Methods Paper

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Introduction

Social media has become a crucial tool for organizational communication, particularly in the instance of crisis (Roshan, Warren, & Carr, 2016). The purpose of this review is to better understand how the use of social media by organizations impacts communication during crisis. Crisis management research is not a new topic nor is organizational communication. A comprehensive crisis management program (CCMP), that includes a crisis decision-making process as well as crisis communication and reputation management, is an organizational requirement for modern organizations (Coombs 2012, p. 1). Social media as a mechanism for organizational communication has grown rapidly over the last decade. The combination of organizational communication and the use of social media to disseminate information and respond during crises has only recently been carefully researched. The research in this study relies heavily on case study analysis and the synthesis of concepts related to crisis communication and social media as a tool for disseminating information.

Methods

Research Question

Researching crises is particularly difficult given the unpredictable nature of these events. It is impossible for researchers to know when a crisis will occur, and what type of crisis is happening until the crisis is over. For this reason, crises are studied in arrears and predominantly through case study. It is with this in mind, and with an eye toward case study research that this review asks this question: *How does social media impact organizational communication during crisis?* In order to answer this question, this review explores many different types of crises and how organizations with varied missions, backgrounds, and structures dealt with crises, or in some cases ignored them, through the use of social media.

Evidence-based Research

In order to answer the research question, this review will follow an evidence-based research approach. Evidence-based research is a systematic process of gathering, analyzing, and synthesizing research, which is a key tenet of evidence-based management (EBMgt). EBMgt is "the systematic, evidence-informed practice of management, incorporating scientific knowledge in the content and process of making decisions" (Rousseau, D. 2012, p. 3). The movement to evidence-based practice began in the field of medicine, spread to education, and has now landed firmly in the field of management (Tranfield, D., Denyer, D., & Smart, P. 2003). Applying evidence to management decisions is now widely accepted as best practice. EBMgt is a decision-making tool for manager/practitioners utilizing systematic reviews "that summarize in an explicit way what is known and not known" (Briner, R. Denyer, D. & Rousseau, D 2009, p. 19) about a specific topic. Management decisions based on evidence lie within the 4 overlapping elements of EBMgt (see figure 1). The balance of external evidence, stakeholder preferences, practitioners' experiences, and organizational context, leads to higher quality decisions (p. 19).
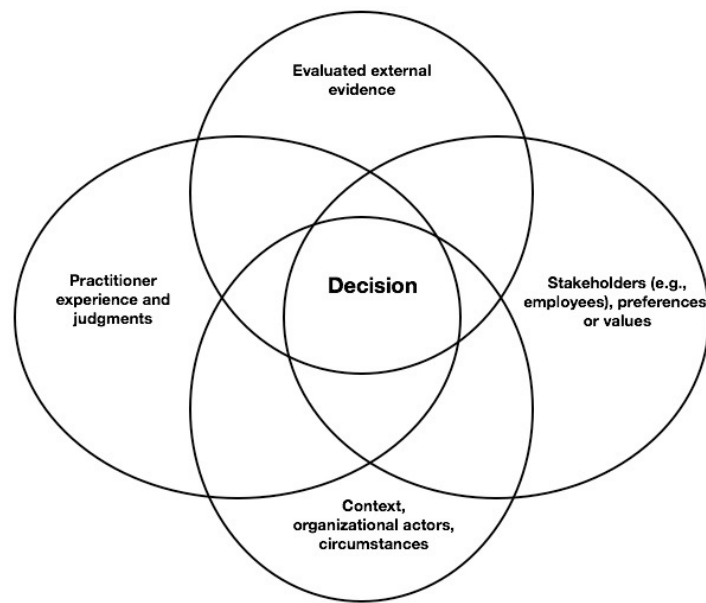
Figure 1. EBMgt decision-making model as described by Briner, Denyer, and Rousseau (2009, p. 22).

Systematic reviews have become a crucial component in EBMgt. Systematic reviews pull together information from a vast array of resources in order to summarize research findings (Rousseau 2009). Systematic reviews are: organized, based on a structured method; transparent and explicit; replicable and clear (p. 115). While systematic reviews do not provide definitive answers, they do "allow us to draw conclusions [...] with varying levels of certainty [...] to the review question" (p. 115).

The purpose of this review is to better understand the implications of the use of social media for organizational communication during a variety of potential crises in order to inform organizational leadership decisions. How organizations communicate through social media can have a great deal of impact on the organization's reputation following the crisis.

Methodological Approach

This review follows the seven-step process for the development of systematic review defined by Gough, Oliver, and Thomas (2012): review initiation; review question and methodology; search strategy; description of study characteristics; quality and relevance assessment; synthesis; and interpreting and reporting findings (p. 8).

