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**ALERTING THE PUBLIC DURING FOOD PRODUCT RECALLS:
SOCIAL MEDIA'S IMPACT ON ORGANIZATIONAL REPUTATION**

Written by Salita Lue/June Demary

A Thesis

Presented in partial completion of Master of Arts in Public Relations to Rowan University's
Department of Public Relations

Rowan University

Thesis Advisor: Dr. Suzanne FitzGerald

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Salita Lue/June Demary

Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to God, without whom I would not be blessed with the opportunity to pen this study. Thank you to my family, church members, and friends who supported me while writing my thesis and pursuing my Master's degree.

To my mother, Deloris Anderson and my brother Officer Frederick Demary, thank you for your unending support throughout my educational endeavors. Thank you to my father, Clyde Demary, and my sister Stacey Anderson for encouragement throughout the graduate school process.

Thank you Dr. Suzanne FitzGerald for all of your help throughout this study.

Abstract

Salita Lue/June Demary

ALERTING THE PUBLIC DURING FOOD PRODUCT RECALLS: SOCIAL MEDIA'S IMPACT ON ORGANIZATIONAL REPUTATION

2011/12

Dr. Suzanne FitzGerald, Ph.D.

Master of Arts in Public Relations

Crisis managers are constantly striving to find the best media outlets to reach the public in the event of a crisis or emergency and still maintain good public reputation. This researcher uses the food industry to examine the impact social media is having on the way the public is gathering news. This researcher will also study generational divides and how news gathering preferences differ among generational groups. This study also investigates the impact social media use has on organizational reputation in a crisis. A focus group and content analysis will serve as this study's qualitative measures and a surveymonkey.com survey will function as the primary quantitative measure. These instruments will measure reputation, opinions regarding social media, and news gathering preferences overall and generationally. Social media is a tool currently being widely used and explored by communications professionals. Harnessing its power for potentially life threatening situations such as food product recalls could save lives and spare businesses severe monetary repercussions and reputation damage.

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Chapter 1

Purpose

The advent of the mobile internet and social media has allowed news to be shared and accessed instantly from anywhere. There is no question about social media's power when it comes to marketing and reaching an audience. According to a CBS.com article titled *5 surprising social media facts*, Americans spend three times as much time on social media as e-mail (Dave Johnson, 2011). The same article says "Neilson found that 60% of social networkers are writing reviews and sharing them with friends." Because so many people share and receive news via social media, researchers are realizing that the power of this medium can be used to quickly share news in a crisis.

Laura Crovo, Vice President at the Baltimore, Maryland based MGH advertising agency, wrote an article titled *3 Tips on Crisis Communications* on business2community.com offering her expertise regarding social media and crisis communication. She says that according to a survey conducted by Gartner Communications, 85% of companies worldwide have general crisis plans but only 20.7% have established social media crisis plans. She also said that according to the survey, 71% of in-house PR professionals said social media was becoming more and more important, but only 78.6% of PR professionals said they were prepared to use social media (Crovo, 2010).

Numerous studies have been conducted regarding social media and crisis communications but very few have been conducted regarding social media and product recalls, specifically in the food industry.

This study intends to collect aggregate opinion pertaining to news gathering during a food emergency. This study will also explore expert opinion on the use of social media in crisis management. The information gleaned from researching overall industry opinion pertaining to social media and food industry emergencies can be carried over to other aspects of crisis management and can be used as a roadmap for social media use in crisis management in and out of the food industry.

Reputation management is also a very important part of crisis communication. In the midst of a crisis, an organization must assure its publics that it is still a reputable and quality establishment. This study will also examine if the use of social media during an emergency in the food industry has a positive or negative effect on organizational reputation.

Problem importance

The importance of this problem goes beyond the food industry. Social media are changing the way news is shared during any type of emergency, but the food industry has a particularly urgent need to spread news quickly. In a study by Shelly Wigley and Maria Fontenot which will be discussed in chapter 2, a Public Relations strategist named Mark Hannah stated, "PR professionals no longer have time to strategize before bad news reaches the media and public. Instead, we have to strategically repair the news once the public (and, thus, the media) has already broken it," (Wigley and Fontenot, 2011).

According to a May 2010 article written by Janice Wong published on AustralianFoodNews.com, an online food industry news source based out of Victoria, Australia, Australian food suppliers could soon be mandated by law to update the public more frequently

and directly by means of social media because the number of food product recalls has risen so dramatically. The article says:

The report [Review of the Australian Product Safety Recall System] recommends suppliers be expected to develop recall communication plans that target consumers based on demographics and communication preferences, including making greater use of social media and online forms of communication such as websites and blogs to advertise product recalls, (Wong, P. 5).

Could something similar soon become mandatory worldwide? One can never know, but as a public relations professional, preparedness for any situation is a must.

According to WebMD.com, the salmonella peanut scare of 2009 caused a need to reach mass numbers of people in a short period of time because the peanut supplier, the Peanut Corporation of America, had its product used by other food brands such as Trader Joe's who recalled Peanut Butter and Chocolate Chip cookies and Rite Aid who recalled Chocolate Peanuts and Bridge Mix (WebMD.com, 2011).

This recall wasn't a local fiasco that could be solved with a feature on the evening news and a flyer to local residents. This story made national news headlines with stories on the HuffingtonPost.com and CBSnews.com. Could social media have made a difference in getting information to people and updating the public about the situation? That is what this study will explore.

Retailers and manufacturers in the food industry, like all other industries, have specific legal obligations regarding reporting to the FDA and informing the public about the product recall as highlighted on the FDA website, FDA.Gov. Could social media help people in the food industry fulfill these guidelines by meeting their FDA deadlines and becoming a standardized

part of crisis communication plans? This thesis should be a start to answering some of these questions.

Validity

Numerous researchers have conducted studies regarding social media and emergencies, but they are few and far between in the area of food. In a situation such as mass food product recalls, it is quite pertinent to get information pertaining to the incident to the public as quickly as possible because lives could be at stake.

The authors of *Is the medium more than the message? Perceptions of and reactions to crisis communication via Twitter, blogs and traditional media* state that social media's role in crisis communication is an area that is vastly understudied. They feel there is a need to explore its effects on the way the public receive messages and message types in crisis communications. The article states, "The effects of different media and especially social media on recipients in crisis situations are still understudied," (Schultz, Utz, and Göritz, 2010).

The 2011 Wigley and Fontenot study stated that there is plenty of evidence that crisis communication has had an impact on news reporting. The authors state "Examples of social media's impact on crisis reporting abound. When U.S. Airways Flight 1549 landed safely in the Hudson River, the first pictures of the crash were posted on Twitter. When terrorists took over parts of Mumbai, victims tweeted to update their friends, families and the world about what was happening to them," (Wigley and Fontenot, 2011).

Social media has also given rise to citizen journalism. People are sharing their opinions and reporting on accidents as they happen.

This study will benefit practitioners in and outside the food industry. Examining the changing landscape of news and how it makes the public change its view of corporate responsibility is vital to modern day public relations professionals.

Delimitations

This researcher will not:

1. Include food emergencies related to natural disasters such as famines, earthquakes, or the like.
2. Study the effect of the messages sent through the channels, just the effect of the channels on its audiences.
3. Include the marketing aspect of social media. This research will not focus on selling.

Hypotheses

Hypothesis 1: It is expected that the best way to handle a crisis or emergency in the food industry is to alert the public through social media. Based on the fact that there is more citizen journalism, which CW Fong and Associates define in their article *Research: Crisis Communication in the era of new media*, citizen journalists as a surge of people posting their own accounts and/or opinion pertaining to newsworthy events (CW Fong and Associates, 2010), organizations may feel the need to take to social media for damage control because social media is where today's public conversation is happening.

The article also reads:

In today's information environment, practically anyone can create and disseminate "news" contents. These "citizen journalists" can now galvanize populace support as widely and

as effectively as any big budget news organization. Furthermore, the internet's ability to provide instantaneous news on a 24/7 basis, consolidated and indexed (via intelligent search engines), has made it the primary source of news (CW Fong and Associates, P. 4).

The Executive Director of the American Public Health Association stated in a roundtable discussion, that will be later discussed, that, "It [social media] speeds up communication and for all practical purposes speeds up awareness," (CW Fong and Associates, 2011).

In the Wigley and Fontenot study, which will be discussed in more detail in the literature review, PR strategist Mark Hannah, stated "We (PR professionals) used to provide information and context in crisis situations. Now, the contextualizing is being wrestled from us by a media culture that is responding before we can. However, in the case of crises, user-generated media is just as likely to inform traditional media as vice-versa,"(Wigley and Fontenot, 2011).

Hypothesis 2: It is expected that younger people (ages 18-24) will be more inclined to use social media to get their news than their older counterparts (ages 50 +). Younger people have grown up with technology such as iPhones, iPads, and social networking and new media is second nature. According to the 2010 Pew Internet and American Life Project, 73% of teens use social media which was an increase from their previous study, (Dave Johnson, 2011).

Hypothesis 3: It is expected that the use of social media will positively affect the reputation of its user in the event of a crisis. Social media used during a crisis will cause the public to feel that organization is tech savvy and that it is concerned enough about the public to keep them in the know 24/7.

Based on the findings of the study *Is the medium more than the message? Perceptions of and reactions to crisis communication via Twitter, blogs and traditional media*, this researcher believes that social media can have a positive impact on organizational reputation.

The article states "When organizational reputation was used as a dependent variable, only a main effect of medium emerged. The highest scores were found in the 'Twitter + blog' condition, followed by newspaper, blog and 'Twitter only (Schultz, Utz, and Göritz, P. 24)."

Procedure

This researcher plans to test the hypotheses by conducting a focus group with younger people (ages 18-25) and older people (ages 50+) to examine where these different age groups receive their news in a food industry crisis. Also, a case study will be conducted comparing a food emergency that used social media and one that did not use social media to see its successes and failures and how organizational reputation was affected. Lastly, this researcher will conduct a snowball survey pertaining to preferences of communication channels to gather a general consensus of where people prefer to gather their news. Chapter 3 will outline the details of this study's procedure.

Summary

How social media are affecting the way people collect their news is something that needs to be considered for crises across all industries. This collection of industry and public opinion pertaining to modern-day crisis management will benefit practitioners across the board.

Definition of terms

Food emergency: For the purposes of this study, a food emergency is defined as a significant food product recall due to manual contamination, bacterial contamination or any other food born disease and/or contamination that could pose a public health risk.

Social Media: For the purposes of this research, social media will be defined as the Facebook, Twitter and blogs.

Crisis communication: Larry Smith, president of the Kentucky- based institute for Crisis Management says crisis management is a significant business disruption which stimulates expensive news media coverage and the resulting public scrutiny will affect the organization's normal operations and could have a political, legal, financial and governmental impact on its business (pg. 6, Gottschalk, crisis management).

