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Evolving Crisis Communication in Social Media Era: Analysis of Tweets and News Stories of the Manchester Arena Bombing

Allyson R. Staton

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Evolving Crisis Communication in Social Media Era:
Analysis of Tweets and News Stories of the Manchester Arena Bombing

by

Allyson R. Staton

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Abstract

The purpose of this research study was to better understand the evolving crisis communication methods used on traditional media and social media following organizational crises such as the Manchester Arena bombing. The research was primarily conducted by analyzing the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) online article archives and stakeholder Twitter accounts, including @ManchesterArena, @ManCityCouncil, @ArianaGrande and @GMPolice. Tweets under the hashtags #ManchesterBombing, #Manchester, #OneLoveManchester as well as the Manchester Bombing Twitter Moment were also analyzed for crisis communication responses to understand how traditional media and social media were used to communicate with the public following this crisis.

The results of this study assist future public relations students and practitioners in bettering the understanding of how crisis communication responses are evolving with each crisis. By understanding and adapting to each change in crisis communication responses via traditional media and social media, public relations practitioners can yield better crisis management responses and feedback from the publics being communicated with. The study also shows how important it is to communicate information with the public and ensure people remain informed no matter if traditional media or social media is used by the target audience.

Keywords: public relations, crisis communication, breaking news, traditional media, social media, Twitter, BBC, Manchester Arena bombing

Dedication

To my parents, siblings, and friends:

Thank you for everything. You believed in me when I didn't believe in myself.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of Tables.....	viii
List of Abbreviations.....	ix
List of Appendix Figures.....	x
CHAPTER I: Introduction.....	1
CHAPTER II: Literature Review.....	5
Defining a Crisis	
Understanding Crisis Communication	
How Audiences Seek Crisis Responses	
Use of Traditional Media and Social Media in Crisis Communication	
Research Questions	
CHAPTER III: Method.....	19
Identifying the Stakeholders	
Identifying the Media Outlets	
Sample Table	
Performing the Content Analysis	
Analyzing the Data Collected	
CHAPTER IV: Results.....	24
CHAPTER V: Discussion.....	35
CHAPTER VI: Conclusion.....	36
References.....	38
Appendix.....	43

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1.....25

Table 2.....26

Table 3.....27

Table 4.....28

Table 5.....30

Table 6.....31

Table 7.....31

Table 8.....32

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

BBC British Broadcasting Corporation

LIST OF APPENDIX FIGURES

FIGURE NUMBER

1. Coding Book.....43

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

At approximately 10:30 p.m. on May 22, 2017, one of the United Kingdom's most populous cities was changed forever. The day started off like any other: parents dropped their kids off at school and went to work, trains ran on their usual timetables, and people went about their normal daily routines. Except it was not a completely normal day for some people in Manchester. That night, United States singer Ariana Grande would perform at the Manchester Arena. Fans of Grande were excited for the night to come; for some it was their first time seeing Grande in concert, and for others, their first concert they ever attended. A night that was supposed to end in excitement and longing for continuity ended in heartbreak and tragedy.

Shortly after the conclusion of Grande's final song around 10:30 p.m., a radicalized terrorist detonated a homemade, shrapnel-infused bomb in the foyer of the Manchester Arena (Manchester attack: What we know so far.). The foyer was full of Grande fans leaving the arena. That specific foyer is known to be the busiest entrance and exit from Manchester Arena due to it housing the box office and leading to a bridge that connects to one of the main rail and tram stations (Manchester attack: What we know so far.). Concert-goers in proximity to the explosion were pierced by shrapnel from the homemade device. Twenty-two victims and the bomber died following the attack on the Manchester Arena. An additional 116 people were hospitalized following the attack and an estimated 800 people sustained non-fatal injuries (Manchester attack: What we know so far.).

As the bomb detonated, concert-goers were blown off their feet as a widespread panic took over the Manchester Arena. Immediately following the explosion, chaos

ensued. People scrambled to find an exit from the arena, fearing that this explosion was only the beginning (Manchester attack: What we know so far.). Drivers who had only recently arrived to pick up friends and relatives went on a desperate hunt to find their missing passengers, which was often a parent looking for their missing child (Manchester attack: What we know so far.). In the hours following the attack, people made 240 emergency calls, 60 ambulances arrived, and 400 police officers attended to the tragic attack at the Manchester Arena (Manchester attack: What we know so far.). The night of May 22, 2017 was supposed to be fun and exciting; however, it was devastating and tragic for the victims, their families, Ariana Grande, and the world.

In the hours, days, and months following the attack, traditional media and social media platforms would be used to communicate about the bombing in order to help those who had been affected. Media platforms were used for a number of different reasons following the attack. People would inquire about missing friends or relatives, offer rides and housing, offer condolences, provide footage and evidence from the attack, and share the news worldwide. It was not long before the news of the attack had spread around the world, and everyone with access to a newspaper, television screen, or social media account knew every detail of what happened at the Manchester Arena.

Immediately following the Manchester Arena bombing, traditional media platforms, such as newspapers, television stations, and radio stations provided news coverage of the attack. Coverage started in and around the United Kingdom, but quickly spread to the United States where the bombing was covered on every major news outlet. Traditional media platforms kept pictures and videos of the bombing censored or provided a warning that viewers should use discretion before viewing such content as it

might be harmful to some viewers. Soon after, traditional media outlets started circulating a helpline that the public could call if their loved ones were missing and spread the word that there was a gate of the arena if people needed assistance. Since traditional media platforms often have regulations about what can and cannot be published or aired, this type of coverage, and the corresponding updates, is the type of content that was dominating newspapers, televisions, and radios.

However, social media is more lenient on what can be posted because it is less regulated than traditional media outlets and is mostly used by the majority of the public, meaning anyone can create an account and post an update. Following the Manchester Arena bombing, people flocked to social media to share videos and images of the devastation. Additionally, social media users in the Manchester area offered free rides and housing to those who had been affected by the bombing. This was seen primarily on Twitter and users just had to send the person who Tweeted the offer a direct message to get more information. Ride sharing platforms Uber and Lyft suspended the surge charge and offered free rides out of the area affected by the bombing. Users of Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram shared a “Pray for Manchester” image to stand in solidarity with those affected. The image was a pink background with a black ribbon which featured Ariana Grande’s iconic black bunny ears. The words “Pray for Manchester” were displayed under the ribbon. Probably the most shocking content shared by social media users was pictures and videos from the explosion. The images, often uncensored, showed the chaotic scene following the attack. Since the Manchester Arena bombing, social media platforms have implemented a “potentially sensitive content” feature that hides or blurs content and requires the user to press a “reveal” button in order to view the image

or video. While social media offers a new way for people to communicate post-crisis, there is always the threat of Internet trolls posting fake content in order to earn likes and shares. One way Twitter is combatting this is through the use of Moments. Moments help highlight the most important Tweets related to an event in order for people to get a snapshot of the event and all the pertinent information. This helped people during the attack have updated information a lot quicker than waiting for a news update or scrolling through all of their newsfeeds.

