

# **GHANA INSTITUTE OF JOURNALISM**

**SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH (SoGSaR)**



**THE ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN CRISIS COMMUNICATION; A STUDY OF  
SELECTED ORGANIZATIONS IN ACCRA**

**BY**

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**(MAPR19110)**

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RELATIONS**

**DECEMBER, 2021.**

## STUDENT DECLARATION

I, Nana BiamahAppah hereby declare that this thesis is my original work and has not been presented for a degree in any other university and all materials used in this thesis have been duly acknowledged.



15/12/2021

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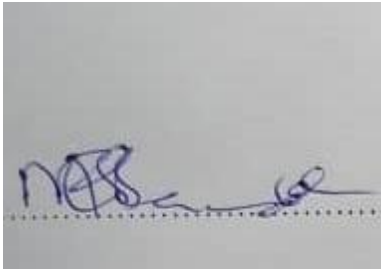
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## SUPERVISOR'S DECLARATION

I hereby certify that this project work was done under my supervision. I thereby approve that the work is adequate in scope and quality for the partial fulfilment of their requirements for the award of a Master of Arts in Public Relations

A rectangular box containing a handwritten signature in blue ink. The signature appears to be 'Mavis Essandoh' written in a cursive style. Below the signature is a horizontal dotted line.

15/12/2021

.....  
Dr. Mavis Essandoh

.....  
Date

## **DEDICATION**

I dedicate this work to myself, my husband and anyone who aided in the completion of this project

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

I will first of all want to thank the almighty God for the grace to come this far and to Dr. Mavis Essandoh whose guidance, support and criticisms helped shape this work to its current state. Your time and patience is deeply appreciated.

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## **ABSTRACT**

The main objective of the study was to determine the role of social media in crises communication. The study interrogated how some practitioners from four different organizations use social media for their crises communication efforts, how often organizations use social media during crises and the significance of social media during crisis communication. The study used the image restoration theory and the two-way symmetrical model to understand the significance of communication during crises situations. The study used qualitative methodology in its approach to determine the role of social media in crisis communication.

The study found after analysis that organization view social media as a very important medium used for corporation communication and by extension, crises communication. It was also found that traditional media is still a very instrumental tools for organization despite the proliferation of digital media. The study also found that practitioners like using social media because it provides them the opportunity to control their own communication especially during crises.

It was recommended that organizations continue to invest in social media since it is a very significant medium for crises communication. The study also recommends that future studies look into how organizations use analytics to identify target groups and how they employ social media strategies to engage audience.

# **CHAPTER ONE**

## **BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT OF THE STUDY**

### **1.0 Introduction**

This chapter discusses the introduction of the research. The chapter will discuss the background of the study, problem statement, the research objectives and the research question. The research seeks to examine the role of social media in crisis communication. The background touched on crisis communication and its significance to public relation and also discussed how social media is changing the communication space which has necessitated the need for this study. The problem statement helps us define the problem of the study and also proposed what the study will do. The research objective also helps us set specific objectives of the study and the research question provides us with a set of questions which ought to be answered in order to achieve the objectives. The rest of the chapter discusses the scope of the study and the significance of the study.

### **1.1 Background and context of the study**

Crisis Communication is very important in crisis management (Cavalic, 2015). The role of crisis communication is to protect and defend the reputation of the company (Cavalic, 2015) and also to help provide information that is capable of defusing tension in crises situations. In any organization, the image of the entity is of importance and must be protected at all times (Frandsen, 2017). It is mostly the responsibility of the communication team to ensure the image and the brand of any organization is well protected (Frandsen, 2017, and Cavalic, 2015).

The Public Relations (PR) practitioner is responsible for managing crises within an organization (Cavalic, 2015; Frandsen, 2017). The practitioner's major responsibility during crises situations is to control information flow by developing and distributing important messages to the media and the public (Wigley & Zhang, 2011). Information is very important during crises situations. To be able to successfully manage the impact of a crisis situation, it is important to get ahead of information flow in order to effectively decide how facts will be presented and distributed (Wigley & Zhang, 2011; Cavalic, 2015 and Frandsen, 2017).

Cavalic (2015) argued that crisis communication and crisis management should be as much as possible planned and systematically organized by the organization and also must be willing and ready to respond to emergencies especially in the era where there is rapid spread of misinformation through the internet. The internet has led to the integration of large information systems and networks which has led to rapid globalization and democratization of information (Cavalic, 2015). This feature allows for information to travel at the speed of light ray as anybody from anywhere with access to the internet and a computer, smart phone or tablet can send information to millions of subscribers around the world. This has created a "jungle of information" that are not mediated or fact-checked as it is done in traditional outlets (Cavalic, 2015). This situation is making the work of PR extremely difficult and also very delicate (Cavalic, 2015).