Crisis Communicators: For the purposes of this study, crisis communicators are the people who eschew messages and interpret feedback in crisis situations. They are mediators between the public and/or media and the organization that is in the midst of a crisis.

Food industry: For the purposes of this study, the food industry is defined as the industry that prepares produce and meats both fresh and packaged as well as restaurants for public and private consumption.

Traditional media: For the purposes of this study, traditional media will consist of print media (EX: magazines and magazines) and broadcast media (EX: Radio and television)

Citizen journalism: CW Fong and Associates management and crisis communication firm defines citizen journalism as a surge of people posting their own accounts and/or opinion pertaining to newsworthy events (CW Fong and Associates, 2011).

Chapter 2

Crisis Communication

Booz, Allen and Hamilton, a 97-year-old U.S. consulting firm, held a roundtable entitled *Social Media's Role in Crisis Communication*. The roundtable met on March 31, 2009 at the American Public Health Association (APHA) headquarters in Washington D.C and brought together experts from public health, emergency response, crisis communication and social media to discuss the use of social media in today's emergency situations.

The firm stated that crisis communicators are having a difficult time controlling messages because of the multiple messages flooding the internet via social media. The article reads, "Because anyone can create content and distribute it freely, it has become increasingly difficult for those involved in risk communications to control messaging," (Booz, Allen and Hamilton, 2009). The article also goes on to say that organizations must prepare themselves for the power of this medium. The article that accompanied the roundtable discussion states "Government, non-profit, and commercial organizations must improve their understanding of how to use social media to support their crisis communication strategies." (Booz, Allen and Hamilton, 2009).

The roundtable report stated that President Barack Obama pledged transparency in government and created a \$787 billion stimulus package that included \$19 billion for health information technology through Congress. According to the article there "had never been a better time to "stretch" into the world of social media and risk communication during times of crisis," (Booz, Allen and Hamilton, 2009).

According to Nathan Huebner, the then emergency risk communication specialist and lead for the CDC's emergency websites, in a crisis there are those who are affected and

unaffected and both parties must be kept in-the-know. He said in the roundtable discussion that you cannot dismiss the people who are unaffected especially if they are interested enough to seek out the information via social media and other news sources. He also says that those that are unaffected should become a means for sharing information because they are able to pass along information.

Huebner is correct about keeping the unaffected in mind. Going back to the definition of citizen journalism, more and more of these unaffected audience numbers are spreading and sharing information during crises. Based on the fact that President Obama spent so much money on social media for crisis communication, using social networks to reach people in the midst of a crisis seems to be the direction many organizations are heading in.

Another study that further investigates citizen journalism in crisis communication is *The Giffords shooting in Tucson: Exploring citizen generated versus news media content in crisis management* conducted by Shelly Wigley and Maria Fontenot. Their research compared citizen journalism coverage and news media coverage of the Tucson, Arizona shooting which injured Representative Gabrielle Giffords.

Study. They stated in the introduction of their article that more reporters were turning to social media for news sources pertaining to crises. The authors state "With little more than a click reporters and the world can learn instantly about victims or perpetrators of crimes," (Wigley and Fontenot, 2011). In their literature review the authors say that more and more journalists rely on citizen-generated content. The authors say that one of the key components of successfully handling a crisis is controlling the flow of information by developing and disseminating key messages to the media and an organization's publics, (Wigley and Fontenot, 2011).

Their literature review discusses whether a spokesperson or non-spokesperson dominates during a crisis. The authors say, "In a study of the coverage of the 9/11 terrorist attacks, Li and Izzard (2003) discovered the media rely more on government sources than other sources in a crisis situation. Wigley, Fontenot, Boyle and Gallagher (2009) found in their survey of news coverage of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita that larger newspapers relied more on official sources than non-official sources," (Wigley and Fontenot, 2011).

Another study that Wigley and Fontenot examined found that after the news coverage of 1992's Hurricane Andrew was studied, individuals were quoted more often than government or business figureheads (Wigley and Fontenot, 2011). This research seems to be very situational because 9/11 required more input from government officials because of the nature of the possibility of a declaration of war.

The authors make the point that technology is quickly taking the place of having a spokesperson. The authors said, "Because of social media outlets such as Facebook, YouTube and Twitter, citizens have become more important players in the coverage of crises," (Wigley and Fontenot, 2011).

Methodology. The authors chose the Tucson shooting because (Wigley and Fontenot, 2011):

- It was similar to the Virginia Tech shooting in that the perpetrators were both distressed male college students.
- Both incidents garnered massive media coverage from a lot of the same sources.
- Both involved citizen-generated content

- The Giffords shooting occurred four years after the Virginia Tech shootings which made it an excellent case for comparing changes in the types of sources used during these crises.

The authors used a content analysis to investigate the types of sources which they classified as official, non-official, new technology and non-technology sources used in the media of the Tucson shooting which made the "sources" the unit of analysis. The authors defined official sources as government officials and/or their spokespersons associated with them or their department. Technology sources were considered to be social networking sites, blogs, websites, online videos and the like (DVDs, VHS tapes and other older technologies were considered antiquated by the authors and were not included), (Wigley and Fontenot, 2011).

The authors considered official/non-technology sources to be people tied to state, local or federal government agencies that were directly involved with the shooting. Official/technology sources were technological resources used by any of the official sources (I.E: Their Twitter feeds, Facebook pages, YouTube videos, personal websites, etc.). Non-official/Non-technology sources involved individuals not tied to any government department or official which included eyewitnesses to the incident, employees at the facility where the incident occurred and the like. Non-official/ Technology sources include websites, social networks, online videos and the like of non-official sources, (Wigley and Fontenot, 2011).

The sample, which was collected in February 2011, included three national newspapers, *The Washington Post*, *The New York Times* and *USA Today* and four television news websites, ABC.com, CBSnews.com, CNN.com and FOXnews.com. These sources were the same from the Virginia Tech study conducted by the researchers. To check for intercoder reliability, the authors

used the Holsti formula. They identified 1,506 sources and when broken into the previously defined sources the results were as follows:

- 644 official/non-technology sources
- 7 official/technology sources
- 712 non-official/non-technology sources
- 143 non-official/technology sources

They compared coverage of the first two days (January 8-9, 2011) of the crisis which represented the beginning of the crisis and the following six days (January 10-15, 2011) represented the latter stage days of the crisis. The same length of time was used in the Virginia Tech shooting.

Results. The results of the study were as follows:

- The authors asked the question, "To what extent did reporters use citizen-generated content in their coverage of the Tucson shootings and how did it compare to the Virginia Tech shootings?" (Wigley and Fontenot, 2011). Of the 1,506 sources identified, 143 fell into the non-official/ technology category or citizen generated content which was a 3% increase over the number of citizen generated sources cited in the Virginia Tech shooting study.

- The authors asked, "Were reporters covering the Tucson shootings more likely to use citizen-generated content during the beginning stage of the crisis and how did it compare to the Virginia Tech shootings?" (Wigley and Fontenot, 2011). Fifty-three of the 143 sources the authors coded as user generated were used during the first two days of the crisis and 90 were used during the latter stage of the crisis. The authors concluded that reporters were less likely to use citizen-generated content during the first stage of the crisis which was the opposite of the Virginia Tech shootings

- The authors asked, "Were more official technology sources, such as official online statements and news releases, or non-official technology sources (citizen generated content) used during coverage of the Tucson shootings and how did this compare to the Virginia Tech shootings? He researchers concluded that reporters were more likely to use non-official technology sources, or citizen generated content than official technology sources.

- The researchers asked, "Was there a difference in the amount of citizen generated content used by newspapers compared to cable and broadcast news websites during the Tucson shootings and how did this compare to the Virginia Tech shootings"? The researchers found that 79 of the 143 citizen generated sources were used by the cable and broadcast news websites and 64 were used by newspapers.

The authors found that journalists used more citizen generated content as sources for their news stories pertaining to the Tucson shooting than the Virginia Tech shooting. This one study seems to suggest a trend that more and more journalists are turning to social media to find out what's going on as it happens. How does that pertain to this study? If suppliers, food companies and/or restaurants used social media to alert the media and the public to the latest information in a food emergency, journalists may use their social networks as a reference in their stories about the emergency thus possibly getting their information presented more often in news stories pertaining to the incident.

According to this study, journalists are also turning to the social networks of everyday people who have either been eyewitnesses to the event, been affected by the event or maybe just have an opinion. Maybe what they have to say could help your business in an emergency and maybe what they have to say could damage your organization...is the 50/50 chance worth it?

Emergencies and crisis management in the food industry

Emergencies in the food industry call for ways to spread news as quickly as possible. The food industry is onboard with using social media for marketing but there is little research pertaining to social media's use in crisis management. A few industry professionals have weighed in with their opinion pertaining to the correct ways and incorrect ways to effectively handle an emergency in the food industry.

ThePRCoach.com, an Internet Public Relations library that collects information and opinion in the PR industry, examined a product recall of organic food bars in mid-April 2011. Jeff Domansky, former CEO of the West Coast based Peak Communications PR firm, wrote an article on ThePRCoach.com entitled *Bad PR: Organic Food Bar Recall Woeful*. The article states that Organic Food Bar, Inc voluntarily recalled its *Chocolatey Chocolate Chip Bars* because of the possibility of cross-contamination of cashew butter with a peanut allergen by their supplier. Domansky criticized the company for not having links to their website, product photos and no personal contact information for the media or consumers.

Domansky states, "A visit to Organic's website had no warnings or information regarding the recall. The website newsroom had no recall information and was sadly out of date," (Domansky, 2011). He also warns that if a company is selling its products online, it is important to focus on informing your customers via online media channels because your business may not get traditional media coverage.

Domansky stated his curiosity about Organic's use of social media since they did so poorly in his opinion regarding the product recall. Domansky said:

At first glance, it seems to have numerous social media connections with consumers including a newsroom, blog,

newsletter, podcast, branded clothing, FAQs and research information. Appearances are deceiving. On closer examination, the company has abandoned updating many of these components and sadly still left some links and old information in place, (Domansky, P. 19-20).

Domansky warns that if an organization is going to use social media as a communication tool, it must follow through and continue keeping the information updated and current. He states, "Food companies involved in product recalls must make the extra effort to inform consumers properly. A big dose of transparency would bring many companies a better relationship with consumers and ultimately a better reputation," (Domansky, 2011).

Domansky's quote pertaining to transparency is especially pertinent when it comes to the food industry. Again, the lives of consumers could be at risk and information must be accessible. Companies within the food industry must be transparent enough to admit what happened and keep the public up-to-date. Which channel is the best means for doing so? That is what this study will examine.

In the case of the 1996 Odwalla apple and carrot juice recall, according to the textbook written by Sean Melvin entitled *The Legal Environment of Business: A Managerial Approach: Theory to Practice*, Odwalla moved swiftly to handle the case. According to the textbook, after health officials in Washington state announced to Odwalla that there was a possible link between its apple and carrot juice products, Odwalla jumped into action and held an emergency meeting to discuss its response to the situation.