In the past, traditional media has been the main source of news coverage following any major event, especially a terrorist attack. Now, with social media dominating the lives of people worldwide, more and more people are looking to social media for their news. Compare this with the 9/11 attack or the Centennial Olympic Park bombing, and the crisis communication methods following the attack vary greatly. Before social media, people relied solely on word of mouth, newspapers, and news and radio stations, but now people can learn about an attack from scrolling their newsfeeds and reading posts from people who experienced it firsthand. Social media offers a new way for users to interact in a crisis. When done correctly, it can be beneficial to all those involved. With the Manchester Arena bombing being one of the first attacks to use social media as a vehicle for crisis communication, a lot can be learned from what was done right and what missed the mark. However, one thing everyone can agree on is that May 22, 2017 started as a normal day in Manchester but ended in a horrific act of violence that devastated the world and changed the way crisis communication is used on traditional media and social media platforms following terrorist attacks.

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

Defining a Crisis

There are two types of crises that utilize crisis communication: natural disasters and organizational crises (Ulmer, Sellnow & Seeger 2017 p. 3). Natural disasters are often unexpected and unpredictable while organizational crises can often be prevented or expected. Organizational crises can include food-borne illnesses, corporate malfeasance, and terrorism (Ulmer, et. al 2017 p. 3). The Manchester Arena bombing was an attack of terrorism on the city of Manchester and is therefore considered an organizational crisis.

Crises lead to positive outcomes because crises provide “opportunities for learning and improvement” with the “potential to leave the organization stronger in some ways than it was before the crisis” (Ulmer, et. al 2017 p. 4). If an organization does not handle a crisis appropriately, then the organization can be weakened and never recover. Any organizations who handle crises poorly often “lose the confidence of both their own members and the public,” which is hard to recover from (Ulmer, et. al 2017 p. 4).

Ulmer, Sellnow, and Seeger identify three characteristics that separate crises from unpleasant events. The three characteristics are: surprise, threat, and short response time (Ulmer, et. al 2017 p. 5). According to Ulmer et. al, “a troubling event cannot reach the level of crisis without coming as a surprise, posing a serious threat, and forcing a short response time” (Ulmer, et. al 2017 p. 5). In regards to surprises, Ulmer, Sellnow, and Seeger state that natural disasters escalate to the level of crisis when they “come at a time or level of intensity beyond the expectations of government officials and residents” (Ulmer, et. al 2017 p. 5). Organizational crises are almost always a surprise to the organization. If the organization knows about an issue before it comes to light, it is

usually not considered a crisis. In regards to threats, Ulmer, Sellnow, and Seeger state that “all crises create threatening circumstances that reach beyond the typical problems organizations face” (Ulmer, et. al 2017 p. 6). Threats can affect the organization’s financial network, its customers, any nearby residents, and stakeholders in the organization (Ulmer, et. al 2017 p. 6). In regards to short response time, Ulmer, Sellnow, and Seeger state that “the threatening nature of crises means that they must be addressed quickly” (Ulmer, et. al 2017 p. 6). In order to reduce criticism following a crisis and effectively communicate, organizations must respond immediately in the wake of a crisis. However, *Effective Crisis Communication: Moving from Crisis to Opportunity* states that responding quickly is often difficult for organizations because of uncertainty and unknown information regarding the crisis (Ulmer, et. al 2017 p. 6). Additionally, *Effective Crisis Communication: Moving from Crisis to Opportunity* goes on to stress the importance of an organization taking control of the crisis and setting the tone for response and recovery efforts (Ulmer, et. al 2017 p. 6).

As stated before, the Manchester Arena bombing on May 22, 2017 was an act of terrorism, which classifies as an organizational crisis. In *Effective Crisis Communication: Moving From Crisis to Opportunity*, Ulmer, Sellnow, and Seeger define an organizational crisis as “a specific, unexpected, and nonroutine event or series of events that create high levels of uncertainty and simultaneously present an organization with both opportunities for and threats in its high-priority goals” (Ulmer, et. al 2017 p. 7). The authors then add that “once an organization abandons its routine procedures, its leadership is faced with managing [the] uncertainty by emphasizing either opportunities for growth or renewal or threat to the organization’s image or reputation in their crisis communication (Ulmer, et.

al 2017 p. 7). Unfortunately, no organization is safe from a crisis. Since the Manchester Arena bombing is defined as an organizational crisis, it is now important to understand crisis communication in order to analyze its effectiveness in the Manchester Arena bombing.

Understanding Crisis Communication

According to the Institute of Public Relations, a critical function for all organizations is crisis management and communicating during a crisis (Coombs, 2007 p. 66-77). Crisis management is a pertinent function for all organizations because of its relations to three major threats: public safety, financial loss, and reputation loss (Crisis Management and Communications 2018 p. 1). Dilenschneider (2000) notes that all crises are a threat to an organization and its reputation because it reflects poorly on an organization and its communication efforts (Dilenschneider, 2000 p.63). As seen during and after the Manchester Arena bombing, public safety is often the most important concern for stakeholders and the public during a crisis. Due to this, crisis management is “designed to protect an organization and its stakeholders from threats and/or reduce the impact felt by threats” (Crisis Management and Communications 2018 p. 1). According to Weick (1995), the problem for an organization is not the crisis itself, but rather the communication during and after a crisis and how the organization responds to stakeholders (Weick 1995). In terms of stakeholders, Wu (2007) states, “only those publics who directly or indirectly have something to gain or lose from the organization’s operations are relevant” in terms of discussing stakeholder relations (Wu 2007 p. 3).

There are three phases to a crisis management and communication plan: pre-crisis phase, crisis response, and post-crisis phase (Crisis Management and Communications

2018). In the pre-crisis phase, Coombs (2009) states that organizations are better equipped to handle crises when a crisis management plan is in place, there is a designated crisis management team, crisis exercises are conducted annually, messages are pre-drafted for a more timely response (Crisis Management and Communications 2018 p. 3). Additionally, a spokesperson must be identified and trained to talk to the media during a crisis. In the case of the Manchester Arena bombing, there was no key spokesperson identified for the crisis as a whole; however, the Manchester City Police were the most vocal on crisis updates. In order to effectively communicate with the media and publics during a crisis, spokespeople should (Crisis Management and Communications 2018 p. 3):

1. Avoid “no comment” as publics see it as the organization hiding something
2. Present information clearly
3. Maintain strong eye contact and appearance while avoiding nervous gestures
4. Be briefed on the latest information pertaining to the crisis to be well informed and answer any relevant questions

Additionally, organizations can identify communication channels that are to be used during a crisis so pre-draft messages can be filled in and sent to the relevant media source for publication. The Institute for Public Relations states that, “stakeholders, including the news media, will turn to the Internet during a crisis” and that “crisis managers should utilize some form of web-based response or risk appearing to be ineffective” (Crisis Management and Communications 2018 p. 4).