Review Initiation

Systematic reviews are initiated by stakeholders of the organization or the research topic. Stakeholders are individuals who might use the findings of the review in practice, or whose work or lives could be impacted by the results of the review (Gough et al. 2012). Stakeholders could be subject area specialists whose primary research could be included in the review, or organizational leaders faced with a particular problem. Stakeholders can provide oversight, context, or even expert opinion throughout the review process. In some cases, stakeholders may help define the research question or the focus of the review (p. 27). In the case of this review, the review is part of a larger process to inform EBMgt practice and as partial requirements for the Doctor of Management program at the University of Maryland University College.

Review Question

The review question, as defined in the review section above, is the driving force behind the systematic review process and connects the overall goals of the review to the research methodology. Systematic reviews "either generate, explore or test theory" (p. 76). The methodology chosen for a review depends on the question, what types of research are available (quantitative or qualitative), and whether or not theories regarding the research are well defined prior to the review (p. 77).

Conceptual Framework/Methodology

This review employs a Grounded theory approach with realist synthesis. The Grounded

theory approach uncovers major conceptual categories through cycles of coding and analytic

memoing (Miles, M. Huberman, M. & Saldana, J. 2014). This method has been chosen because

organizational communication through social media has generally been analyzed through case

studies. Grounded theory is an inductive approach that assigns codes to narrative data that

represent concepts. "The resulting guidance can be relevant to all case studies" (Yin, R. 2014, p.

138). The concepts inform several rounds of coding as information is reduced to its core.

Through realist synthesis, the concepts from each of the individual studies are then

combined to form new understandings (Petticrew, M. & Roberts, H. 2006, p. 39). Realist

synthesis is used "to understand how interventions or systems work in various types of contexts"

(Denyer, Tranfield, & Aken 2008, p. 399). Realist synthesis uncovers the "generative

mechanisms" (p. 399) which may explain how an intervention could change subjects' behavior.

Additionally, this review utilizes the CIMO approach (Context, Intervention, Mechanism,

Outcome). This approach serves to inform practice through understanding how an underlying

mechanism (M) applied to an intervention (I) will provide a specific outcome (O) within a

certain context (C) (p. 399). In regards to this review, organizations like the Ford Motor

Company during crisis, represent context (C). Social media, such as Facebook, is the mechanism

(M) through which crisis communication (I) is either successful or not (O).

Search Strategy

The objective of this search was to identify studies that could provide historical context

with regard to organizational communication through social media during crisis. This is

accomplished by first establishing key words or phrases linked to the topics of crisis and social

media. An initial search was conducted utilizing the following keywords:

> Social media
> Communication
> Crisis management/ communication during
> Organizational communication
> Crisis decision-making

By limiting the database search to full-text scholarly, peer reviewed journals between

2009 and 2016, and searching the terms social media AND crisis AND communication, 1,116

articles (more than could be reviewed) were discovered. The second article, however,

Understanding the use of social media by organizations for crisis communication (Roshan,

Warren, & Carr, 2016), closely matched the objectives of the review. Using this article as a

starting point, the following search string was developed:

Social media AND cris* AND Commun* AND Organization NOT Comunity

Databases

Restricting the search to full-text articles in scholarly journals between the years of 2009

and 2016, the search string was run against UMUC OneSearch, which includes 45 databases

(including Business Source Complete, ScienceDirect, and SocINDEX). This search revealed

308 articles, which was further reduced to 124 after duplicates were removed. By manually

searching article bibliographies, 3 more articles were identified. Applying the exclusion

criteria, an additional 111 articles were excluded, 3 articles were kept for the literature review