The book says that Odwalla products were removed from nearly 4,600 retail outlets in seven states in just 48 hours which cost a total of \$6.5 million, (Melvin, pg. 657). Odwalla's media strategy included daily statements to the press, internal conference calls and a website to

provide information pertaining to the public which was pretty revolutionary since the Internet was just really becoming popular in 1996.

An article written by Kathryn A. Braun-Latour, Michael S. Latour and Elizabeth F. Lotus entitled *Is That a Finger In My Chilli?: Using Affective Advertising for Post crisis Brand Repair* published in *Cornell Hotel and Restaurant Administration Quarterly* again reiterates the fact that little research has been conducted pertaining to advertising and communicating in a food industry crisis. These authors studied techniques for saving reputation in a food industry crisis and compared two reputation-saving techniques for Wendy's after a Las Vegas woman accused Wendy's of serving her a bowl of chili with a severed finger.

The first technique was the Free Frosty weekend that Wendy's implemented after the incident (the authors feel it was the wrong thing to do during the situation). The second technique was a more autobiographical approach which, according to the researchers, would remind customers of all of the good Wendy's has done and its reputation for quality food and service (Latour, Latour and Lotus, 2006). The authors hypothesized that when autobiographical ads are used, good childhood memories held by Wendy's customers will reemerge.

Study. To test their autobiographical theory, the authors created two print advertisements with a picture of a Wendy's restaurant, the Wendy's logo in the lower left and a picture of Wendy's founder Dave Thomas in the lower right. The control ad had a Wendy's advertisement offering a Free Frosty. To test their autobiographical theory, the authors created an autobiographical ad which had a photo of a young boy eating a burger with the message, "Remember your family trips to Wendy's, every week for tasty burgers and fries. Playing on the slide, jumping into the ball pit, swinging on the swing sets. Memories you never forgot," (Latour, Latour and Lotus, 2006). The researchers intentionally added the part about the Playland because

Wendy's does not have one. They wanted to test how successful the autobiographical ad would be at reconstructing happy childhood memories at Wendy's restaurants.

The researchers recruited fifty men and fifty women at the University of Nevada in Las Vegas. The researchers only used data from students who were born in the U.S., regular fast food consumers and those who stated that they were aware of the situation.

The authors said that the study employed what they called a between-subject design meaning that participants saw only one ad version, either the control Free Frosty ad or the autobiographical ad at random. The sessions lasted twenty minutes each and participants were given a written questionnaire and their advertisement. The authors said, "Participants were given 5 minutes to read and provide feedback on the ad and rate their attitude toward the ad," (Latour, Latour and Lotus, 2006).

The questionnaire asked questions pertaining to their attitudes towards three fast food restaurants; Wendy's, McDonalds and Burger King. The authors said "participants then rated the extent to which certain positive affect words (i.e: fond, happy, sentimental, affectionate) were related to those brands." They also asked participants to rate how much each restaurant was associated with their childhood.

Findings. When compared with the control group, the authors found that those who received the autobiographical ad associated Wendy's more with their childhood and fond childhood visits to Wendy's than those who received the control ad. The authors state, "Note that the ad had suggested frequent family trips (which could be an accurate memory) as well as the Playland reference (which could not have occurred). It appears that just referring to childhood events made all given events seem plausible. That meant the ad was effective in providing a

frame in which those who received the autobiographical reference colored their message of Wendy's," (Latour, Latour and Lotus, 2006).

The authors stated that the autobiographical ads gave the participants fonder memories of Wendy's as a child in spite of the incident. They also found that when it came to the Free Frosty advertisements, the majority of the participants said they were skeptical of anything free from Wendy's after the accusations raised against it. The authors said, "Though this article was focused on how to employ reconstructed memory to help restore a brand damaged by a crisis, the importance of advertising and management of consumer experiences (through their memories) is an important lesson for all hospitality organizations," (Latour, Latour and Lotus, 2006).

This research study will not focus on message, but on the channel. What would have happened if the authors researched the effect of the use of a print ad versus another media outlet? This research study will fill in that gap.

A 1991 article published in *The Economist* titled *When the bubble burst* examined an incident involving Perrier water. Two laboratory workers at the Mecklenberg County Environmental Protection Department in Charlotte, North Carolina bought the sparkling mineral water to dilute substances they were testing for hazardous chemicals and found unusual results.

After finding that the instruments weren't to blame, tests discovered trace amounts of benzene, a carcinogen. The amounts were above the 5 parts per billion specified by the FDA but far below the levels that might endanger health. Within weeks, Perrier had withdrawn every bottle from worldwide circulation - costing \$160 million in all.

When notified, the Pettier Group of North America, the parent company of Perrier water, recalled over 70 million bottles from North American retailers and restaurants. The article says

that Perrier Group of North America broke one of the cardinal rules of crisis management by making light of the incident by saying it was just limited to North America.

In France, the company made what the article called "more far reaching errors" (When the bubble burst, 1991). They stopped global bottling of the sparkling water and two days after news of the crisis had broken, Source Perrier announced that the contamination was a result of a cleaning fluid mistakenly used on the bottling line that served the North American market. The company stated that the proper repairs have been made.

According to the article, Source Perrier had announced these conclusions when in actuality it had no idea where the contamination had come from. The article says that fewer than three days later the company discovered the benzene contamination was due to plant employees failing to replace the charcoal filters that are used to cleanse impurities.

The article says

To a Perrier drinker who did not read newspapers, watch television or listen to the radio, Perrier's response to the crisis would have seemed perfect: it withdrew the product swiftly, cleared up the problem and reintroduced the product within weeks. But because Source Perrier in France fumbled its initial explanations so badly, the company got bad press worldwide. Could it have done better? (When the bubble burst, P.13).

In the case of Perrier, the message indeed seemed to be the problem since both Perrier affiliates released information they weren't exactly sure of. This incident occurred before social media and today's popular technology, but what if Perrier had access to today's communication tools? Would it seem more credible for quickly informing the public about the mistakes they made? This study will examine these questions.

Traditional and social media

Traditional media has become more and more intertwined with traditional media. Booz, Allen and Hamilton held an expert round table regarding social media and discussed blending traditional and non-traditional media. The round table discussion handled everything from natural disasters to crisis communication.

A 2010 article titled *Is the medium more than the message? Perceptions of and reactions to crisis communication via Twitter, blogs and traditional media* published in *Public Relations Review*, discusses a study conducted by students from the VU University in Amsterdam, Netherlands and the University of Würzburger in Germany pertaining to social media and reputation management in the event of a crisis. The authors stated in the purpose of the research that corporations treat blogs and Twitter as efficient communications tools for avoiding boycotts and fixing reputations in the event of a crisis. The article states, "They are in general seen as more dialogic, interactive, and faster instruments for the building of relations than classic media," (Schultz, Sonja and Göritz, 2010).

The study consisted of sending emails to people with a link to the online experiment. After a short instruction, participants viewed the screenshot of a fictional Mercedes Benz Crisis. The case description said that ten people died and thousands had accidents because of spark plug problems. Depending on the experimental condition, respondents were presented with one of three reactionary messages, a sympathetic message in which Mercedes Benz expressed sympathy with the fictional victims and their families, a apology message in which Mercedes Benz apologizes for the incident and an informative message in which just the information pertaining to the incidents were presented via one of three media choices, a blog post, a screenshot of a newspaper article from the German newspaper Die Süddeutsche and a screenshot of a fictional Mercedes Benz tweet. Participants answered questions pertaining to secondary crisis

communication, which the authors define as the way publics spread the message and whether the messages spread are positive or negative, while the screenshot was visible. On the next pages organizational reputation and secondary crisis reactions and their demographics were gathered. Organizational reputation was measured by six items such as Mercedes delivers high quality products and services. The authors used three indicators of secondary crisis communication by asking participants:

- How likely they were to share the message with other people.
- How likely they were to tell their friends about the incident.
- How likely they were to leave a reaction (i.e: retweet, leave a blogpost comment, etc.).

The authors hypothesized that:

H1.A: Apology and sympathy lead to a higher reputation of the organization than information. The authors also expected that communication strategies effect secondary crisis communication. The authors assumed that people are more likely to forward messages or react to messages when they are filled with indignation about the incident. Apology and sympathy should therefore not lead to less negative feelings but also fewer negative secondary crisis communication.

H1.B: The authors also assumed apology and sympathy messages will produce less harmful secondary crisis communication than information meggases. The writers expected that apology and sympathy lead to fewer negative crisis reactions than the information strategy. According to the authors' literature review, established newspapers have credibility and organizational communication via blogs leads to higher reputation than communication via traditional media such as newspapers. The authors expected crisis communication via social

media to result in higher organizational reputation. This should be the case especially for Twitter because Twitter allows immediate reactions.

H2.A: The authors hypothesized that crisis communication via Twitter would lead to higher organizational reputation than crisis communication via blogs, which then translates to higher organizational reputation than traditional newspapers.

H2.B: The authors hypothesized that crisis communications via Twitter leads to more intense or passionate secondary crisis communication than crisis communication via traditional newspapers because of the interactivity of the medium. The authors found two possible outcomes of using social media in crisis communication:

A: The effects of the communication strategy are stronger when using social media rather than traditional media.

B: Organizations who use traditional media are perceived as more committed and honest for using traditional media.

Based on these two arguments the researchers formulated an open research question: What are the combined effects of communication strategy and media on (A) reputation, (B) secondary crisis communications and (C) secondary crisis reactions, (Schultz, Sonja and Göritz, 2010).

Results. Participants who received the apology message gave a higher score on the question, "Mercedes took responsibility for the incident" than participants with the sympathy or informational message. When it comes to sharing messages, Twitter users were more likely to share the message they received than blog users who were more likely to share their message than non-blog users. The results showed that H2.B was not supported because the study found Twitter users were more likely to share information than the other two groups and they were also

more likely to talk to their friends about the incident than non-users. Twitter users were found to be more likely to leave a comment than blogs users who were more likely to leave a comment than non-social media users. The authors threw out H1.B because the results showed that communications strategy had no significant effect on secondary crisis communication.

In the discussion section of the study, the authors stated "The medium matters more than the message. For all dependent measures - reputation, secondary crisis communication and reactions - main effects of medium occurred, whereas the message had only a significant main effect on secondary crisis reactions," (Schultz, Sonja and Göritz, 2010). Essentially they suggest that the medium matters more than the message which this researcher disagrees with.

This study showed the medium coupled with the right message will garner the desired reaction from key publics. Because those three messages were three different correct ways of handling that crisis, maybe an incorrect message (i.e: Mercedes Benz will have nothing to do with the incident. ...) would help test the power of social media versus traditional media. An "incorrect" message could see how well social media can carry a certain message type in a crisis situation versus social media, which was the original intention of the study.