The actual crisis response refers to actions that are taken immediately following a crisis incident (Crisis Management and Communications 2018 p. 4). The initial response should be quick, accurate and consistent with all messaging from the organization (Crisis Management and Communications 2018 p. 4). A response should typically be disseminated within an hour of the crisis incident happening, which can put a lot of pressure on the crisis management team to not only craft the response, but ensure it is published to the correct communication channels. However, an untimely response or no response can occasionally be even worse for the organization than the crisis itself. Carney and Jordan (1993) states that a quick response is “active and shows an organization in control” by letting the organization keep control of the story rather than letting others control the narrative and showing the public that the organization is not in control of the crisis (Carney 1993). With crises that affect public safety, instructing information must be issued so that people know what they have to do in order to provide protection for themselves (Crisis Management and Communications 2018). In recent years, crisis management teams have recommended that expressing concern to any victims be included in the initial response (Crisis Management and Communications 2018). This is heavily evident in the responses following the Manchester Arena bombing as there was an entire Twitter Moment dedicated to audiences sharing their condolences with those who were in the arena when the bomb went off. The Institute for Public Relations recommends the following best practices for the initial crisis response (Crisis Management and Communications 2018):

1. Be quick and try to have a response within an hour
2. Be accurate

3. Be consistent
4. Make public safety a top priority
5. Use all available communication channels
6. Show concern for victims
7. Include employees in the initial response
8. Provide counseling to victims of the crisis and their families

The final phase, the post-crisis phase, involves the organization returning to regular business practice. While the crisis is no longer a main concern for the organization, there should be follow ups and educational measures taken as needed. Stakeholders should be kept informed with any new updates and on the recovery efforts the organization has put in place (Crisis Management and Communications 2018). The Institute for Public Relations recommends the following best practices for the post-crisis phase (Crisis Management and Communications 2018):

1. Deliver all information to stakeholders as soon as the information is known
2. Keep stakeholders updated on recovery efforts, corrective measures and any investigations
3. Analyze the crisis for lessons and integrate those lessons in the crisis management plan

How Audiences Seek Crisis Responses

According to Austin (2012), crisis communication cases have increased the importance of monitoring social media and understanding how to effectively use social media for crisis responses (Austin et al. 2012). The same article claims that “audiences seek out online media for both immediate and in-depth crisis information (Austin et al.

2012). There is also a clear difference in how public relations practitioners or organizations use social media compared to how their audiences use social media to communicate during a crisis (Eyrich et al. 2008). A 2009 article by Wright and Hinson demonstrates how “social media are digital tools that facilitate interactive communication and content exchange among and between audiences and organizations” (Wright et al. 2009). For the first time, American adults polled in 2009 stated that the Internet was their preferred and the most reliable source for information and news (Austin et al. 2012). Taylor and Perry (2005) says that “online sources can be ideal for generating timely communication” (Taylor et al. 2005). While Seltzer and Mitrook (2007) added that online sources also provide organizations with interactive, two-way conversations with audiences (Seltzer et al. 2007). During a crisis, online sources like social media provide a forum for word-of-mouth communication, which works as “an informal communication channel through which personal, product/service, or organization information is conveyed, shared, and processed” (Austin et al. 2012).

The motivation behind using social media lies in young adults’ need for connectivity but also for self-expression (Behairy et al. 2006). There are five ways that online consumers use social media: topic-related, consumption, approval, moderator-related, and homeostasis (Goldsmith 2006). Topic-related refers to adding value in the community, consumption refers to using contributions from others to benefit oneself, approval refers to feeling satisfaction when praised by others, moderator-related refers to acting as a third party in the complaint process and homeostasis refers to balancing in one’s online and offline life (Goldsmith 2006). Following the Manchester Arena bombing, topic-related utility and consumption utility were more prevalent than the other

three modes of communication. Moreover, “organizations often combine both one-way and two-way communication strategies to maximize outcomes,” which relates to the use of traditional media and social media in regards to crisis responses (Taylor et al. 2005).

Use of Traditional Media and Social Media in Crisis Communication

The Internet has been an emerging source for organizations to communicate with publics and media outlets since its conception, and more often nowadays organizations are incorporating the Internet into their crisis response messaging (Taylor et al. 2005). Therefore, online communication is a pertinent strategy in an organization’s crisis communication plan (Perry et al. 2003). Traditional media is defined as any form of mass communication available before the introduction of social media. Traditional media channels include television, radio, newspapers, books, magazines and has since included digital versions of each. Social media is defined as websites and applications that enable users to create and share content or to participate in social networking. Both traditional media and social media are used by organizations to communicate with the public.

Navarro, Moreno and Al-Sumait states that “social media have profoundly altered the relations between organizations and their stakeholders due to their ability to disseminate content, provide interactivity, and foster lasting relationships” (Navarro et al. 2017). According to Brynielsson (2018), social media has a number of distinctive features such as being user-generated, interactive and mobile (Brynielsson, et. al 2018). Social media users not only consume the media but they also create and edit it as well (Brynielsson, et. al 2018). Brynielsson states that traditional media has become more interactive with the introduction of sharing articles and commenting online. (Brynielsson, et. al 2018). The flow of information and communication are thus more integrated into

the daily lives of people both online and offline. Additionally, Twitter wasn't created to help spread crisis communication responses, but it does, which shows how publics personalize innovations to conform to uses other than the creator's original idea (Taylor et al. 2005).

Social media use in an organization crisis can evolve as unpredictable changes come to light. However, social media allows for a more immediate response and interactive communication between stakeholders and the organization (Austin et al. 2012). A 2006 Pew Internet & American Life study shows that “during crises, audiences’ social media uses increases (Pew Internet & American Life 2006). While Procopio (2007) expands on that claim and states that audiences find social media more credible than traditional media sources during an organizational crisis (Procopio et al. 2007).

In this research study, the social media platform being analyzed is Twitter. According to Eriksson (2016), Twitter is “an asymmetrical, one-way micro blog network that primarily enables users to follow friends, experts, celebrities, and breaking crisis news” (Eriksson et al. 2016). Twitter is also more dialogic, interactive and builds relationships faster than other platforms (Schultz et al. 2011). By including a hashtag in a Tweet, people are connecting to other people around the world who use the same hashtag. Bruns and Burgess (2014) discuss the importance of hashtags when the “aim is to disseminate important crisis messages and news to wide networks of users” (Bruns et al. 2014). Regardless, Eriksson (2016) concludes that Twitter is a top communication channel in times of crisis, it's an important tool for crisis monitoring and it makes discovering crises easier by its use of hashtags (Eriksson et al. 2016).