Social Media helps subscribers to connect with people of shared interest and values who share information amongst themselves and debate issues out. In crisis situation, social media plays a very significant role in the spread of information (Kelly, 2014). In most cases, pieces of the information are spread out and each part of the story is reported differently by different actors with different motives (Kelly, 2014). The job of the practitioner however is to make sure that the

organization is protected at all cost by using various theoretical approach and also other persuasive and communication skills to communicate effectively with the public (Wigley & Zhang, 2011). This has necessitated the move by practitioners to think of ways to deal with crisis that emanated from the virtual space and also the role of social media in crisis communication and that is why this study is aimed at examining the role of social media in crisis communication.

## **1.2 Problem Statement**

Crisis communication and social media are not a new phenomenon in academia. There has been considerable literature on social media and crisis communication. Stieglitz, Mirbabaie, Fromm, & Melzer (2018 ) sought to investigate the challenges emergency management agencies face in using social media analytics within organizations. In their study, they used qualitative methodology to gather data on the adoption of social media analytics for crisis management (Stieglitz, Mirbabaie, Fromm, & Melzer, 2018). Wigley & Zhang (2011) used the survey method to study how practitioners use social media in crisis planning and crisis communication as well as in ordinary situations in America. Cavalic (2015) also studied crisis communication and the internet. His study investigated the threats of the internet to crisis communication and also the possibility of using the internet by businesses with the mission of overcoming the crisis situations. Kelly's (2014) study evaluated the use of social media in risk and crisis communication. His research discovered the use of social media might be advantageous in reducing risk to public safety and in providing critical information during crisis (Kelly, 2014). Cheng (2016) in a secondary research also engaged secondary data on how social media is changing crisis communication strategies.

This is evidence of considerable work in the field of social media use in crisis communication. The literature cited above however did little to conceptualize the role of social media in crisis

communication. Social media undoubtedly have become very important in business and society relationship (Kelly, 2014, Wigley & Zhang, 2011, and Reuter, Stieglitz, & Imran, 2019). It has therefore become important to try to conceptualize the role of social media in crisis communication in order to better understand and appreciate its significance to communication and crisis management. This study is however going to engage with some practitioners in some selected organizations within the capital (Accra) to examine the use social media in their crisis communication efforts.

### **1.3 Research Objectives**

#### **1.3.1 Main Objective**

The main objective of this study is to determine the role of social media in crisis communication in some selected organizations in Accra.

#### **1.3.2 Specific Objectives**

- i. To investigate how selected organizations use social media in their crisis communication efforts
- ii. To determine how often organizations use social media during crisis communication.
- iii. To explore the importance of social media during crisis communication.

### **1.4 Research Questions**

- i. How has the selected organization incorporated social media in their crisis communication efforts?
- ii. How often is social media used during crisis communication?
- iii. Why is social media important in crisis communication?

### **1.5 Rationale of the study**

This study will help us understand the role of social media in crisis communication. Stieglitz, Mirbabaie, Fromm, & Melzer (2018) argued that we are in a time where anybody can move from being a passive bystander to an active communicator during crisis. This is made possible through social media. The relationship between business and society has become more intense and very much active (Wigley & Zhang, 2011 and Stieglitz, Mirbabaie, Fromm, & Melzer, 2018). This has made the work of PR practitioners somewhat difficult and exciting at the same time. With the astronomical growth in social media subscribers over the years and how social media has become very important in corporate communication and crisis management, it has become necessary to investigate how organizations use social media in their crisis communication efforts and its effectiveness.

### **1.6 Significance of the study**

The study is first and foremost going to add up to existing literature on social media and crisis communication. This particular study as stated earlier will try to conceptualize some role of social media in crisis communication within an organization. It is also important to note that the outcome of the study will help practitioners and organizations who are having problems with social media engagement during crisis situation or in crisis communication. This study will also try to provide some blueprint as to how some organizations incorporate social media in their crisis communication efforts and also try to analyze its success rate.

### **1.7 Scope of the Study**

The main objective of the study is to define the role social media plays in crisis communication using some selected organizations in Accra as the case. The study will interview five (5) PR practitioners from five (5) reputable organizations in Accra on how they incorporate social media

in their crisis management efforts and also its significance to their objectives. The study will use organizations like *AirtelTigo*, Consolidated Bank, Vodafone Ghana, and also Fidelity Bank. These organizations have strong social media presence due to the nature of their service and also have a well-structured crisis management team. Practitioners are going to answer questions on crisis communication efforts in Ghana, and the strategies mostly used. How social media plays a role in crisis communication and also its effectiveness.