What was missing from the message types that were sent to the study participants was a control message type or a horribly written ill-conceived message that would completely turn off an audience. If a message like this were sent through these three channels, the researchers would receive results pertaining to the popularity of the channels and how many people get their information from each medium. A negative, poorly written message will more than likely elicit a response from its readers which in turn would give the researchers more valid results for willingness to leave a response.

In regard to the question of how willing people are to leave a response on these three media choices, newspapers should not be included and a comparison should just be made between Twitter and blogs. The authors didn't clearly define a lot of terms such as secondary crisis communication and secondary crisis reactions; they alluded to what they meant but never stated it clearly.

The authors also didn't test the power of Facebook which could possibly be more powerful than Twitter when it comes to sharing information. That was a big social network missing from the study.

As a matter of convenience, people will be more likely to leave a response on an online medium. To respond to a newspaper article, the reader has to write a letter to the editor and hope it will run in the paper. With Twitter, users can compose a tweet or respond to a blog post on a laptop, iPad or cell phone in a matter of seconds.

This researcher's structure and purpose is similar to that of this study's and will be used as a guide. Facebook posts as a crisis communication tactic, which were left out of the Schultz, Sonja and Göritz study, will be included in this researcher's study to see if there are any differences between messages coming from different popular social media outlets.

Agreement and disagreement within the field

The Booz, Allen and Hamilton roundtable discussion brought up tips regarding the use of social media in a crisis situation (Booz, Allen and Hamilton, 2009). They are:

- Make social media efforts message driven, not channel driven
- Embrace every possible teaching moment
- Tap into all available resources
- Keep messages brief and pertinent

- Make sure you can receive public input
- Use social media to support an unified message
- Have a Plan B
- Forge partnerships or sharing methods and messages
- Focus on people when formulating your communication plan
- Avoid elitism
- New technologies are not simply new types of media with which to do the same old things
- Avoid shiny new object syndrome

A journalist named David Spark, also wrote about his opinion pertaining to crisis communication and social media in an article entitled *Best Practices for Crisis Communications over Social Media*. Spark states that while a majority of people using social media seek information, only a small percentage are news creators. In other words, if someone isn't posting something about you online, they are reposting and spreading what's out there. The author says you must be involved in the online community to keep tabs on your organization's reputation. The author states, "In a moment of crisis, the social networking community is driving the dialogue of our collective vision of the crisis. Is that dialogue helping you or hurting you? If you're not participating in the discussion, then you'll have no say in the matter," (Spark, 2010).

His 15 tips were as follows:

1. Always one up the issue that's being played out
2. Don't rely on just one platform
3. Become the hub of the issue

4. Leave comments on
5. Rely on your advocates and your allies
6. Act fast
7. Have a preparedness plan in place
8. Don't abandon your values
9. Monitor real-time content to answer questions, not sentiment
10. Be clear about your limitations
11. Speed to response is critical
12. Advocate all employees in social media
13. Use judgment in response
14. Take it off the social sphere
15. Good crisis communication in the social sphere is not a panacea for everything

The author says to utilize as many social media platforms as you can to increase your visibility and make your social media platforms the hub of the information. In regards to tip number four, Sparks says he believes that allowing users to leave comments leads your public to believe that your organization is able to receive and handle criticism (Sparks, 2010).

The business2community.com article mentioned in Chapter 1 provides author Laura Crovo's tips pertaining to social media and crisis communication. She says, "Several major brands have been dinged via social media recently-whether it was due to a product deficiency, customer service problem or God forbid, the worst environmental disaster ever...but, what's added insult to injury in many of these crisis situations are slow, inadequate and insincere responses to the calamities at hand-probably due in large part to a lack of social media crisis preparedness."

Her tips are as follows (Crovo, 2010):

- *Stop looking at "general crisis communications" and "social media crisis communications" as two different things-* She feels social media should be considered as vital as any of the other traditional communications tactics in a crisis.
- *Be prepared **before** hitting the launch button for the Facebook page-* Crovo suggests preparing for any possible criticism and/or issues before delving into social media.
- *Pay attention-all of the time-to what people are saying about your company and where they are saying it-* Crovo says social media comments need to be evaluated and organizational responses should be swift because conversations on social media move fast because "any lag can just serve to fuel the fire," (Crovo, 2010).

In a blog post written on PRblogservice.com, a website created by two internet marketers- Mike Seidle and Paul Lorinczi, titled *Crisis Communications Needs Social Media to be First, Be right, Be Credible* says that in crisis emergency and risk communication it is important to get the correct information out as soon as possible and to have your organization be seen as the source of news. These internet marketers say that the definition of the media has changed because "anyone with a smartphone and YouTube is a TV journalist," (Deckers, 2010).

Summary

The overall industry opinion seems to be that social media should be used like any other communication tool. The vast majority of industry opinion obtained by this researcher shows that industry professionals have found social media to help reputation management. As shown in the previous section, Agreement and Disagreement within the field, most of the opinions of today's communication professionals advocate for at least preparing to handle a crisis via social media.

The study *Is the medium more than the message? Perceptions of and reactions to crisis communication via Twitter, blogs and traditional media* showed that the medium is just as

important as the message when it comes to crisis communication and can have an effect on corporate reputation.

Is that the case in the food industry? Will consumers feel a company is more reputable because they present the information quickly and provide access to vital information or do they feel social media is the easy route and traditional media should be the forerunner when it comes to providing information? This researcher intends to find out.

The information derived from this study pertaining to the reputation of the different social media outlets can be used by practitioners both in and out of the food industry. An overview of where different age groups prefer to gather their news information can also be used by practitioners across all industries when creating crisis plans. Chapter 3 will outline the methodology behind this study.

Chapter 3

Methodology

This researcher will blend quantitative and qualitative techniques to study aggregate industry and public opinion pertaining to social media use in the food industry and its effect on organizational reputation. Information pertaining to trends in news gathering and their effects on reputation will be the main focus of this study. This research will also examine preferences amongst different age groups.

Survey

A snowball SurveyMonkey.com survey will be sent to Twitter followers, and industry professionals on LinkedIn and Facebook connections of this researcher. A paper version of the survey will be distributed to receive feedback from potential non-social media users. The fourteen-item survey will ask questions pertaining to where recipients prefer to receive their news crisis or no crisis; how they feel regarding the use of social media in a product recall; and how the use or non-use of social media in the food industry during a crisis affects the reputation of the organizations involved.

The survey will run from February to April, a three month time period. For this survey to be generalized to the public, this researcher hopes to reach at least 200 recipients for an error rate of +/- 6.9% at a 95% confidence level. Chapter 4 will detail the findings.

Focus group

A focus group, held on March 7, 2012 in Rowan University's graduate resource room, will be the primary qualitative method for gathering public opinion pertaining to the use of social

media in the food industry during a crisis and media outlet preferences across a generational divide. Participants will be offered refreshments in exchange for their participation in the study.

Participants between the ages of 18 and 25 will be randomly chosen from the Rowan University student body and the Rowan University vicinity for the "young people" group. South Jersey residents ages 50 and over in the vicinity of Rowan University will be randomly selected as part of the "older people" group. The focus group will have a total of eight participants, four from each age group.

Participants will be questioned pertaining to daily news gathering preferences and news gathering techniques during a food product recall. Participants will be asked how they feel social media use affects organizational reputation, their knowledge regarding social media, and their overall opinion of social media use for news. A focus group protocol, located in the appendix, will outline the probes and discussion topics to be used in the focus group.

Some example probes are:

- How many of you are social media users?
- How many of you follow a news source via these social media outlets?
- Which source (social media, TV news, newspapers (digital or paper), radio, etc...) would you say you get your news from most often and why?

The complete focus group protocol will be included in the appendix.

Because the survey will be administered to participants via social media, the participants will have social media accounts and will more than likely be well-versed social media users. To avoid skewing research results, this researcher will use a focus group to get a blend of opinions from social media users and non-social media users.

Content analysis

As another quantitative measure, a content analysis of four prominent food industry crises requiring mass product recalls will be conducted to examine overall reception to the company's public relations campaign. The Odwalla fruit juice recall, the 2009 peanut butter recall, the Organic Organic food bar recall and the 2006 spinach recall will be analyzed for positive and/or negative feedback towards their crisis communication efforts. This researcher will look for trends in news coverage and industry opinion pertaining to these cases. To analyze these cases, a full report will be written of the researcher's findings.

An analysis of broadcast media coverage and newspaper coverage will be assessed for overall tone towards the food product recall. The researcher and a coder will examine headlines, body copy and news story coverage for overall positive, neutral or negative tone.

A search for television and newspaper news coverage of these incidents will be conducted via YouTube.com, online databases, and Google.com to find news stories presented by the broadcast networks *ABC*, *CBS*, and *CNN* and the national newspapers *The Washington Post*, *USA Today* and *The New York Times*.

Because the news sources and coverage are vastly different, this researcher will look solely at tone. News stories that praise an organization for its communication efforts will be considered a positive article. News stories that indicate just the facts of the incident will be considered neutral articles. News coverage that scolds, criticizes, or indicates confusion surrounding the organization's communication efforts will be considered a negative article.

Chapter 4 will outline the results of this research in detail.

Chapter 4

General Findings

Focus group. This focus group was intended to examine the news gathering preferences of two completely different generations, people ages 18-24 (younger people) and people ages 50+ (older people). This research study intended to find out if an organization's social media use had any effect on organizational reputation and if there was a difference in opinion among the two different generations. All of the participants' responses are coded for anonymity. Each participant was given a codename with their age range and letter (i.e: 18C) for the purpose of anonymity.

Of the participants in the focus group, 88% had social media profiles. Eighty-eight percent of focus group participants had a Facebook profile and 25% had a Twitter page. No focus group participants had their own blog but 13% followed blogs for recreational purposes. Thirty eight percent of focus group participants stated that they follow news sources in their feeds.

One participant (50+) noted that she didn't have the time to use social media. The overwhelming response from the 50+ participants was that they were "for" social media and thought it was an excellent tool, but they found it time consuming and they simply did not have the time for social networking.

To investigate which media outlets consumers felt would be the best in alerting the public in a food emergency, focus group participants were given a fictional scenario.

ABC pretzel company has an incident where a piece of machinery for its regular pretzels has been cross contaminated with peanut butter for its peanut butter pretzels posing a hazard for consumers with peanut allergies.