The use of social media is widespread in the United States and Europe, which gives reason to believe that “social media use and coverage will increase rather than decrease in the future” (Brynielsson, et. al 2018). With social media still in its youth, crisis communication responses will likely be focused on social media platforms in future crises. According to Brynielsson (2018), “an important success factor for using social media tools in emergency management is to use the same tools for daily communication and activities, and not just in times of crisis. This is necessary for creating a relationship with people online, as well as creating trust. It is also important for crisis communication officials to be clear, honest and precise in communication, and to share and follow messages from credible sources. Social media provides an “unfiltered, up-to-date line of communication” (Procopio et al. 2007) and “unique crisis information that audiences cannot get elsewhere” (Bucher 2002). However, Coombs (2009) states that publics’ evaluation on crisis responses is minimal in regards to media type (Coombs 2009). Five media tactics were identified by Taylor and Perry (2005) in regards of engagement features for online communication (Taylor et al. 2005):

1. Dialogic communication: organizations encourages the visitor to respond to an issue via the Internet
2. Connecting links: organizations directly connect journalists to Internet sites
3. Real-time monitoring: organizations provide updated information hour-by-hour
4. Multi-media effects: organizations offer images, video, photography and audio

5. Online chat: organizations involve people in the situation

During a crisis, Jin and Liu (2010) describe a social-mediated crisis communication model that organizations use when communicating with publics in a crisis (Liu et al. 2010). According to the social-mediated crisis communication model, there are three types of publics who produce and consume information before, during and following a crisis. The three types of publics are: influential social media creators, social media followers, and social media followers (Liu et al. 2010). Influential social media creators create crisis information to disseminate to others to consume (Liu et al. 2010). Social media followers are defined as those who consume the influential social media creators' information (Liu et al. 2010). Social media inactives consume influential social media creators' information through word-of-mouth communication with social media followers or traditional media (Liu et al. 2010). As described by the model, "crisis information is transmitted directly from influential social media creators to social media followers, but potentially indirectly from influential social media followers to social media inactives (Liu et al. 2010). The model also shows how traditional media and social media transmit information directly between the other (Liu et al. 2010).

According to Eriksson (2016), the use of social media in crisis communication creates new opportunities for stakeholders and the public to produce their own content, monitor crisis issues, and engage in fast conversations (Eriksson et al. 2016). The world has become more networked based with speed and first reactions in crisis communication being more valued by audiences (Pinter 2018). Eriksson states that in times of crisis, delivering the message was more important than the message itself when it came to generating positive attitudes among the message receivers (Eriksson et al. 2016).

Eriksson concludes that crisis communication via Twitter led to less negative crisis reactions than newspaper articles (Eriksson et al. 2016). Another study conducted showed that people use social media during crisis situations to seek more information, and maintain contact with loved ones (Liu et al. 2013). An additional study showed that Twitter is most often used in crisis events to redistribute information and to provide eyewitness accounts (Palen et al. 2010).

No matter if people are getting news from traditional media outlets or social media outlets, Brynielsson (2018) states a number of recurring characteristics that affect the effectiveness of crisis communication responses. These characteristics are: content of the message, timing, trust, media outreach and connectivity (Brynielsson, et. al 2018). The content of the message should include location, time, and magnitude of the impact of the event and should be specific, consistent, clear and accurate (Gregg et al. 2007). Release times should be timely in order for the message to be spread effectively. Lack of a response can “extend the basic scope of the problem, widen the scope of possible interpretations, and escalate uncertainty” (Pinter 2018). Both the sender and the receiver rely on trust in terms of content and format of the message. In addition, connectivity refers to proximity and how fast the population will receive important information and in turn how fast that information can be acted upon.

Traditional and social media are especially used in crises so organizations can quickly spread a response. With the introduction of social media and the 24-hour news cycle, organizations are able to get their message out instantly rather than waiting for a television or radio broadcast or for a magazine or newspaper to be published. Austin (2012) discusses how in the past traditional media sources were used for information

needs because the sources were seen as more credible than social media; however, now both sources are seen as credible (Austin et al. 2012). According to Coombs (2009), only 24% of Americans receive their news from traditional and digital newspapers combined (Coombs 2009).

According to an article titled, “Informing crisis alerts using social media: Best practices and proof of concept” by Joel Brynielsson, et. al, “the focus of social media use has been on citizen use for organizing and spreading information, but social media should also be considered to be a communication link and a significant source of information for emergency managers” (Brynielsson, et. al 2018). Brynielsson, et. al states that the main motive of communication during a crisis is to “save lives and prevent or limit the dangers and risks of damage” (Brynielsson, et. al 2018). In terms of crisis communication, Brynielsson, et. al states that rather than waiting for public announcements during a crisis, the public can go online and actively participate in conversation regarding the crisis (Brynielsson, et. al 2018). Brynielsson, et. al discusses how “social media generally is considered an effective platform” since everyone involved in the situation can provide context rather than traditional media where a writer and editor restrict what is published (Brynielsson, et. al 2018). Regardless of whether or not an organization uses social media to communicate during a crisis, the public will continue the conversation online, which will oftentimes be met with criticism if an organization fails to respond in a timely manner. This shows the importance of using a mixture of both traditional media and social media when communicating and responding to the public following a crisis. Coombs (2009) summarizes that crisis coverage will remain a mix of traditional media

and social media even with the Internet emerging as a popular news source (Coombs 2009).

Research Questions

The research questions posed aim to answer how traditional media and social media were used to communicate with the public following the Manchester Arena bombing on May 22, 2017. This study will aid in examining traditional media and social media posts as both were utilized by media outlets and stakeholders to communicate. The research questions will seek to identify how traditional media outlets and social media outlets were used, which medium was more effective and what communication style was most popular for communicating during this terror incident. The research questions were as follows:

RQ1: How were traditional media outlets used to deliver information to the public following the Manchester Arena bombing?

RQ2: How were social media outlets used to deliver information to the public following the Manchester Arena bombing?

RQ3: Which medium, traditional media or social media, was used more effectively in communicating crisis response messages?

RQ4: What type of communication style was used the most in relaying the messages from stakeholders to the public?

CHAPTER III: METHODS

Identifying the Stakeholders

The purpose of this study is to analyze how crisis communication responses were implemented between stakeholders and target publics on both traditional media and social media following the Manchester Arena bombing on May 22, 2017 through the one-year anniversary of the event on May 22, 2018. The study began by identifying the stakeholders to analyze. Stakeholders are defined as “all of those groups and individuals that can affect, or are affected by, the accomplishment of organizational purpose (Freeman 1984, p.64). There were five stakeholders identified for this study. Those stakeholders are as follows: Manchester Arena, Manchester city officials, Manchester police, Ariana Grande, and the individuals attending the Ariana Grande concert at Manchester Arena when the bombing occurred. These four organizations and group of individuals were identified as stakeholders because of the effect the incident had on their lives and their role in communicating crisis responses.