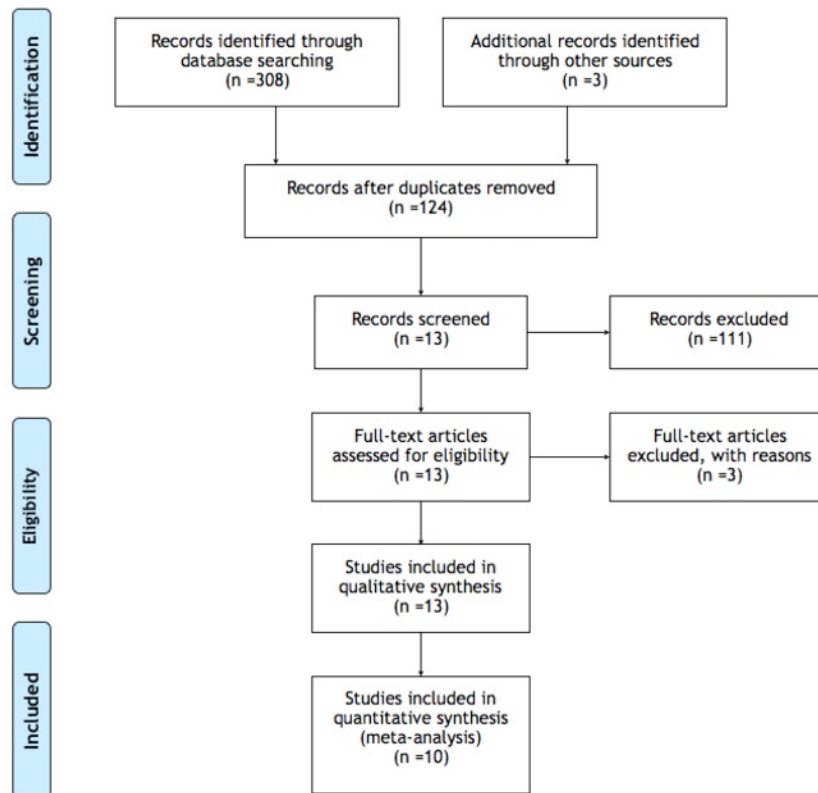and 10 articles were kept for analysis (See figure 2 for PRISMA diagram).

Figure 2. Results of systematic searches (PRISMA, 2016).

Inclusion and exclusion criteria

Due to the nature of the study of crises, case studies proliferate the extant literature. The homogeneity of the research precludes the inclusion of both quantitative and qualitative research studies, as suggested by Pawson et al. (2004). Additionally, since social media is a recent phenomenon, only articles published after 2009 were included in the research for this review. From this body of research evidence, three inclusion criteria were identified and applied to answer the research question: (1) studies must include social media as the communication mechanism rather than the wider mainstream media; (2) studies had to show that social media had some impact on the outcome of the crisis; (3) crises within the studies must match one of Timothy Coombs (2012) definitions of crisis.

Limitations of Search Strategy

As noted above, studies regarding social media and crisis communication are predominantly case studies. This homogeneity of study type is not ideal and therefore a limitation of the search strategy. Furthermore, time constraints on the review precluded searches of papers in languages other than English, which may have provided a more heterogeneous body of evidence.

Quality Appraisal

The assessment of the quality of research is important, in systematic review, to determine the fitness for purpose of each research article (Gough, 2012). For all articles that met the inclusion criteria, the TAPUPAS framework was applied. This framework enables the researcher to determine the following as defined by Ray Pawson and his colleagues: (1) transparency- is it open to scrutiny?; (2) accuracy- is it well grounded?; (3) purposivity- is it fit for purpose?; (4) utility- is it fit for use?; (5) propriety- is it legal and ethical?; (6) accessibility- is it intelligible?; (7) specificity- does it meet source-specific standards? (Pawson, Boaz, Grayson, Long, & Barnes, 2003, p. 2)

Study Characteristics and Coding

"A solid, descriptive foundation of your data enables higher level analysis and interpretation" (Miles et al. 2014, p. 162). Description of the characteristics of the research studies provides consumers of the review a more coherent picture of the state of research participants, variables, and of the focus of the studies themselves. Characterizing individual studies is the first step in coding study data. This step is to familiarize the researcher with the purpose and focus of the study (Gough et al. 2012, p. 136).

When organizations respond, or not (denial) to a crisis, their responses fall within one of nine response topologies (see Table 1) (Coombs, 2012). Initial codes were taken from these topologies and applied to all of the studies.

Table 1

Initial Coding Lexicon

Primary Code

Attack

Deny

Scapegoat

Excuse

Justify

Remind

Ingratiate

Compensate

Apologize

Realist synthesis is a theory driven approach to evaluation that synthesizes results from primary research studies in order to provide explanation as to how or why complex social interventions or mechanisms work (Pawson, Greenhalgh, Harvey, & Walshe, 2004). The four primary steps to realist synthesis are: (1) Define the scope of the review; (2) Search for and appraise the evidence; (3) Extract and synthesise the findings; (4) Draw conclusions and make recommendations (p. vi).

Methods Paper Conclusion

As this review is still in process, there are many aspects still to be completed. Utilizing the seven-step process as defined by Gough et al. (2012), has kept the process both systematic

and replicable. The nature of the research question: *How does social media impact organizational communication during crisis?,* led to the selection of realist synthesis as the method of review. As the review progresses, and coding becomes more defined, it is expected that theories regarding the mechanisms of crisis communication through social media will emerge. These theories will then be combined to allow for "conceptual innovation" (Strike, & Posner, 1983, p. 346) that could then be utilized by practitioners in the field of crisis management. It is at this point that the final stage of the review process, interpreting and reporting, will be conducted.

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