The participants responded this way:

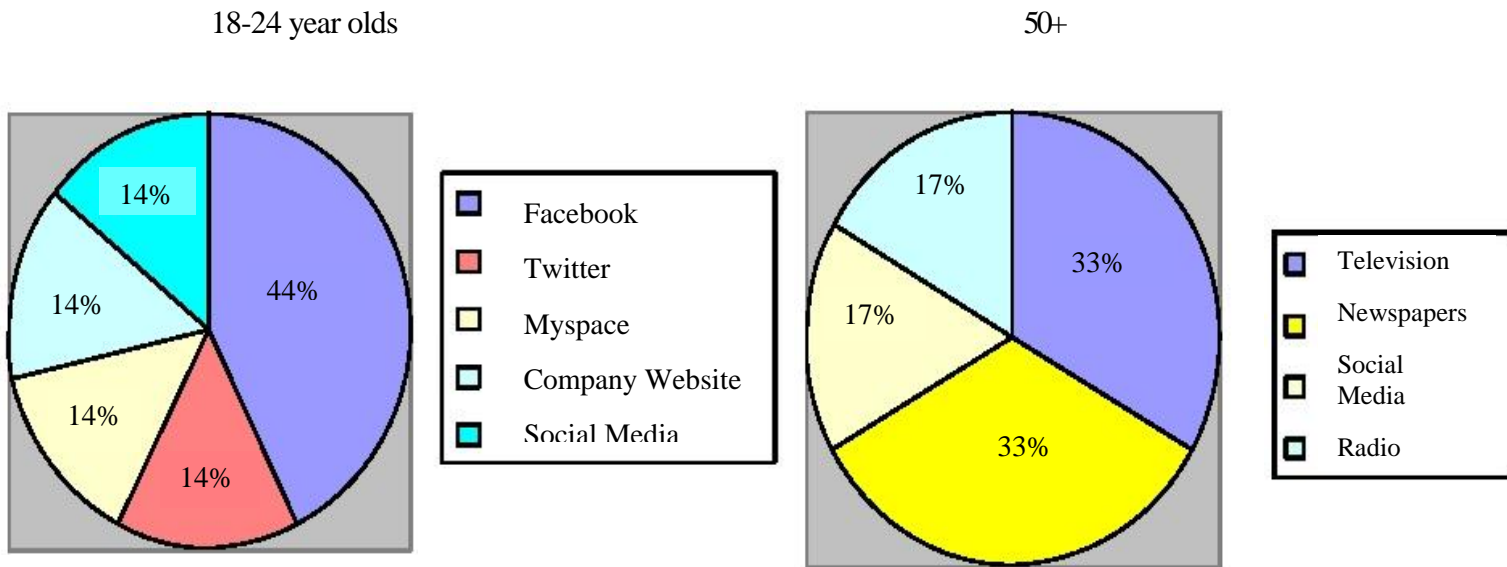


Fig. 1. Fictional scenario responses regarding media choice

None of the younger respondents mentioned traditional media formats for disseminating news to the public in this situation. Three of four 18-24 year old participants specifically stated using Facebook to inform the public in the fictional scenario. One of the 18-24 respondents mentioned Twitter, one of the respondents mentioned MySpace, one mentioned websites and one mentioned social media.

The older participants thought ABC pretzel company should use more traditional methods, but one mentioned social media. Two of the 50+ respondents said television should be used to disseminate news, 2 mentioned news papers and one mentioned radio.

Respondents were also asked about how they felt about the company's use of social media in its campaign. Many focus group participants stated that because social media is fast and this could be a potentially life-threatening situation. 18B stated "It just makes sense.

When asked which specific social media outlets should be used to release this information, 75% of the younger group participants selected Facebook. Fifty percent of the older participants stated "all of them" meaning any, or a blend, of social media outlets.

When asked about news disseminated via social media, respondents felt that was a positive thing. Participants stated that sharing news via social media was a good idea, but sources matter. 18C responded to the picture of the *Today Show's* Twitter feed and stated "If it [news] came directly from the *Today Show* or somewhere [similar] it will be credible, if you get it somewhere else the words [information] have probably changed."

When participants heard an excerpt of the blog post written by Jeff Domansky on ThePRCoach.com called *Bad PR: Organic Food Bar Recall Woeful* in which the author criticized Organic Food Bar Inc. for abandoning its blog and other new media techniques, they unanimously stated that it is wrong for an organization to abandon any media effort. Participant 18C stated "If you are going to set something up, follow through with it because people won't get the right information, the information, it will be outdated."

When given the statement, "Companies using social media to handle a crisis are lazy," all of the participants felt the statement was false. Respondents stated that social media was not taking the easy way out, but respondents felt that using a faster information source showed that companies were making an effort. Participant 18A stated, "They are not lazy because they are getting it [news] out there." Respondent 18C stated that the lack of face-to-face communication in today's business world because of social media makes businesses lazy. 18C stated "In a way [businesses are lazy] because people feel like they don't have to get up to do anything like go out and speak.

When asked where they receive their news, The younger participants responded as shown in Figure 2:

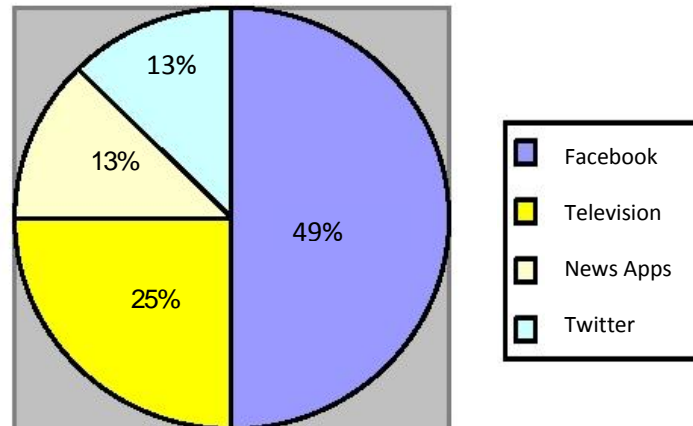


Fig. 2. News channels used by younger participants.

All of the younger participants stated that they received their news via Facebook, one of four mentioned Twitter, one of four mentioned mobile news applications on their telephone and two of four mentioned television. Their reasoning for receiving their news and following news sources via Facebook was convenience. Participants 18B and 18C stated that following news sources via social media allowed for access at the leisure of the user. 18C stated, "It's good because you can always miss it [news story] on the news, but it [news] will always be on Facebook." 18B said "I'm not home until 4 and hopefully I am sleeping by the midnight news, I don't have to wait [for news programs]."

Figure 3 shows the favored news outlets of the older focus group participants (50+).

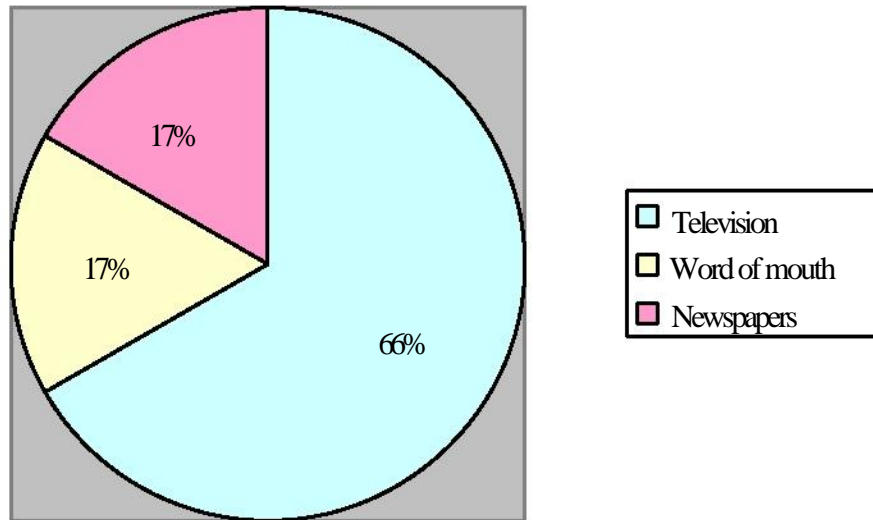


Fig. 3. Preferred news channels of older focus group participants

All of the 50+ focus group participants mentioned television and one mentioned word of mouth and one mentioned newspapers. Older participants felt that television was the most convenient news channel. Respondent 50A stated that she liked the visual aspect of television by saying, "I like that I can see it." 50D stated she can hear the television as she maneuvers around her home by saying, "I can be everywhere and hear it [television]."

From the responses to these focus group probes, younger people ages 18-24 are more likely to receive their news via social media because of its mobility, customization, and on-demand nature.

When asked about the credibility and accuracy of social media news, respondents stated their main concern was sourcing. Across all ages, the actual use of social media did not make the news and/or organization more or less credible in the participants' eyes. Content and sourcing made the organization more or less credible when information was shared via social media. Participant 50B stated, "Some of the things on TV aren't accurate." Participant 18B stated,

"Source matters, anyone can say something [via social media], but that doesn't mean it's right."

While discussing the *Today Show's* Twitter feed, participant 18C stated, "If it [news] came directly from the *Today Show* or somewhere [similar] it will be credible, if you get it somewhere else, the words [content] have probably changed."

Participants also stated that they like news programs involving viewers in the news broadcasts. Participant 18D said "I love it, it [social media] involves you in the show and when they [news programs] read the top tweets, it feels like you are talking to the people on the show."

Content analysis

Figure 4 shows each product recall and the amount of positive, negative or neutral coverage a story received, or if the story received any coverage at all. The numbers on the left indicates the number of news stories.

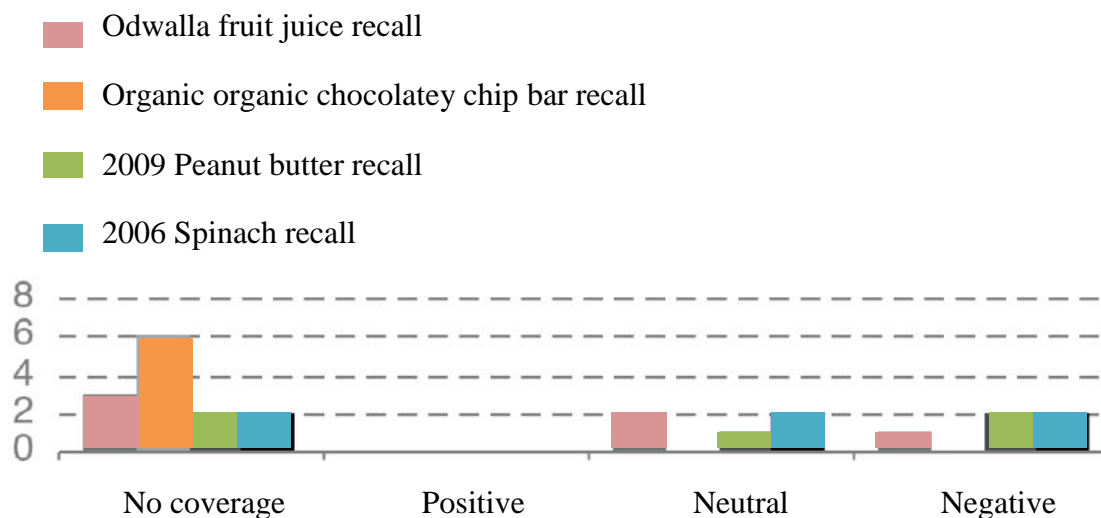


Fig. 4. Overview of news coverage

The following is a breakdown of each product recall's media coverage by the broadcast news outlets *CBS*, *CNN* and *ABC* up to two years after the product recall following an online search:

Odwalla.