Identifying the Media Outlets

This study seeks to analyze the crisis communication responses between stakeholders and the public on traditional media compared to social media following the Manchester Arena bombing. To do so, the traditional media outlet and social media outlet must be identified. According to a 2018 Ofcom report, 62 percent of adults in the United Kingdom consider BBC the most important news source (Ofcom 2018). The same Ofcom report ranks three BBC sub outlets in the top ten most popular sources for cross-platform news consumption (Ofcom 2018). Therefore, the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) served as the traditional media outlet for this study. The traditional media content

of the Manchester Arena bombing was analyzed from the BBC website archives due to the BBC's popularity and trustworthiness among citizens of the United Kingdom.

In regards to the social media outlet for this study, 44 percent of adults in the United Kingdom said that social media is the most popular type of online news (Ofcom 2018). Thirty percent of United Kingdom adults aged 16-24 said that they are more likely to use Twitter and other social media platforms for their news (Ofcom 2018). Therefore, Twitter served as the social media outlet for this study. In the same 2018 Ofcom report, Twitter was ranked in the top ten most popular news sources for cross-platform news consumption (Ofcom 2018). The social media content of the Manchester Arena bombing was analyzed from accounts operated by stakeholders. The Twitter accounts analyzed were: @ManchesterArena, @ManCityCouncil, @ArianaGrande, @GMPolice. Tweets from the hashtags #ManchesterBombing, #Manchester, #OneLoveManchester and the Manchester Bombing Twitter Moment were analyzed but limited in quantity due to the overwhelming number of Twitter interactions following this incident and the timeline for the study. The Tweets were chosen by searching the hashtags #ManchesterBombing, #Manchester, #OneLoveManchester and the Manchester Bombing Twitter Moment, going down the search results and choosing Tweets to analyze.

Sample Table

The following table shows each media outlet and the number of articles and Tweets that were pulled from for this research study. Each media source is categorized under Unit of Analysis, and the number of articles or Tweets pulled from that source is categorized under unit size.

<i>Unit of Analysis</i>	<i>n</i>
BBC Archives	139
Tweets from @ManchesterArena	5
Tweets from @ManCityCouncil	5
Tweets from @ArianaGrande	6
Tweets from @GMPolice	54
General Tweets from #ManchesterBombing, #Manchester, #OneLoveManchester and Twitter Moment	52

Performing the Content Analysis

An analysis of the traditional media outlet British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) as well as the social media outlet Twitter was conducted to understand how stakeholders communicate with the public through media coverage. The timeline for the analysis was May 22, 2017 through May 22, 2018. The BBC website archives for news articles were analyzed in terms of how stakeholders communicated with the public following the Manchester Arena bombing. Additionally, four stakeholder Twitter accounts' Tweets and 52 Tweets from the public were analyzed in terms of how stakeholders communicated with the public following the Manchester Arena bombing.

News articles and Tweets were analyzed using the following five coding categories. The coding categories were: date, source, tone, theme and message purpose. The articles and Tweets were first labeled by the date it was published and then by the source (traditional media or social media) it came from.

Content was then analyzed in regards to tone. Articles and Tweets were coded either positive, neutral or negative depending on the tone of the response. Articles and Tweets were then analyzed for the message theme. The two main themes focused on if

the message was empathetic or focused in the present. Each article and Tweet were labeled with either “empathetic,” “not empathetic,” “present,” or “not present” depending on which category it fell under after analysis.

Finally, the articles and Tweets were coded by the purpose of the message. The three message types focused on in this study were informational/educational, persuasive, or personal/emotional. Each article or Tweet was coded with the appropriate label depending on the content of its messaging. These five coding categories were chosen based on literature review of how communication responses are executed following a crisis.

In terms of coding variables, each category had variables to define how the article or Tweet was labeled. Using a Google Sheet, the articles and Tweets were organized and coded based on the following variables. For date, the articles and Tweets were labeled by the date they were published to the BBC website or posted on Twitter. For source, it was labeled with traditional media (BBC) or social media (Twitter) depending on where the message originated from. For tone, if the content was positive, the piece was labeled with “positive.” If the message has a neutral tone, it was labeled with “neutral,” and if the message was negative, it was labeled with “negative.” For message themes, each article or Tweet was labeled with “empathetic,” “not empathetic,” “present,” or “not present” depending on the overall content in the message. Finally, for the purpose of the message, the articles and Tweets were labeled by which type of message purpose the content portrayed to the public, whether the message was informational/educational, persuasive, or personal/emotional. These coding categories and coding variables helped organize the content so the data collected could be accurately analyzed. The data was sorted by results

and transferred into charts and graphs so it could be easily reported in the findings section of this research report.

Analyzing the Data Collected

Following the content analysis, the coding categories were transferred to charts in order to show the relationships between traditional media and social media crisis communication responses involving an organization's stakeholders and the public following a crisis like the Manchester Arena bombing. The charts showed the frequency of the coding categories in the BBC sources compared to Tweets. Additionally, the charts showed which combination of the coding categories is used the most on which media outlet. Each of the charts created from the data collected from the content analysis of the BBC sources and Twitter is shown in the appendix section of this research study.

CHAPTER IV: RESULTS

RQ1: How were traditional media outlets used by stakeholders to deliver information to the public following the Manchester Arena bombing?

After following the methods described to analyze the articles and Tweets from the Manchester Arena bombing, multiple observations were made pertaining to how traditional media outlets were used by stakeholders to deliver information to the public following the Manchester Arena bombing. The first observation made was traditional media articles used a more neutral tone to communicate with audiences rather than a more positive or negative tone. A neutral tone is described as light or de-emphasized, meaning it is perceived as shorter than other tones. A positive tone is described as amiable or heartfelt, and usually relates to the reader on an emotional level. A negative tone is described as leaving the reader feeling angry and defensive. While there were articles that had a more positive tone, the majority of the articles analyzed had a neutral tone, which is to be expected from traditional media sources. Figure 1 shows that breakdown of message tone in the traditional media messages. The breakdown of the traditional media responses shows that a neutral tone was used the most in 99 (71.22%) of the 139 articles. Next, a positive tone followed as it was evident in 40 (28.78%) of the 139 articles. There were no articles that had a negative tone used to communicate with the intended audience.