The study should cover the space of five months. This is because the interviewees are mostly workers with busy schedules and may require the researcher to book appointments before we can get access to them. This may take a while and might drag the study a bit. The theories also intend to use the Two-way Symmetrical Model by Grunig and also the Image Restoration Theory by William Benoit to try to understand the concept of social media and crisis communication.

### **1.8 Organization of the study**

The first chapter introduced us to the study. It gave us an overview of what to expect within the study. The chapter discussed the background of the study, the problem statement, research objectives and questions, and the scope of the study.

The second chapter is the literature review. The literature review interrogated related literature within the frame work of the study. The review was divided into three parts; thus, the conceptual framework, theoretical framework and also empirical framework. The conceptual frame work helped in the definition and conceptualization of key words such as crises, crises communication and crises management, social media and crises communication. The second part of the chapter discussed the theoretical framework. The section discussed the image restoration theory which helped us understand the importance of communication during crises situations. The second

model discussed was the two-way symmetrical model by Grunig& Hunt (1984). This theory helped in extending the argument of the significance of communication in corporate communication and also the importance of two-way communication and how it is facilitated by social media, especially during crises situations. The final section also discussed relevant literature in the empirical review. Here, the researcher contextualizes her study within the framework of other related studies. This was to help put her study within the context of other relevant literature and also contribute to the ongoing debate in academia on the role of social media in crises communication.

The third chapter discussed the methodology of the study. Here, the research design, research method, population, sample size, data collection instruments, and data analysis instruments were all discussed. The study employed the use of qualitative methodology in its data collection and analysis. Chapter four analyzed and discussed data. It was found that social media has grown to become an official medium for corporate communication by organizations. This makes it a very important medium for organizational communication and also very instrumental in crises communication. The final part of the study (chapter five) summarized some of the main findings, made recommendations for policy formulation and further research and concludes the study.

### **1.9 Chapter Summary**

This chapter discussed the background of the study, problem statement, objectives, and research questions, rationale of the study, significance of the study, literature review and also the methodology of the study. The study will use to use the qualitative methodology to examine the role of social media in crisis communication- A study of selected organizations in Accra. The study will also employ the use of Image Restoration Theory and the Two-way Symmetrical

studies in analysing the concept of social media use in crisis communication as well as the importance of social media in crisis communication.

This next chapter reviews literature within the area of studies. The chapter discusses the theoretical review, conceptual review and the empirical review.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

#### **2.0 Introduction**

This chapter reviews relevant literatures in relation to the study as well as some theoretical framework. The chapter will be divided into three parts, we have the conceptual review, theoretical framework and empirical analysis. The conceptual review will help us define and explain some basic concepts within the topic title. The theoretical framework will discuss the underpinning theories of the study. This study for instance, will adopt the image restoration theory and the two-way symmetrical communication model to try and understand the role of social media in crisis communication. The final part of the study is the empirical analysis. Here, the study will review existing study in relation to the research objectives of the study. This is to help put the study with the framework of existing research.

#### **2.1 Conceptual Review**

##### **2.1.1 Organizational Crisis**

Coombs (2007) posit that crisis can cause a significant threat to operations that can have negative consequences if not handled well (p; 3). Crisis can be termed as a situation which is characterized by surprise, a serious threat to important values of the organization and a short time to make a decision (Cutlip, Center & Broom, 2003, p.184). Organizational crisis can threaten an organizational goal and also cause financial and reputational damage to the organization (Bundy, Pfarrer, & Coombs, 2017). Cavalic (2015) also added that crisis can hinder business routines and create uncertainties and stress for the employees (p,3). Cavalic (2015) argued that crisis can be

internal or external. Internal crisis are mostly within the organization while external crisis is mostly linked to the external environment.

Crisis within an organization also affects the relationship between an organization and its stakeholder and their perception towards the organization. Many studies have tried to conceptualize organizational crisis and also devoted considerable attention to crisis and crisis management because crisis communication is gradually becoming one of the major threats to obtaining organizational goal (Coombs & Holladay, 2002, Coombs, 2007, Kahn, Barton, & Fellows, 2013 and Bundy, Pfarrer, & Coombs, 2017).

### **2.1.2 Crisis Management**

Crisis management is a process designed to prevent or lessen the damage from crisis (Coombs, 2007, p; 3). Coombs (2007) went ahead to explain that crisis management is a process designed or planned to prevent or lessen the damage a crisis can inflict on an organization and its stakeholders. He (Coombs, 2007) tried to conceptualize crisis management into three phases; the pre-crisis, crisis response and the post-crisis. Pre-crisis phase looks at ways to anticipate and prevent crisis situations, crisis response as the name entails looks at how to respond to a crisis in a way that will help minimize its impact on the organization and the post-crisis phase looks at how future occurrences can be prevented (Coombs, 2007).