-*CBS News*:

The articles on *CBS.com* pertaining to the Odwalla fruit juice recall were neutral toned articles. The articles contained keywords such as "fined," "charges," case history, and death tolls that indicated *CBS* reporters were stating the facts of the case and there was no positive or negative tone toward the organization's communication efforts.

-*CNN news*:

The search for *CNN*'s news coverage of the Odwalla fruit juice recall showed neutral news coverage of the event. Keywords such as death tolls, case history, and the name of the bacteria that caused the outbreak (*E. Coli*) showed there was a neutral tone toward the organization's communication.

-*ABC.com*

A search for *ABC*'s coverage of the Odwalla Fruit juice recall showed no news coverage of the incident.

Organic Organic Chocolatey Chip food bar recall.

-*CBS.com*:

CBS news had no news coverage of this food product recall.

-*CNN.com*:

CNN news had no news coverage of the food bar recall.

-*ABC.com*:

ABC showed no coverage of the incident

2009 Peanut butter recall.

-NBC.com

NBC.com contained negative news coverage of the incident. A January 2009 news report of the 2009 peanut butter recall directly stabbed at the reputation of the organization responsible, The Peanut Corporation of America. Dr. Stephen Sundolf of the Food and Drug Administration stated, "There's a lot of information that is both helpful and confusing in anyone of these outbreak investigations," (Williams, Bazell, 2009). Key words such as confusing, do not eat, and avoid were indicative of a distrustful, negative tone.

-CBS.com

The articles found on *CBS.com* were negative articles. Keywords such as "fuzzy" and "confusion" indicated a negative tone toward the communication efforts of those involved in the peanut butter recall. An article entitled *Americans fuzzy on peanut product recalls* discusses the confusion surrounding the peanut butter recall. It says that people were unsure which products were on the recall list and which weren't, something that is clearly a communication issue. A poll conducted by the Harvard Opinion Research Program that studied the public's knowledge of the 2009 peanut butter recall stated:

The poll shows that most participants, 93 percent, had heard about peanut product recalls linked to the salmonella outbreak, but when half of those aware participants were asked about the extent of those recalls, there were a lot of wrong answers, p. 1.

The uncertainty surrounding the recall list caused companies to fear that the public would distrust consuming peanut butter products. This public distrust could cause the companies that purchased their peanut products from the Peanut Corporation of America to have a negative relationship with the organization.

2006 spinach recall.

-*ABCnews.com*

ABC news carried negative news coverage of the 2006 spinach recall. Key words such as "vulnerable" and "fear" indicated a negative tone in the news stories.

-*CBS.com*

CBS.com carried neutral coverage of the spinach recall. The news stories carried on this news source stated the facts of the case which indicated a neutral tone toward the organization's communication efforts.

-*CNN.com*

CNN.com carried negative coverage of the spinach recall. Keywords such as "negligence" and "lawsuit" indicated a negative tone

The following is a synopsis of the news coverage of the news coverage by the print news sources *USA Today*, *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* after an online search for news coverage:

Odwalla fruit juice recall.

-*USA Today*:

USA Today carried no news coverage of the Odwalla fruit Juice recall.

-*New York Times*:

The New York Times contained mostly neutral stories that stated just the facts of the case. Although there were *USA Today* stories that had a negative tone toward Odwalla itself, there were no negative stories by this study's definition of a negative story.

-*The Washington Post*:

The Washington Post did not have any coverage of the Odwalla Fruit Juice Recall.

Organic Organic Fruit Bar Recall.

-*USA Today*:

USA Today contained no news coverage of the food bar recall.

-The New York Times:

The New York Times had no news coverage of the product recall.

-*The Washington Post*:

The Washington Post had no coverage of the Food Bar recall.

2009 Peanut Butter recall.

-*USA Today*:

USA Today contained no news coverage of the 2009 Peanut Butter recall.

-*The New York Times*:

The New York Times contained negative news coverage of the 2009 peanut butter recall. Keywords such as "risk" and headlines comparing the product recall to disasters such as the tainted baby formula recall in China, showed a negative tone toward the product recall.

-*The Washington Post*:

The Washington Post contained no news coverage of the 2009 peanut butter recall

2006 Spinach recall.

-*USA Today*:

USA Today contained no news coverage of the 2006 spinach recall

-The New York Times:

The New York Times contained neutral-toned articles regarding the 2006 spinach recall. The stories in The New York Times had only the facts regarding the 2006 spinach recall such as death tolls and case history were indicators of a neutral tone.

-The Washington Post:

The Washington Post contained no news coverage of the 2006 spinach recall.

The overall tone of the articles found through an online search of these events, showed either a neutral or negative tone regarding these cases. None of these selected media outlets carried positive news coverage of any of these incidents. Neutral toned articles can be beneficial because they are not giving the organization negative news coverage of the incident, but just stating the facts may not be enough to restore organizational reputation in the event of a crisis.

Many of these news stories had no news coverage. The use of social media in these cases could have been more of a deflection tactic versus a reputation booster. The extra avenue of information flowing from the organization to the media could have caused an increase in stories reporting just the facts versus negative stories about the incident.

Survey

This survey yielded a total of 166 responses, figure 5 shows the ages of the survey participants.

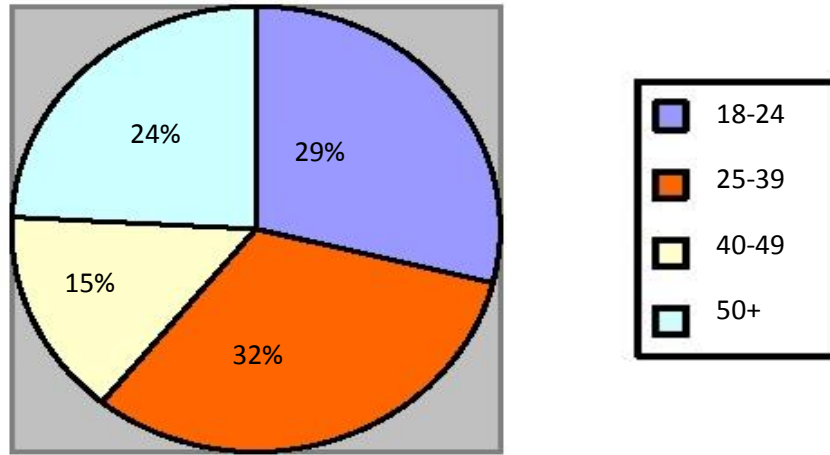


Fig. 5. Ages of survey participants

Twenty-nine percent of respondents stated that they were ages 18 to 24, 32% of respondents stated they were ages 25-39, 15% of participants stated they were ages 40-49 and 24% were 50 and over.

Figure 6 shows the percentage of participants who had a social media profile versus those that did not.

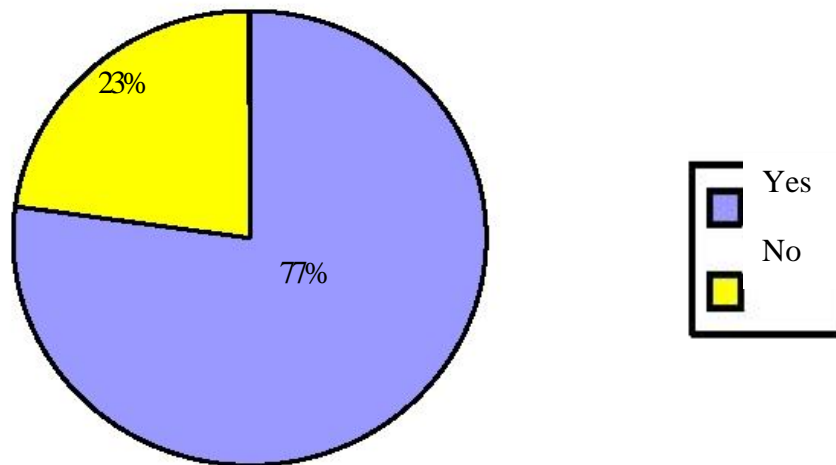


Fig. 6. Have a social media profile.

Seventy-seven percent of survey participants stated that they had a social media profile while 23% said they did not.

Here are a few sample responses to the statement "If you do not have a social media profile, please briefly describe why":

- "I do not have a social media profile because I have no interest."

- "Don't want to give my personal information for public access (privacy reasons)."

- "Don't want one."

- "Care not to"

- "Privacy."

- "Don't want one."

- "Never learned to use the computer."

- "I would waste too much time nosing around in other people's business."

Figure 7 shows the percentage of users and non-users of social media divided by age.

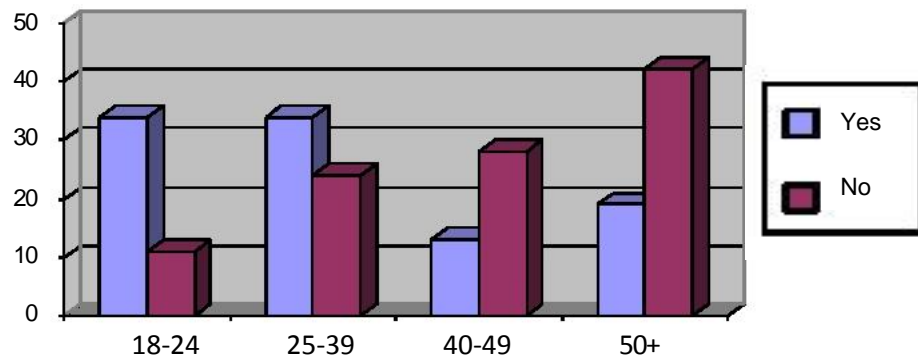


Fig. 7. Percentage of users and non-users of social media by age.

Of the 18-24 respondents, 34% said they did have a social media profile while 11% said they did not have a social media profile. Thirty four percent of 25-39 year olds said "yes" they

had social media profiles, while 24% said they did not. Thirteen percent of 40-49 year olds said "yes" they have social media profiles and 28% of them said "no". Forty-two percent of 50 and over respondents said they did not have a social media profile while 19% said they did have a profile.

Figure 8 shows how participants responded to the convenience of receiving news via social media.