Figure 1

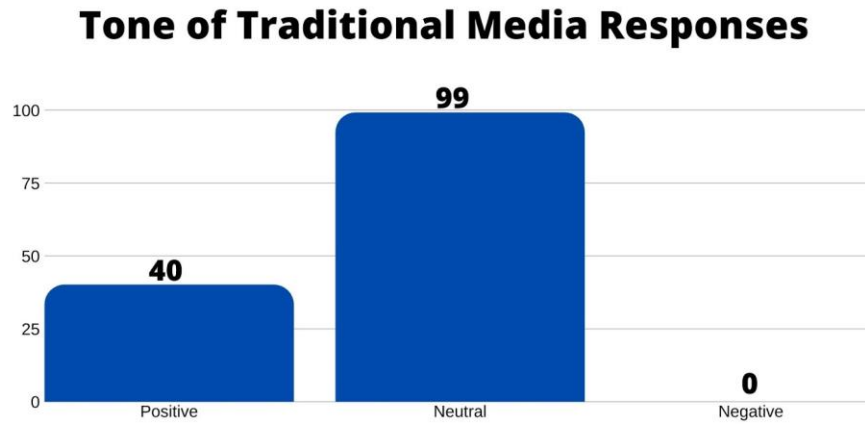


Table 1

<i>Unit</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Positive	40	71.22%
Neutral	99	28.78%
Negative	0	0%

Regarding the overall themes displayed in traditional media responses, the BBC articles were written to be not empathetic, yet still present in the crisis. While there were articles that were empathetic and not present in the crisis, a majority of the articles had themes centered around a neutral, not empathetic, yet present message. The term empathetic is described as portraying an ability to understand and share the feelings of another. Not empathetic is described as not relating to what others are feeling. Present is described as being rooted in the crisis rather than looking at the past. Not present is described as not focusing on the crisis or mainly focusing on something besides the crisis.

Figure 2 shows the breakdown of the themes presented in the traditional media messages. The breakdown of the traditional media responses shows that an empathetic theme was used in 50 (35.97%) of the 139 articles while a not empathetic theme was used in 89 (64.03%) of the 139 articles. Additionally, a theme of being present in the crisis was used in 90 (64.75%) of the 139 articles while a not present theme was used in 49 (35.25%) of the 139 articles. This data shows that traditional media outlets used a not empathetic but present message delivery strategy to deliver information to the public following the Manchester Arena bombing.

Figure 2

Theme of Traditional Media Responses

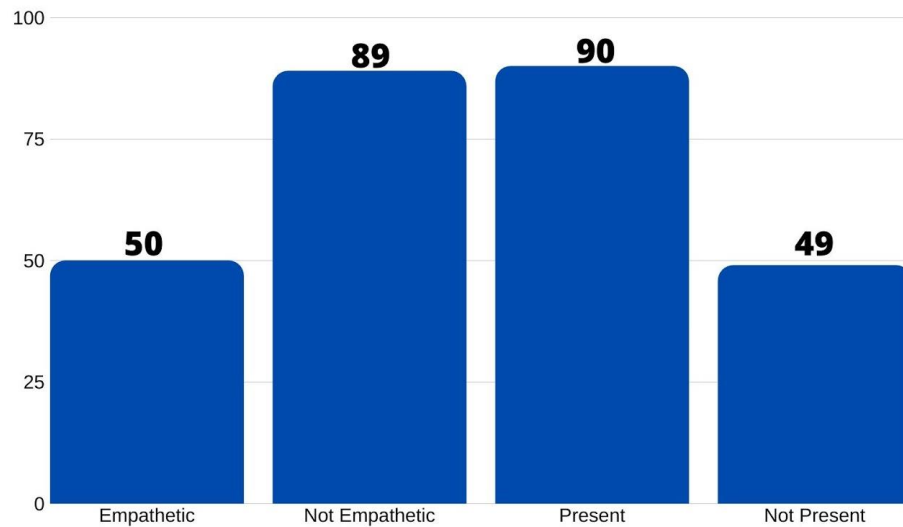


Table 2

<i>Unit</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Empathetic	50	35.97%
Not Empathetic	89	64.03%

Table 3

<i>Unit</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Present	90	64.75%
Not Present	49	35.25%

In regard to the purpose of the message, the analysis of BBC articles showed that the traditional media outlet used a mix between informational/educational and personal/emotional purposes to deliver information to stakeholders following the Manchester Arena bombing. Informational/educational is characterized by providing facts on a crisis. Persuasive is described as convincing someone to do or believe something through reasoning. Personal is described as using emotion to affect an individual. Figure 3 shows the breakdown of the message purposes in traditional media messages. The breakdown of the traditional media responses shows that an informational/educational message was used in 91 (65.47%) of the 139 articles. Additionally, a personal/emotional message was used in 48 (34.53%) of the 139 articles, and a persuasive message was not at all used in 139 articles. This data shows that traditional media outlets used a combination of informational and personal messages to deliver information to the public following the Manchester Arena bombing.

Figure 3

Message Purpose in Traditional Media Responses

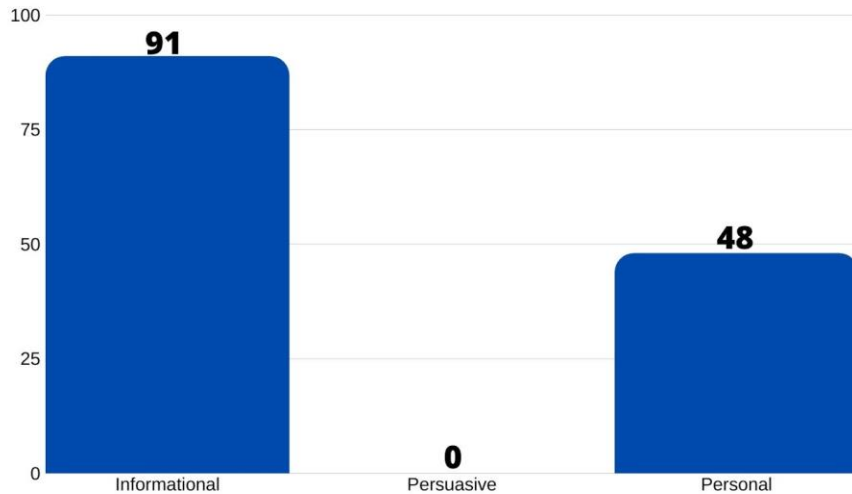


Table 4

Unit	Frequency	Percentage
Informational	91	65.47%)
Persuasive	0	0%
Personal	48	34.53%)

RQ2: How were social media outlets used to deliver information to the public following the Manchester Arena bombing?