Cavalic (2015) also expanded the stages by arguing that crisis pass through five clearly defined phases (p; 4). They are the beginning stage, rise, culmination, decline and end of the crisis. The beginning stage as the name implies, deals with the initial stage of the crisis. Here the crisis in most cases is seen as an ordinary everyday incidence, the next stage is the rise and culmination stage. This is where the crisis situation begins to directly affect the organization greatly. Here,

the organization would have to come up with some swift strategies to deal with the impact of the crisis. The decline stage occurs when the organizational strategy responds very well to the crisis in order to reduce its impact and finally the end stage is when the company is able to bring the situation under control and also has to reflect on how the crisis came about and what to do to prevent future occurrence.

Crisis management is very important to every organization. It is important to prepare adequately for any crisis that may occur within an organization (Özgür, 2019). Being proactive is a hallmark of any serious organization. Companies must be able to anticipate some crisis situations that may disrupt operations, processes to follow in other to ensure a systematic way of dealing with the issues to ensure orderliness, and also the appointment and the training of crisis management team members to deal with crisis. (Özgür, 2019). Özgür (2019) also argued that it is important to develop a comprehensive communication plan to deal with crises situations.

### **2.1.3 Crisis communication**

Diers-Lawson (2017) in understanding the field of crisis communication as a public relations and management function focused on some five critical factors that affect and drives our understanding and research in crisis communication. The five critical factors are as follows; issues and reputation management as crisis mitigation and prevention; crises types in a modern global environment, organizational factors affecting crisis response, stakeholder factors affecting crisis response and response factors to consider in crisis response (Diers-Lawson, 2017). Diers-Lawson (2017) most research on crisis communication seems to fall with any of these categories.

Crisis communication as conceptualized by (Cavalic, 2015) is any communication under the state of crisis. The main aim of crisis communication is to help fill the information gap during

crisis situations in an effort to protect and defend the image and reputation of the organization and the employees within the organization (Cutlip, Center and Broom, 2003; Cavalic, 2015, p: 4).

#### **2.1.4 Importance of communication in crises situations**

Crisis communication should be timely and must be able to represent the facts and accurate information to the target groups (Combs, 2007). Effective crisis communication should be the priority of any crisis situation. Information is important during crises because it helps to prevent misunderstandings and confusions during crises situations. Effective crisis communication strategy must be well planned and also well implemented.

Ozer (2009) also argued that crisis communication and management is the effective operation of business, relationship, communication and information processes in accordance with the strategic communication objectives developed in the special circumstance of the crisis environment itself (p, 353). Crisis communication focuses on the communication strategies and tactics to be followed in crises periods.

#### **2.1.5 Social Media and Crisis communication**

Social media is used during crises for different reasons and by different actors (Reuter, Stieglitz, & Imran, 2019). The actors may include but not limited to, authorities, emergency services, and citizens. Reuter, Stieglitz, & Imran (2019) discussed a crisis communication matrix in their study. They explained that there are four (4) different levels of information flow on social media in emergencies. The first is Citizen to Citizens (C2C) information flow, the second is from authorities to citizens (A2C), this is where organizations use social media to inform the public. The third is when the information is moving from the public to the organization or authorities

(C2A) and finally the inter-organizational level on which organizations communicate with each other (A2A) (Reuter, Stieglitz, & Imran, 2019).

Social media is very essential to mass communication because it has the ability to send information to the masses with just a click of a button (Emre, Cemberci, & Eralp, 2016). Social media is characterized by some factors which has made it a very significant mode of communication in recent times. Social media provides space for interactivity, instantaneity and its ability to send information to relatively large connected individuals at a relatively fast pace (Cheng, 2016). Social media also operates an open system that does not give credence to any class system or socio-economic discrimination. It is available and accessible to any individual with access to the internet (Emre, Cemberci, & Eralp, 2016).

Social media provides the opportunity for users to generate their own content. Individuals can create their own content and can also share uncensored information to any social media subscriber around the world (Cavalic, 2015). With social media, information is not subjected to gatekeeping philosophies as it is with the traditional media. This has paved way for so many misinformation and non-factual information being flooded online. This has also made information management somewhat difficult (Emre, Cemberci, & Eralp, 2016).

Ward (2011) made the point that the proliferation of social media subscribers and its current role in mass communication has affected the job of public relations practitioners to strive to understand how social media works and its importance to organizational communication. With social media, practitioners can now monitor the environment to discover public opinion and also communicate to the organization (Ward, 2011). With social media, organizations can also identify crises situations and deal with them even before they get out of hands. Baron and Philbin

(2009, p. 12) argued that social media impacts on crisis communication in two ways; first the conversation can affect your organization's perception and reputation and secondly, social media outlets provides new opportunities to engage stakeholders and the media.

