

# Chapter 17

## Digital Crisis Communication Management

**Deniz Özer**

*Ondokuz Mayıs University, Turkey*

**Ümmü Özlem Çerçi**

*Selçuk Üniversitesi, Turkey*

### ABSTRACT

*Public relations is a communication process managed strategically and in a planned way. It includes all internal and external communication activities of institutions, including communicating with the target audience, providing information, creating an institutional image. Institutions face uncertainties, unexpected situations, and dangers in times of crisis; they make an effort to seize every opportunity to cope with these. Under changing conditions outside of the normal order, institutions have to act strategically. Institutions that do not care about these strategic studies will have less chance of success. Gaining and maintaining the trust of the internal and external stakeholders of the institution is much more important in times of crisis. The aim of the study is to reveal how crisis communication is handled in the digital environment, also called new media, in the COVID-19 pandemic that affects the whole world. In the study, communication activities of the Ministry of Health of the Turkish Republic will be investigated.*

### INTRODUCTION

Public relations is a communication process managed strategically and in a planned way. It includes all internal and external communication activities of institutions, including communicating with the target audience, providing information, creating an institutional image. These communication activities gain more importance in times of crisis, which can be defined as unwanted negative and extraordinary events that may result in dramatic changes that can affect all kinds of institutions / organizations, key figures such as administrators and political leaders, and require rapid decision-making. In crises such as economic shocks, natural disasters or pandemics, while shortages of resources and time create a stressful environment for institutions, panic and uneasiness feelings are at the highest level in the target audience.

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Institutions face uncertainties, unexpected situations and dangers in times of crisis; they make an effort to seize every opportunity to cope with these. Under changing conditions outside of the normal order, institutions have to act strategically. Institutions that do not care about these strategic studies will have less chance of success. Gaining and maintaining the trust of the internal and external stakeholders of the institution is much more important in times of crisis. Crises cannot be mentioned without crisis management and crisis communication. Crisis management is a multidimensional dynamic process in which conscious and programmed public relations activities are carried out in order to get rid of crisis situations that occur unexpectedly and in which undesirable consequences are largely inevitable. Therefore, informing in case of a crisis should be the first step of the institution. It is also important that this information is reliable and adequately explanatory. Otherwise, misinformation will harm the institution. Trust in the organization decreases and corporate reputation is damaged. In times of crisis, the first thing the institution should do is to accept the crisis. It is an important act for the institution to inform the public about the crisis, to establish the communication process based on the principles of integrity, honesty and transparency of public relations. This process is actively carried out in digital environments as well as in traditional media in order to reach “digital citizens”. It is essential to establish and maintain a successful strategic communication with the target audience in order to overcome all crises, including pandemics. This strategic communication requires that the determined messages are shared with the relevant public at the most appropriate place and time, with the most appropriate tool, which will create the strongest effect and in the most synchronized way. The purpose of an effective crisis communication, whose management, channels and forms are pre-planned, and which adopts the principle of openness and honesty, is to help the crisis to come out with the least damage. With the developments in the technology, radical changes have taken place both in the citizen term and in the field of communication techniques. As a result of these changes, people are more prone to digital education programs or political activities which has created digital citizenship phenomenon and have also led to differentiation in the communication tools and methods used in the crisis management process. Crisis communication management in digital environments requires thinking and acting differently from traditional public relations communication strategies. Nowadays, where people make a large part of their lives online, it is seen that blogs, wikis, social networks and media sharing platforms are frequently used for purposes such as spreading news about the crisis, mobilizing the target audience and contributing to crisis management. Considering the nature of crises, it is not surprising that social media, which provides bilateral communication regardless of time and place, has become an important part of crisis communication.

Covid-19 is the name of the new struggle of the administrations that have survived many crises from terrorist attacks to natural disasters and economic shocks. In this dynamic process, governments and the World Health Organization have been in an effort to announce the constantly updated information to the public, while considering the measures to be implemented and the next step to be taken. The ongoing Covid-19 pandemic, which has wreaked havoc around the world, has put enormous pressure not only on public health systems but also on crisis communications. The main task in crisis communication is to help people put up with this situation and act wisely by not being delusional in the face of overwhelming emotions. Correct and effective communication at the right time is essential when experiencing a crisis. The use of social media makes it possible to give an early and rapid crisis response to the vast majority of stakeholders. In crisis situations where every second counts, it is an absolute necessity for

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