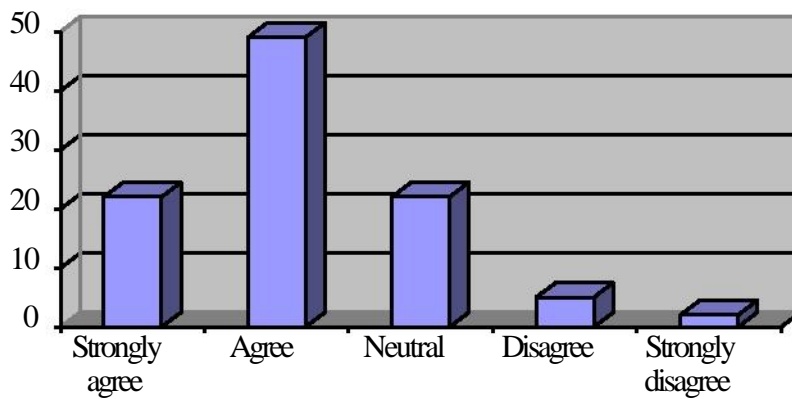


Fig. 8. Convenience of receiving news via social media.

Sixty-one percent of survey respondents stated they "strongly agree" or "agree" that receiving news via social media is convenient. Twenty-two percent of survey participants said they were neutral toward social media's convenience as a news gathering tool. Seven percent of respondents said they "strongly disagree" or "disagree" that receiving news via social media is convenient.

When respondents were asked to rank media outlets in the event of a crisis with one being the most important, respondents chose television as their most important media outlet followed by social media, newspapers, the company's social media profile, the company website, radio and word-of-mouth.

Younger participants, 18-24 year olds and 25-39 year olds, comprised the majority of those that agreed and strongly agreed that receiving news via social media was convenient. Most of the 50+ participants stated they disagreed or strongly disagreed that receiving news via social media was convenient.

When asked if using social media in a product recall is a good idea, participants responded as shown in Figure 9.

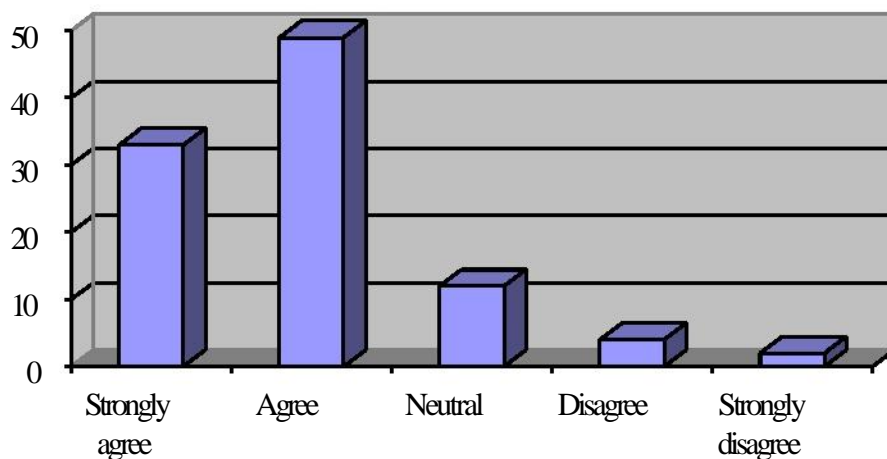


Fig. 9. Social media use during a product recall is a good idea.

Eighty-two percent of survey respondents stated they "strongly agree" or "agree" that using social media during a product recall is a good idea. Twelve percent of respondents said they were neutral towards social media use in a crisis being a good idea. Six percent of respondents said they "strongly disagree" or "disagree" that using social media during a product recall is a good idea. 50+ participants were the majority of the respondents who stated that using social media during a product recall was not a good idea, while 18-24 year olds and 25-39 year olds believed using social media during a product recall was a good idea.

Fifty four percent of survey respondents said they follow news sources (i.e: Anderson Cooper, The *Today Show*, NBC) in their news feed, 49% of respondents said they did not follow news sources in their news feeds and 1% said they weren't sure if they followed news sources in their feeds.

All of the public relations practitioners that participated via LinkedIn checked that they either "agree" or "strongly agree" that businesses that use social media in a crisis are more reputable than those that don't. All practitioners surveyed also stated they either "agree" or "strongly agree" that organizations that don't use social media at all are behind the times.

Figure 10 shows responses to the statement, "organizations that don't use social media at all are behind the times."

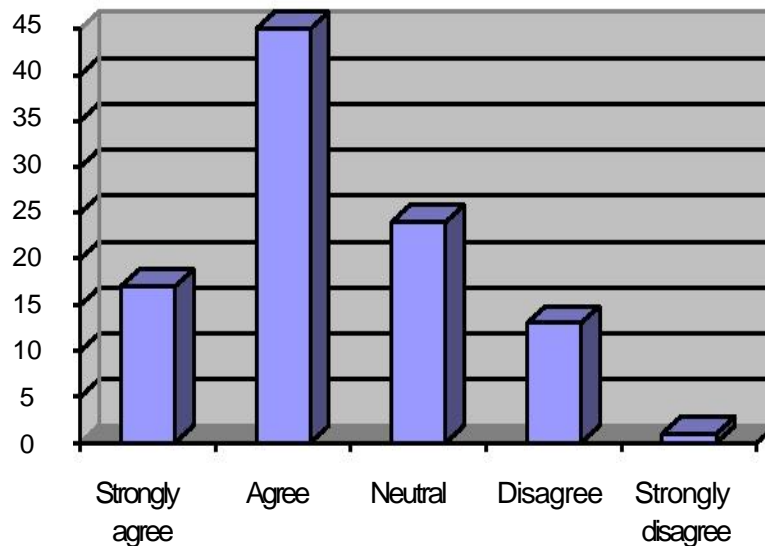


Fig. 10. Organizations that don't use social media at all are behind the times.

Sixty-two percent of respondents stated they "agree" or "strongly agree" that organizations that don't use social media at all are behind the times. Twenty four percent of respondents stated they were neutral towards organizations that don't use social media being

behind the times. Fourteen percent of respondents said they either "disagree" or "strongly disagree" with the statement.

Younger participants ages 18-24 and 50+ respondents were a large portion of the participants who either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement. Although they strongly stated that using social media in a product recall was not a good idea, 50+ respondents felt that organizations that don't use social media are outdated in their communication efforts.

Figure 11 shows the responses to the statement "Businesses in the food industry that use social media during a product recall are more reputable than those that don't."

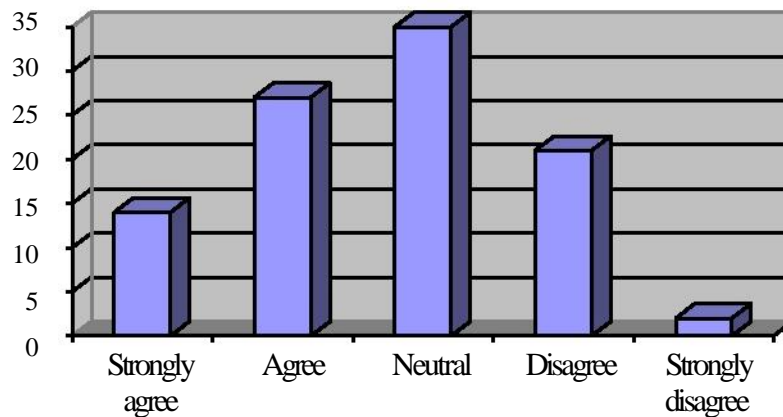


Fig. 11. Businesses in the food industry that use social media during a product recall are more reputable than those that don't.

Fourteen percent of respondents said they "strongly agree" that businesses in the food industry that use social media during a product recall are more reputable, Twenty seven percent of respondents said they "agree" that businesses that use social media during a product recall are more reputable than those that don't and 35% of respondents said they were neutral. Twenty-one percent of respondents said that they do not agree that social media use during a product recall makes a business more reputable than one that doesn't and 2% of respondents said they strongly disagree.

These survey results show that although social media is quickly growing as a news source, it is not to be the only media outlet in a crisis. Social media is not viewed as a priority media outlet by the public across all generations. The public prefers a mix of traditional and new media as indicated by the ranking scale survey question. Participants consistently rated television higher than social media, but social media was always a close second.

Reputation wise, as shown by the responses to the question, "Business in the food industry that use social media during a product recall are more reputable than those that don't," the public seems to be rather indifferent to the use of social media during a product recall. When broken down by age this probe shows 44% of 50 and over respondents stated they strongly agree that a business in the food industry that used social media as a tool in a crisis was more reputable, while 75% said they strongly disagree. This shows the use of social media made no reputational difference to respondents who were 50 and over. Strongly agree, agree and neutral responses were almost tied with 35%, 31% and 33% for 18-24 respondents when it came to this probe showing that social media had little to no effect when it came to 18-24 year old participants.

Hypothesis 1: It is expected that the best way to handle a crisis or emergency in the food industry is to alert the public through social media.

Focus group.

The results of the focus group show that if news was released solely through social media, it could reach some, but not all. Although the vast majority of people do have social media profiles, the purpose for registering with these networks varies from person to person. 50C, a member of the focus group's 50+ group, stated "I just got a Facebook to see pictures of my kids and grandchildren."

The focus group showed that people would rather have a mix of channels rather than one specific media outlet, thus not supporting H1. Respondents overwhelmingly stated that although social media is a good news source and excellent way to spread news, it should not be the only news channel. Because many of the participants only used their profiles to connect with family and friends, they were not frequent users of social media.

Survey.

Survey results show that the public would rather have a blend of channels than strictly social media. Traditional media such as television and newspapers were rated as more of a priority channel than social media. The survey also shows that many people do not want a social media profile because of privacy issues, they feel like it's a waste of time or they just plain don't want one. If an organization solely uses social media to inform the public regarding a product recall, it will not reach these people who do not have social media profiles, those who aren't tech savvy, and those who are fearful of social media unless they hear it through word of mouth or the media picks it up. The results of the focus group and survey show H1 is not supported.

Hypothesis 2: It is expected that younger people (ages 18-24) will be more inclined to use social media to get their news than their older counterparts (50+).

Focus group.

The results of the focus group show that younger people are quickly discovering the news capabilities of social media. A member of the focus group's 18-24 participants, 18B, stated "Facebook is becoming a news source itself." The focus group results also show that younger people follow news sources via social media because of its mobile nature which makes it more convenient.

Many of the older people in the focus group who had a Facebook page stated that their purpose for using Facebook was solely to connect with family and friends and nothing more. Older participants found television the most convenient source of receiving news and never mentioned receiving their news via social media but they think that social media was an excellent source of news.

Survey.

The responses to the survey show that the vast majority of 50+ respondents did not have social media profiles and many of the older survey participants stated that they believe that using social media in a product recall is not a good idea. Younger participants 18-24 comprised the largest number of social media users in this survey who strongly agree that using social media in a crisis was a good idea and were the largest number of followers of news sources via social media. Based on the findings of these two studies, H2 is supported.

Hypothesis 3: It is expected that the use of social media will positively affect the reputation of its user in the event of a crisis.

Content analysis.

The content analysis shows that although social media was used in two of the cases, all of the stories received mostly neutral coverage. Although neutral news coverage is not negative, neutral news coverage is not giving them a boost in the reputation department. The use of social media; however, could have potentially boosted the number of neutral news stories. This study's content analysis shows that the actual use of social media did not raise the reputation of these businesses, but it did raise awareness of the facts (the large number of neutral stories) because the organization made itself the hub of the issue.