This means that practitioners can explore opportunities presented by social media to reach out to their audience during crises situations to help provide information and also clear the air on rumours associated with crises. Social media is a very important tool in crisis communication. (Austin & Jin, 2017; Cavalic, 2015; Emre, Cemberci, & Eralp, 2016, Ward, 2011). To be able to effectively use social media in crisis communication, it is important for practitioners to recongize its potential and its ability to either cause or facilitate a crisis situation and also its potential to serve as a medium for information dissemination especially during crisis situations.

As explained earlier, the main objective of crisis communication is communication in the midst of crisis to provide information with the aim of protecting the image of the company or organization faced with the crisis (Cavalic, 2015). Cavalic (2015) argued that it is important for organizations to device strategies to deal with crisis immediately in other to be able to control its impact on the organization. Diers-Lawson (2017) argued that crises comes in many forms and sizes, they include but not limited to media blunder, social media activism, extortion, product tampering, security issues, natural disasters, accidents or negligence all of which have the propensity of hurting an organization's reputation. Diers-Lawson (2017) also argued that in order to understand crisis communication as a Public relation and management function, it is important to understand the concept and proliferation of research and practice. Crisis characteristics and organizational factors are critically important for identifying the potential success of crisis response. The importance of stakeholders and their reactions to crises (Diers-Lawson, 2017) is also another active area of research in crisis communication.

Kelly (2014) argued that social media is more than just a trendy method of distributing information. According to him, it is a platform that can help organizations converse and also listen to their community's concerns. Social media sites have become important because it has numerous subscribers. It is a platform which was necessitated by the invention of the Web 2.0 in the late 90s (Ford, 2011). The platform has allowed individuals from all over the world to connect and interact. The community of subscribers and active users keeps growing rapidly and it is believed that more people are going to subscribe in the near future (Ford, 2011). The interactive nature of social media has given subscribers the opportunity to engage in narratives and interactive dialogue among organizations, communities and individuals (Ford, 2011). Because of its nature, social media has the propensity of impacting the development of crisis and crisis communications. Social media has accelerated the pace at which information travels, the mode of engagement, control of the message, interactivities, authenticity, boundaries of crisis situation, visibility and transparency of developing event as well as facilitation and triggers (Ford, 2011).

With the growing importance of social media in corporate communication and crisis management, it has become necessary therefore to investigate into the role of social media in crisis communication.

## **2.2 Theoretical Framework**

This section discusses the underpinning theories of the study. The section looks at image restoration theory and also the two-way symmetrical model and its importance to the study.

### **2.2.1 Image Restoration Theory**

The Image Restoration Theory discusses how corporations recover from crises. It was developed by William Benoit (1995; 1997). Ford (2011) argued that the theory is mostly often framed as apologia, or a genre of public apologetic discourse. The theory is used to understand post crisis communication. The theory believes in the assumption that the image and reputation of an organization is both symbolic and of economic value. The theory also believes that organizations face threats every time and that in the midst of these threats, communication is also an important tool used to help repair the damage (Ford, 2011). The image restoration theory also believes in the assumption that; communication is a goal-directed activity and also maintaining a positive reputation is one of the central goals of communication (p; 63).

Benoit (1995) explained that, an attack on ones' reputation comprised of two components; an act occurred which is undesirable and the assumption that you are responsible for that act (p. 71). He added that for a reputation to be at risk, both assumptions must be believed to be true (Roberts, 2006). Benoit believes that strategies such as denial, evading responsibility, reducing offensiveness, corrective actions and mortification can complement the communication efforts of an organization and affect how stakeholders perceive the organization in crisis. The use of Image Restoration Theory can help us understand the importance of communication during crises situations.

### **2.2.2 Two-Way Symmetrical Models**

The two-way symmetrical model was derived from the four models of public relations proposed by Grunig. The model includes press agency, public information, and two-way asymmetrical and two-way symmetrical (Grunig& Hunt, 1984). This model helps us examine the contemporary work of Public Relations practitioners and how practitioners have adopted

research and dialogue in their dealings as opposed to previous work experience of PR practitioners. Grunig (2001) suggests that practitioners use formative research and dialogue to manage conflict, improve understanding and build relationship with the public (Ford, 2011).

Grunig (2009) has argued that social media is capable of creating the platform for more dialogical and socially responsible way of practising public relations (Ford, 2011). Ford (2011) also quoted Grunig (2009) to have argued that social media can help organizations achieve their goals through dialogue and interactivity which have the propensity of reducing conflict and solidifying the relationship between an organization and its publics. The two-way symmetrical model will help us understand the importance of social media to Public Relations practices and also its effectiveness during crisis situations.