After following the methods described to analyze the articles and Tweets from the Manchester Arena bombing, multiple observations were made regarding how social media outlets were used by stakeholders to deliver information to the public following the Manchester Arena bombing. The first observation made was social media Tweets also used a more neutral tone to communicate with audiences rather than a more positive or negative tone. A neutral tone is described as light or de-emphasized, meaning it is

perceived as shorter than other tones. A positive tone is described as amiable or heartfelt, and usually relates to the reader on an emotional level. A negative tone is described as leaving the reader feeling angry and defensive. While there were Tweets that had a more positive tone, the majority of the Tweets analyzed had a neutral tone, which is not what was expected from a social media outlet. Figure 4 shows that breakdown of message tone in the social media responses. The breakdown of the social media responses shows that a neutral tone was used the most in 92 (75.41%) of the 122 Tweets. Next, a positive tone followed as it was evident in 29 (23.77%) of the 122 Tweets. A negative tone was used in 1 (0.82%) of the 122 Tweets analyzed in this research project.

Figure 4

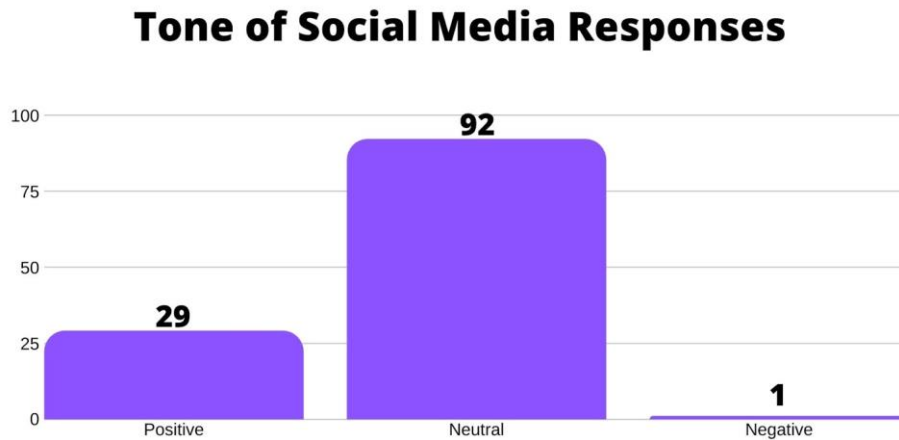


Table 5

Unit	Frequency	Percentage
Positive	29	23.77%
Neutral	92	75.41%
Negative	1	0.82%

Regarding the overall themes displayed in social media responses, the Tweets showed a mix of empathetic and not empathetic responses but also showed presence in the crisis. The term empathetic is described as portraying an ability to understand and share the feelings of another. Not empathetic is described as not relating to what others are feeling. Present is described as being rooted in the crisis rather than looking at the past. Not present is described as not focusing on the crisis or mainly focusing on something besides the crisis. Figure 5 shows the breakdown of the themes presented in the traditional media messages. The breakdown of the social media responses shows that an empathetic theme was used in 34 (27.87%) of the 122 Tweets while a not empathetic theme was used in 88 (72.13%) of the 122 Tweets. Additionally, a theme of being present in the crisis was used in 120 (98.36%) of the 122 Tweets while a not present theme was used in only 2 (1.64%) of the 122 Tweets. This data shows that social media outlets used more not empathetic message themes but still had some empathetic themes, which is to be expected from social media responses. A theme of presence in message delivery was also used to deliver information to the public following the Manchester Arena bombing.

Figure 5

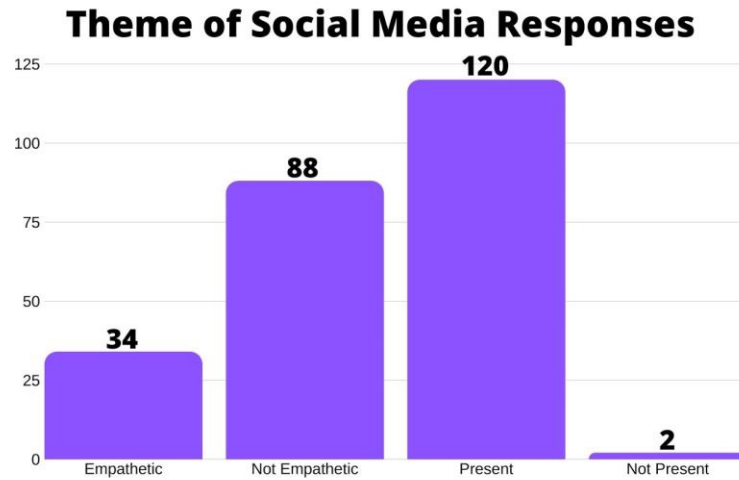


Table 6

Unit	Frequency	Percentage
Empathetic	34	27.87%
Not Empathetic	88	72.13%

Table 7

Unit	Frequency	Percentage
Present	120	98.36%
Not Present	2	1.64%

In regards to the purpose of the message, the analysis of Tweets following the Manchester Arena bombing showed that social media responses used a mix between informational/educational and personal/emotional to deliver information to stakeholders following the Manchester Arena bombing. Informational/educational is characterized by providing facts on a crisis. Persuasive is described as convincing someone to do or

believe something through reasoning. Personal is described as using emotion to affect an individual. Figure 6 shows the breakdown of the message purposes in social media messages. The breakdown of the social media responses shows that an informational/educational message was used in 88 (72.13%) of the 122 articles. Additionally, a personal/emotional message was used in 33 (27.05%) of the 122 articles and a persuasive message was used in 1 (0.82%) of the 122 articles. This data shows that social media outlets used a combination of informational and personal messages to deliver information to the public following the Manchester Arena bombing. Before conducting the analysis, it was perceived that social media responses would be more personal/emotional in nature rather than informational/educational in nature.

Figure 6

Message Purpose in Social Media Responses

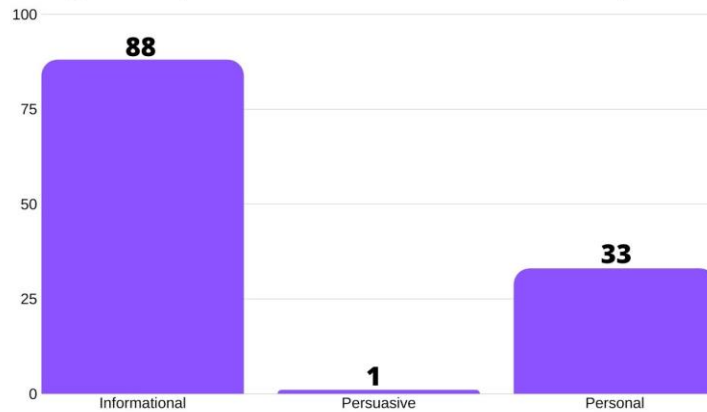


Table 8

Unit	Frequency	Percentage
Informational	88	72.13%
Persuasive	1	0.82%
Personal	33	27.05%

RQ3: Which medium, traditional media or social media, was used more effectively in communicating crisis response messages?