Survey.

The survey results show that the public and PR professionals believe organizations that don't use social media are behind the times; however, the majority of participants were neutral toward a business in the food industry that uses social media in a crisis as more reputable than one that doesn't. These results show that reputation wasn't directly affected by the organization's use of social media; therefore H3 is not supported.

Chapter 5

Although social media is a useful crisis communication tool, a number of factors can inhibit its reach. This study shows frequency of use, social media knowledge and profile purpose can determine how well you communicate via social media. If a social media user does not consistently check their timeline, has limited social media knowledge, or started their profile for the sole purpose of connecting with friends and family, they may not receive an organization's crisis communication messages.

There are vast generational differences regarding news gathering techniques and what different generations view as convenient. The survey and focus group results show that younger people 18-24 and 25-39 view social media as a tool they can tailor to their lifestyle. Older respondents in the survey and focus group favored traditional media and viewed social media as cumbersome and thought television and newspapers were easier to use than Twitter and Facebook. These research results show neither social media nor traditional media should be ignored. Different generations have different preferences, choosing one or the other could cause people to miss out vital information and organization is sending out in the midst of an emergency.

Non-social media users stated they did not want to be seen as prying into the lives of others and/or they were afraid of privacy issues that could result from social media use. The actual use of social media had no direct effect on organizational reputation, however, in the focus group, sourcing was noted as important when an organization "shared" information via social media (i.e: retweets, Facebook link and photo sharing). Survey respondents also viewed organizations that don't use social media at all as out-dated and behind the times.

Evaluation

H1: It is expected that the best way to handle a crisis or emergency in the food industry is to alert the public through social media.

This hypothesis was not supported. This researcher developed this null hypothesis because it is important to examine how the public prioritizes its media outlets in the event of a crisis. Social media was not ranked top priority for respondents when they were asked about their preferred news channels in the event of a product recall, but social media was still highly ranked. This shows a blend of social media and traditional media is key to handling a crisis. One should not overpower another, but they should work hand in hand such as using customer tweets to answer questions live on television at a news conference or referring to a Facebook wall post in a news release.

H2: It is expected that younger people (ages 18-24) will be more inclined to use social media to get their news than their older counterparts (50+).

Many of the respondents in this study that were 50 and over stated that they preferred traditional media outlets. Many of the older participants found social media to be cumbersome and inconvenient, as shown by the results of the survey and focus group. Younger 18-24 year old focus group participants stated only online outlets such as Facebook and the company's website. Younger participants in both the focus group and survey felt social media was convenient because of its mobile nature and on-demand access. Based on these findings, this hypothesis was supported.

H3: It is expected that the use of social media will positively affect the reputation of its user in the event of a crisis.

This hypothesis was not supported. The use of social media may not directly positively affect the reputation of the organization, but it can be an excellent deflection tool for businesses. By becoming the center of the information and releasing facts, the organization can leave the public and media less room for assumption. The actual media outlet didn't boost the reputation of the organization in the eyes of the public.

Interpretation

Though social media is an excellent source for disseminating news, based on this study's findings, the public generally prefers a mix because not everyone is a social media user, and those who do use social media may not be frequent users because everyone has varied motives behind their social media use (i.e: to connect with friends and family, share family photos, chat with classmates).

Many people, specifically those of older generations still prefer traditional media outlets such as television and newspapers. As shown by focus group results, many of the older respondents felt social media was an excellent news source; they just found it cumbersome to use and they deemed themselves as not being tech savvy. Younger participants found the medium's mobile nature and on demand access to be very convenient. Based on these findings, younger people are more likely to gather their news via social media which means messaging via social media should be targeted towards younger, tech savvy users of social media.

Contribution to the field

In a crisis, regardless of the industry, a communicator must know how to distribute information through the correct channels in an efficient manor. This study's examination of how the public receives their news in a potentially life-threatening situation where tainted food is involved can hopefully give those in crisis communication some insight into how to reach their

correct audiences through the right channels. This study's findings regarding organizational reputation can potentially be used as a guide to counseling organizations in how to use social media as a deflection tool when in regards to media relations.

It is important for organizations to understand the positioning of media outlets in the minds of their consumer, especially demographically. If a business wants to reach consumers of a certain age, it needs to understand which media outlets they turn to in certain situations and why. This researchers findings regarding generational gaps can give crisis communicators insight into which media outlets certain age groups value and why.

Many of the results of this food industry study can be generalized to industries across the board for their crisis communication efforts.

Further research

This researcher suggests that further research be conducted regarding the reasons why people do and do not use social media and why older generations find social media so time consuming instead of as an invaluable communication tool.

As the results of the focus group show, people 50 and over feel that social media is a valuable tool, but time consuming, but why? This information could possibly help social networks expand by increasing their appeal to older demographics. Further study should be conducted into their attitudes and opinions.

Researchers should also continue to not only examine the messages they are sending via social media but also their sourcing (i.e: retweets, shares, repins). How do the sources an organization cites on its social networks affect its reputation, if they affect its reputation at all?

Mobile applications are rising in popularity as a means to disseminate news and, as mentioned by one of this researcher's focus group participants, mobile news applications are growing in popularity among the younger demographics. Are organizations that have mobile applications held in a higher esteem by the 20-something crowd than those that don't ? How do mobile applications affect the opinions and attitudes of older generations? What about mobile advertisements? Are they effective? More research should be conducted in the mobile marketing arena.

As shown in the survey results, many people felt privacy issues were a large part of why they did not want to become a part of the social media scene. They did not want to be seen as prying into the lives of others and likewise, they did not want people "following" their personal information. A study should be conducted to examine if marketing social networks as a platform to connect with people has backfired. If a social network were to brand itself as a customizable, mobile news source would people be more inclined to join? Research should be conducted in the area of social media branding and the way it is affecting the attitudes of users and non-users.

Research similar to the Schultz, Utz and Göritz study *Is the medium more than the message? Perceptions of and reactions to crisis communication via Twitter, blogs and traditional media* should continue to be carried out to study the effectiveness of messages sent through social media.

This research, or studies similar, should be conducted on a larger scale for a grater sample size, which will allow for crosstabulating the data.

Conclusion

Although the use of social media may be a good tool for disseminating information and statements to steer media attention toward the facts and away from negative comments during a

crisis, it is not a cure all. Messaging is not to be underestimated and neither should traditional media outlets.

The correct message sent through the right channel to the correct target audience can have a major impact on an organization's crisis communication efforts. Practitioners and researchers must continue to study the correct avenues and messages for crises because confusion surrounding a potentially life-threatening situation, such as tainted food, could prove fatal.

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	News Source:	News Source:	News Source:
Odwalla			
Organic Organic Chocolatey Chip Food Bar			

2009 Peanut Butter Recall			
2006 Spinach Recall			

Focus Group Protocol

Date:

Time: 30-45 minutes

Location: Rowan University Student Center

Names of those attending:

18-24 "Young people":

18 (A):

18 (B):

18 (C):

18 (D):

50+ "Older people":

50 (A):

50 (B):

50 (C):

50 (D):

Topic: Social Media

-Probes:

- How many are social media users?

-How many have Twitter?

-How many have a Facebook?

-How many have a blog?

-How many follow a news source via these media outlets?

-How many follow blogs? Which blogs?

-If you do not use social media? Why?

-If you do use social media but do not follow news sources, why do you not follow them?

-Scenario:

ABC pretzel company has an incident where a piece of machinery for its' regular pretzels has been cross contaminated with peanut butter for its' peanut butter pretzels, posing a hazard for consumers with peanut allergies.

-Scenario questions:

-What techniques should ABC company use?

-How do you feel about them using social media in their crisis campaign?

-Which social network do you feel would be best for reaching people if you agree with the use of social media for crisis management?

-How do you feel about this statement? "Companies who use social media to handle a crisis are lazy?"

-Data presented:

-Scenario

-Example of food emergency without social media (Organic food bar recall)

-Excerpt from Jeff Domansky's article: *"At first glance it seems to have numerous social media connections with consumers including a newsroom, blog, newsletter, podcast, branded clothing, FAQ's and research information. Appearances are*

deceiving. On closer examination, the company has abandoned updating many of these components and sadly still left some links and old information inn place..."

-Example of social media use in a food emergency (Successful widget in 2006 peanut butter recall)

-How effective do you feel the social media was in this recall? How effective do you feel it would be in a similar situation?

Topic: News gathering preferences

-Probes:

-Which source (social media, TV news, newspapers (digital or paper), radio, etc...) would you say you get your information from and why?

-How do you feel about social media being used to disseminate news?

-Do you feel news received via social media is accurate? Why or why not?

-Do you feel news received via social media is credible? Why or why not?

-Data presented:

-Examples of news sources using social media (Today Show's Twitter page, CNN's Facebook Page)

Logistics:

-Items needed:

-Refreshments: Water bottles, Pretzels, Napkins

1. Age (Please circle one):

18-24

25-39

40-49

50+

2. Please briefly describe your occupation:

3. Do you have a social media profile? (Ex. Facebook, Twitter, etc.) (Please circle one)

Yes

No

Not sure

4. If you have a social media profile, which do you have? (Please circle all that apply)

Facebook

LinkedIn

Twitter

YouTube

Pinterest

Blog

Google+

Other

5. If you do not have a social media profile, please briefly describe why.

6.If you are a social media user, do you follow news sources in your feed(s)? (Ex: Anderson Cooper, CNN, Mashable, NBC, ABC, etc.)? (Please circle)

Yes

No

Not Sure

7.Receiving news via social media is convenient. (Please circle)

Strongly agree

Agree

Neutral

Disagree

Strongly disagree

8.An organization that uses social media for news is taking the easy way out (please circle)

Strongly agree

Agree

Neutral

Disagree

Strongly disagree

9.In the event of a food product recall, please rank each media outlet according to importance (one being the most important):

National and/or television news program _____

Social media _____

The company's social media profile _____

10. National and/or local newspaper _____

Word of mouth _____

Company website _____

Radio _____

Other (If you wish, please include other media choice and rank) _____

11. Using social media to inform the public during a recall is a good idea.

Strongly agree

Agree

Neutral

Disagree

Strongly disagree

12. Using social media in an emergency and/or crisis makes a business more reputable.

Strongly agree

Agree

Neutral

Disagree

Strongly disagree

13. If I received news updates during a food product recall via social media, I would feel the organization cared because they kept me constantly updated.

Strongly agree

Agree

Neutral

Disagree

Strongly disagree

14. Businesses in the food industry that use social media during a product recall are more reputable than those that don't.

Strongly agree

Agree

Neutral

Disagree

Strongly disagree

15. Organizations that don't use social media are behind the times.

Strongly agree

Agree

Neutral

Disagree

Strongly disagree