## **2.3 Empirical Analysis**

This section analyzes empirical data from other related studies. This is to help us put our study within the context of other studies.

### **2.3.1 How organizations use social media in crisis communication**

Agnes (2012) posit that in crisis, the most effective ways to communication on social media is to have a clear message content about the crisis, choose an appropriate channel for the delivery of the content, and finally the frequency of the message. In creating content during crisis, Agnes (2012) argued that it is important to consider who reads the content and their response. She argued that the message should be receiver-oriented. The message is very important because it helps close the gap between what the audience know verses what they need to know (Walaski, 2011). To be able to properly understand how organizations use social media in crisis communication, it is important that we look at how some organizations engage the public

through social media. Andoh Quaino and Annor-Antwi (2015) in their effort to examine how organizations use Facebook as a PR tool to foster relationship discovered that about 93% of the posts made by companies on social media target its current customers and the general public. The study also discovered that 92.31% of the respondents agreed that organizational posts are made to engage customers and also to interact with them online.

Raj, Joseph and Rousseau (2015) also argued that social media for corporate communications were employee relations, customer relations, and also media relations. During crisis, organizations use social media to fill information gap and also to report on crisis development (Cheng, 2016). Raj, Joseph and Rousseau (2015) discovered in their analysis that practitioners mostly use Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and in most cases YouTube and Asamoah (2019) also added that organizations have now adopted the use of Instagram to also reach out to their publics. Kelly (2014) also discovered that organizations use Tumblr, Skype, Nixle and . Kelly (2014) however argued that the most efficient social media outlets for monitoring citizens or stakeholders behavior during crisis situation is twitter (64.29%) followed by direct notification (14.29%) and Facebook (12.50%).

AndohQuaino and Annor-Antwi (2015) also observed that companies use social media to share news items about the companies and also some achievements and also for promotion and in most cases advertisement. This is in correlation with that of Asamoah (2019) whose study also revealed that social media sites are very important to organizations in area of updating their customers and prospective customers of some news update of the company and also a platform for promotion and advertisement. In crisis situation, Cavalic (2015) also adds that social networking sites are very useful in updating the public and also bring some clarity.

### **2.3.2 How often is social media used during crisis communication?**

Kelly (2014) in evaluating the use of social media in crisis communication discovered that the top most reason why organizations establish online presence is for public relations purpose (5.35), community risk communication (4.26), crisis management (3.94), monitoring organizations (2.87), Networking with other agencies (2.44), Communication with employees (2.15).

Kelly's (2014) study observed that most organizations do not use social media frequently in their crisis communication and risk communication efforts. 47.46% of the respondents argued that there is the lack of dedicated staff to hand online crisis communication, 16.95% argued that there is the lack of established organizational policy in some organizations to cover crisis communication on social media, the third reason is the lack of expertise (10.17%) and 5.08% still believe that other mass communication tools are more effective compared to the social media. His study (Kelly, 2014) also revealed that organizations mostly post weekly or several days per week (44.06%) on social media. 16.95 % post once per day and 18.64% more than once per day (p. 31).

In Andoh-Quaino and Annor-Antwi's (2015) study, it was observed that majority of the respondents 26.19 % post at least once or twice in a day. 21.43% of the organizations agreed that they mostly post online once in two or three days, 14.29% posted several times once in a week. It was discovered however that some organizations (11.90%) post regularly while 9.52 % of the respondents argued that they posted once every few weeks. Only 2.38% argued that they only posted based on the need to post. That's when the company had some important information to share with their publics (p. 52). Asamoah (2019) also argued after his analysis of interviews

conducted on vodafone employees that, Vodafone Ghana uses social media a lot for their corporate communication efforts.

### **2.3.3 Social media and its importance in crisis communication**

Kelly's (2014) analysis revealed that respondents believed that social media is most beneficial when used for timely and real time information (19.67%), Crisis Management (18.03%), Risk Management (16.39%), Public Relations duties (14.75 %) and direct communication (9.84%) and reputation management (p. 35). The respondent in Kelly's (2014) study believes that social media is the best medium to manage reputation of the company (61.67%) followed by traditional media outlets (38.33%). Fisher Liu, Austin and Jin (2010) however believes that social media is perceived to be less credible than that of traditional media.

Andoh-Quaino and Annor-Antwi (2015) and Asamoah (2019) also added that organizations use social media for their corporate communication efforts and also to promote their brands. In a qualitative study, Asamoah (2019) discovered that in times of crisis, Vodafone Ghana uses its social media outlets to observe public opinion and also to measure the extent of the damage. Asamoah (2019) argued that with the help of social media, the organization can scan its environment for feedback into its communication effort. The organization can also use this opportunity to research and also engage in a dialogic conversation with its customers and potential customers to ensure effective two-way symmetrical conversation.

