated utilize at least one social media platform during an emergency situation. Future research could explore, in greater depth and detail, which social media platforms these universities use in a variety of different crisis scenarios.
For example, data from this study show that Purdue University was the lone institution to use another social-media platform (YouTube) other than Facebook or Twitter to disseminate official communication during an emergency. Another researcher might explore whether or not it is considered best practice to blanket every platform with the same official communication message for every possible crisis situation. Alternatively, it could be advantageous to strategically narrow dissemination to a particular platform based on which target audience one wants to reach during a particular level of crisis. The researcher's case study, based on its findings, would indicate that it is not necessary to cover the social-media platform spectrum, but more research focused on these considerations would help flesh out the debate over the risk versus reward of using social media during a crisis on campus.

**Limitations**

In order to gain further insight into the communication strategies and protocols of universities faced with a crisis situation, future research could explore details concerning the content, length, and frequency of the official messages posted to the various social media outlets. The researcher primarily focused on discovering if the university participants use social media during a crisis and the reasons for that decision, but the researcher did not receive information about the actual content of messages that were distributed or a timeline showing how often secondary updates were posted.

Conducting supplemental qualitative research such as in-depth interviews with the participants would have complemented the online questionnaire in order to contribute to the ongoing discussion of whether or not universities should use social media during a crisis on campus.
Another limitation to this study was the low number of participants who responded from the universities. Increasing the response rate of the questionnaire could have been attained by contacting the participating universities ahead of time to discuss the case study's objectives in an attempt to maximize the number of eligible participants who fit the study's parameters, which may not have been discovered through a simple search on the university's Website. Another method to the increase response rate could have been to offer some form of compensation for completing the questionnaire.

Although universities have crisis communication plans and protocols in place that are governed by a larger group, individual public-relations practitioners do have opinions about using social media as a crisis-communication tool. More individual input involving personal opinion and personal experience would be helpful to capture. The widespread use of social media is changing the landscape of communication, and professional opinions and life-experiences of individuals working in the field of higher education are important indicators of how an organization can adapt to account for this change. For example, the information that Ball State employees provided demonstrates why this research is important and needs to be further explored.

**Future Research**

One area that was not explored in this study, but would be helpful to understand, is to look at how much time, money, and personnel universities allocate to the social media portion of their crisis communication protocols and plans. There is no doubt that social media is being used by universities to market their school and programs to prospective students and their parents—as
well as to media outlets—but how much education and strategy is going into effectively using social media during a crisis or emergency on campus?

The fact that social media is a powerful and fast-growing communication tool in this world and crises occur on university campuses are clear indicators that these two statements must be explored collectively as a legitimate possibility of incorporating social media into all university crisis-communication plans. University public-relations offices play a key role on campus during a crisis, serving as a liaison between university administration and the campus community. Their role is to prepare key messages that are factual and timely and then distribute the information messages to stakeholders. This information needs to be accurate and delivered instantly. Social media can provide this platform if utilized with a balance between timeliness and accuracy. However, social media also presents the potential problem of universities losing control over their information and messaging.

Additional research needs to be conducted to identify the types of media that offer the best outlet for communicating with the various stakeholders, including students, during a crisis. A strong case could also be made that further research involving the exploration of how students are communicating with their peers during a crisis is needed. This type of data could be gathered by surveying the student body from multiple universities in order to obtain valuable information regarding how they prefer to receive initial crisis communication notifications and updates. The results of such a survey could influence university officials to create or adjust crisis communication protocols accordingly in order to ensure that critical information gets delivered to the highest percentage of stakeholders possible in the most efficient and timely manner.
REFERENCES


APPENDIX

Questionnaire

1. What university are you employed by?
   Ball State University
   Indiana State University
   Indiana University
   Ivy Tech Community College of Indiana
   Purdue University
   University of Southern Indiana
   Vincennes University

2. What is your age?
   Younger than 30
   30-50
   Older than 50

3. What is the highest completed degree you hold?
   Associates
   Bachelors
   Masters
   Doctorate

4. How many years have you been involved in your university's crisis communication?
   Less than 1
   1-10
   More than 10

5. Does your university have an official account with any social media outlets, e.g., Facebook, Twitter?
   Yes
6. If you answered YES to QUESTION #5, which social media tools does your university use? (Please select all that apply)

   Facebook
   Twitter
   YouTube
   Other (please specify)

7. If you answered NO to QUESTION #5, please explain your university's rationale for NOT having an official account on any social media outlets. Why does your university NOT utilize this communication tool?

8. Hypothetical Scenario: A call has come into your university's police department that there is a man with a firearm who has been spotted outside of a dormitory. Please explain the initial steps and processes that your university takes in order to communicate this information to all audiences.

9. In your professional opinion, do you think universities—in general—should be using social media during a crisis situation if resources (e.g., money, knowledge, personnel, etc.) permit it?

   Yes
   No
   Please explain.

   NOTE: At this point, if you answered NO to QUESTION #5, then you have now completed the questionnaire. If you answered YES to QUESTION #5, then please continue on with the questionnaire.

10. Is social media part of your university's crisis communication protocol?

    Yes
    No

11. If you answered YES to QUESTION #10, which social media tools do you use during a crisis? (Please select all that apply)

    Facebook
    Twitter
    YouTube
    Other (please specify)
12. If you answered YES to QUESTION #10, when does your university use social media?

   It's used only in our initial (i.e., first alert/response) communication response to our audience during a crisis

   It's used only in our secondary (e.g., updates and follow-up) communication responses to our audience during a crisis

   It's used in all communication (i.e., initial and secondary) responses to our audience during a crisis

13. Does your university have personnel specifically designated to post and monitor content on social media?

   Yes

   No

   Please explain.

14. Do you have authority from your university to send out official e-mail messages, text messages, or social media posts during a crisis?

   Yes

   No

15. If you answered YES to QUESTION #10, please explain your rationale for using EACH of the social media tools that you selected in QUESTION #11. Why does your university use EACH of these tools?

16. If you answered YES to QUESTION #10, please explain your university's rationale for NOT using each of the social media tools that you did NOT select in QUESTION #11.

17. If you answered NO to QUESTION #10, please explain your rationale for NOT including social media as part of your crisis communication protocol.