After conducting the analysis and reviewing the results, it is determined that a mix of traditional media and social media was most effective in communicating crisis response messages between stakeholders and the public following the Manchester Arena bombing. Not everyone uses just one medium or the other, so it is important to incorporate both into a crisis response strategy. Additionally, this study has shown that social media, while still used for personal communication, can be used to deliver informational or educational messages to the public following a crisis.

With the rise of social media, more companies, government agencies, and nonprofit organizations are using both traditional media and social media to communicate with the public. By using traditional media, the company, agency or organization is only targeting those publics who use traditional media sources like magazines, newspapers or radio. By using social media, the company, agency or organization is only targeting those publics who use social media like Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and many other social networking platforms. Older generations tend to use traditional media while younger generations tend to use social media. With a large target audience, which is often the case in crisis communication, it is important for organizations to use a mixture of both traditional media coverage and social media coverage so that companies, agencies or organizations can ensure that the intended message is being consumed by the intended target audience or public.

In this study, the Twitter account for the Manchester Police was analyzed for their crisis communication responses following the Manchester Arena bombing. Not only did the Manchester Police send out press releases and media alerts to news outlets who broadcasted the information or published it in their newspapers or online formats, but the Manchester Police also constantly updated its Twitter account with the same information. This practice ensured that the information was disseminated to the appropriate outlets in order for the message to be spread and consumed by the target audience. In this case, it was important for audiences worldwide to be kept updated with the latest information on the Manchester Arena bombing investigation, so using a traditional media and social media strategy was the best crisis communication response.

RQ4: Based on the coding categories, which aspect of communication style was used the most in relaying the messages from stakeholders to the public?

Based on the results of this study, the aspect of communication style that was used the most in relaying messages from stakeholders to the public following the Manchester Arena bombing were messages that were neutral in tone, showed presence in the crisis and were informational in purpose. The study also shows that a mix of styles can be effective in responses. For example, following the Manchester Arena bombing, many articles and Tweets were straightforward and told the details and offered information for any services that were being provided to help family members. These stories were all in a neutral tone, showed presence in the crisis and were informational in nature. However, some stories proved to be personal and convey an emotional aspect to the reader. While not providing direct information regarding the bombing, the articles and Tweets were still telling the story of what happened from firsthand accounts or personal

anecdotes from that night. It is important for traditional media outlets and social media outlets to find the most appropriate response to telling the story and also consider what the best way to communicate the intended information to the audience would be. In some cases, informational and neutral message are best perceived by the audience. These types of messages are what the audience might want. In other cases, audiences might want something a little more personal, which is where a traditional media outlet or social media outlet would tell a personal story of someone involved in order to communicate with the intended audience. It is important for companies, agencies and organization to know the intended audience in order to better understand what type of message will be the most effective in communicating information to its intended public.

Chapter V: DISCUSSION

A content analysis of the traditional media outlet, BBC, and social media outlet, Twitter, was completed as a qualitative method in the research study to analyze the evolving crisis communication methods used on both traditional media and social media specifically following the Manchester Arena bombing. The results of this research study show that both traditional media and social media outlets are being utilized as information sources following a crisis with the addition of a communication resource on social media. In Pinter (2018), it is stated that “the media market of the twenty-first century features increasingly intensive news competition and a shortening news cycle” with crises becoming “permanent topics in mainstream media” and “media competing for the attention of the target audience.” The results of this study show how media markets have evolved crisis communication responses and bridged traditional media and social media responses to overcome this issue that has progressed with the advancement of technology.

The results of this study also parallel what Schultz et al. (2011) states, “the impact of different media types on the effects of different crisis response strategies is still understudied...while the integration of the internet and social web into crisis communication is discussed intensively.” While this research study focuses on one crisis and the responses on two different media mediums, a more robust and focused analysis of crisis communication responses on traditional media and social media would be useful for future generations of public relations students so that future students and practitioners are better informed on how to act when faced with a crisis in the professional working environment.

Chapter VI: CONCLUSION

The purpose of this research study was to better understand the evolving crisis communication methods used on traditional media and social media following organizational crises such as the Manchester Arena bombing. The aim of this study was to understand how traditional media or social media was used in communicating responses, which medium was more effective in communicating responses and what aspects of communication styles was used the most in crisis communication responses between stakeholders and the public following the Manchester Arena crisis.

This research study contributes to crisis communication and crisis management response practice in public relations practice. The results of this research study provide evidence that a mix of traditional media and social media responses is most effective in communication between stakeholders and the public following a crisis like the Manchester Arena bombing. Message aspects like tone, themes, and purpose are just as important, and the research shows evidence of what is most effective in communicating with the public.

The most significant limitation in this research is the immense amount of information that was available to be analyzed. By picking one traditional media outlet and one social media outlet, the information was narrowed down, but Twitter is still an expansive website with millions of Tweets populating from the night of the Manchester Arena bombing. If there was a way to analyze millions of Tweets and articles from the Manchester Arena bombing, then this research study would yield even better results for future crisis communication practice.

Future crisis communication and crisis management response research should examine how companies use differing strategies on traditional media outlets and social media outlets yet still communicate the same information. In order to offer a more robust response to what organizations or stakeholders can do, more studies need to be conducted so that future practitioners can be better prepared to handle a crisis when it arises in the professional working environment.

The research questions were answered through a content analysis of articles from the BBC and Tweets from multiple Twitter pages, hashtags and a Twitter Moment. The results of this study assist future public relations students and practitioners in bettering the understanding of how crisis communication responses are evolving with each crisis. By understanding and adapting to each change in crisis communication responses via traditional media and social media, public relations practitioners can yield better crisis management responses and feedback from the publics being communicated with.

The study also shows how important it is to communicate information with the public and ensure people remain informed no matter if traditional media or social media is used by the target audience. It is important for public relations professionals to understand the interplay between traditional media and social media especially in a crisis situation and make a consistent and concentrated message out to the public across media. Taylor stated it best in their article when they said, “the media and the public reminds us - the effectiveness of the organization - all benefit from open communication during a crisis” (Taylor, 2005 209-217). It’s important that future practitioners understand the best practices in crisis communication responses and how important it is to remain in constant, open communication with the public.

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APPENDIX

CODING BOOK

TONE

Positive: amiable or heartfelt, usually relates to the reader on an emotional level

Neutral: light or de-emphasized; perceived as shorter than other tones

Negative: leaving the reader feeling angry and defensive

THEME

Empathetic: portraying an ability to understand and share the feelings of another

Not Empathetic: not relating to or understanding what others are feeling

Present: being rooted in the crisis rather than looking at the past

Not Present: not focusing on the crisis or focusing on something else

MESSAGE PURPOSE

Informational/educational: characterized by providing facts on a crisis

Persuasive: convincing someone to do or believe something through reasoning

Personal/emotional: using emotion to affect an individual