## **2.4 Chapter Summary**

This chapter reviewed relevant literature in relation to the study. The chapter was divided into three parts, the conceptual review, theoretical framework and finally the empirical analysis. The study used the image restoration theory and also the two-way symmetrical model in its

theoretical framework. The study also reviewed empirical studies relating to how organizations use social media, how often organizations use social media and finally, social media and its importance in crisis communication.

The next chapter is going to discuss the methodology. The chapter will look at the research design, data collection and analysis techniques as well as its importance.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.0 Introduction**

This study sought to engage some organizations on how they employed the use of social media in crisis communication. The study adopted the use of qualitative research methodology in its data collection efforts. It also sought to give a detailed account of the research design, population of the study, sample size and sampling techniques, data collection instrument and data analysis technique. The chapter also provided guidelines on how the data is going to be collected and analyzed.

#### **3.1 Research Design**

Boru (2018) argued that research design is the overall plan for “connecting the conceptual research problems with the pertinent (and achievable) empirical research” (p. 2). A research design is the “procedure for collecting, analyzing, interpreting and reporting data in research studies” Creswell & Plano Clark 2007, p. 58). Research design according to Robson (2002) and Blumberg, Cooper and Schindler (2005) as cited in Boru (2018), explained that there are three (3) possible forms of research design; they are the descriptive, exploratory and explanatory research. Descriptive research is mostly employed to help describe or give a pictorial account of a situation (Boru, 2018). Explanatory research as the name suggest helps explain why events occur. Explorative research also helps us dive deep into a phenomenon. The main purpose is to help investigate further into an event to better help us in understanding the reason behind the occurrence of certain behavior. The research design is mostly influenced by the purpose of the study which intend also influences the Philosophical stance (Boru, 2018). The philosophical

paradigm of the study helps determine what should be studied, how data should be collected and also how results should be interpreted (Bryman, 2008).

### **3.3 Previous methods used by earlier researchers**

Stefan et al (2018) in investigating the adoption of social media analytics for crisis management-challenges and opportunities employed the use of systematic literature review and also interview technique to gather data relating to their study. Wigley and Zhang (2011) also employed the use of quantitative research methodology to study practitioners' use of social media in crisis planning. Ward (2011) also used quantitative methodology when investigating if organizations are using social media in times of crisis. Cheng (2016) employed the use of secondary research in trying to explore how crisis communication strategies have been contextualized in updated literature.

### **3.4 Research methodology intended for present research.**

The study sought to investigate the role of social media in crisis communication in some selected organizations in Accra. The study also intended to examine how these organizations use social media in their crisis communication efforts, how often these organizations use social media during crisis communication and finally explored the importance of social media during crisis communication. These objectives signal that the study employed the use of qualitative methodology in its study.

Qualitative studies are designed to provide the 'researcher a means of understanding a phenomenon by interacting with the participants of the study' (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008 as cited in Boru, 2018). This methodology operates on the principle of subjectivism. A qualitative study

is interested in exploring and explaining phenomenon. This study however explored the role and importance of social media in crisis communication.

### **3.5 Population**

Majid (2018) argued that population is the total population of your target audience. Polit and Hungler (1993) refer to population as an aggregate of all objects, subjects or members that conform to a set of specifications. This study collected data from selected organizations such as; AirtelTigo, Vodafone Ghana, Fidelity Bank and Consolidated Bank. The population of the study was all staff members working within these companies. The workers of these four organizations form the internal stakeholders of these organizations. The internal stakeholders have first-hand information into the day to day administration of the company and can also help us understand how social media fits into the overall communication objectives of these institutions and their role during crisis communication. The internal stakeholders of this company helped us with insightful data on how various organizations employed the use of social media in crisis management.

### **3.6 Sample**

Sample is usually classified as the subset of the general population of interest (Polit and Hungler, 1999). Majid (2018) argued that sampling is the process of selecting a statistical representative sample of individuals from the population of interest. Due to time and resource consideration, the study could not gather data from the entire population (ie; the entire working force of the four institutions). For this reason, it became necessary for the researcher to sample the population. This was intended to make the target relatively small and easy to study. The sampling size should be a proper reflection of the entire population. This is because results obtained from the sample should be reflective results of the entire population.

This study employed the use of qualitative methodology in its study. The study used the interview techniques in its data collection and gathering. This meant that the sample size for this study was going to be relatively low. This study however, employed the services of four persons from the communication department of each of the selected institutions. Each person was selected from the communication department of each of the various selected institutions. This was because crisis communication is usually the job of the communication department of the various institutions and members of the communication department would be in a better position of provide us with the necessary information needed for the study.

### **3.6.1 Sampling technique**

The study used the purposive sampling technique. Purposive is also a non-probability sampling technique that is mostly limited to the discretion of the research and also the objective of the study. Due to the nature of this study, the researcher deemed it fit to employ the use of purposive sampling to aid in the data collection. The study needed the assistance of PR practitioners working with the selected institutions for questioning. In order to get access to practitioner, the researcher selected the practitioners who were ready and willing to assist in the study. The interviewee needed to also meet certain criteria. The interviewee needed to be a member of any of the selected organization; the interviewee had to be within the communication department of any of the selected institution. The researcher also had to use her own discretion to choose people who fit into the criteria for interview.

### **3.7 Data Collection Method and Instrument**

As stated above, the researcher employed the use of interview technique in her data collection method. The research engaged four staff of the communication department of four selected institution in Accra. These interviewees were engaged separately and various times on the role social media plays in crisis communication. The interview was recorded and later transcribed for data analysis purpose.

### **3.8 Data Analysis**

The data was analyzed using thematic observation. This helped us uncover themes in a data obtained from the data collected during the interviews. This mode of analysis enabled the research by examining similarities in the relationship and also observed trends among data collected. This helped us uncover patterns and helped us develop themes that are relevant to our objectives and also themes that sought to answer research questions raised.

### **3.9 Advantages and disadvantage of the qualitative approach**

Qualitative method can be very useful to a study. It allows for flexibility during your data collection. Questions asked are mostly open-ended questions which allows for flexible answers. This means that the researcher can also seek for clarification when s/he does not understand anything within the course of data collections. The researcher is also able to understand reasons behind some attitudes or phenomenon as s/he dives deep into the study to seek for explanations as well as clarifications.

Qualitative study can be said to have some element of biases especially during the data collection and this might affect the conclusion of the study. The researcher in his/her observation may

establish some personal connections that may affect the outcome of the study. Also the sample size may not necessarily be the true reflection of the entire population. This study for instance interviewed four practitioners from within four institutions which may not be enough to represent the view of the entire population but were purposely chosen because of the nature of the study. Qualitative study can be time consuming. This is because there might be multiple interview sessions which may drag the study during data collection. Before interviewing a respondent, you have to be able to make sure that the research is comfortable and also the interview must be scheduled in the interviewees own time. This may also drag the duration of data collection and might affect the duration of the study. Transcribing oral data can also be time consuming.

### **3.9. 1 Chapter Summary**

This chapter discussed the methodology of the study, research design, the sample size of the study, data collection and data analysis instrument. The chapter concluded that the study would employ the use of qualitative research methodology to gather data. The data collection instrument was interview technique and the study used thematic observation to analyze data obtained.

The next chapter will analyze data collected from the interview granted.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSIONS**

#### **4.0 Introduction**

This chapter discusses the findings and analyzed them in relation to the study. Data was gathered using an interview guide which was divided into four parts. The first part of the interview sought information about the respondents such as their work experience and the departments they worked in. This was to help determine if respondents fitted into the criteria for interview. The second and third parts of the interview investigated how selected organizations used social media in their crises communication efforts. The final part of the interview interrogated the importance of social media in crisis communication. The analysis was to critically examine the responses provided by the interviewees in relation to the research objectives.

#### **4.1 Data Analysis**

##### **4.1.1. Information about respondents**

The researcher interviewed five professionals from four different organizations who have between five (5) to thirteen (13) years experience in corporate communication and marketing. Respondents one (R1) has 7 years overall experience in Marketing and have 5 years' experience at AirtelTigo. Respondents two (R2) also has 5 years exposure in marketing communication at AirtelTigo. Respondents three (R3) has 7 years' experience in Communication and has worked for Vodafone Ghana for over 3 years. Respondents four (R4) also have 13 years' experience in banking and also have 3 years experience working for Consolidated Bank. Respondent five (R5)

have over 6 years experiences in banking and now working within the communication department of Fidelity Bank.

#### **4.1.2 What do you understand by organizational crisis?**

##### **Organizational Crisis**

In defining crisis, respondent one (R1) conceptualized crisis to be an internal factor. He argued that crisis can occur when an “organization fails to address issues affecting staff.” This can be described as a very limited way of defining crisis since the respondents did not consider some external factors that may cause crises situations. Respondent one’s argument appears to be similar to Cavalic’s (2015) assertion that internal crisis is mostly about staff’s wellbeing. Cavalic (2015) however expanded his definition by adding that crisis can be external or internal. Arguing that crisis can hinder business routines and create uncertainties and stress for the employees (Cavalic, 2015).

Respondents two (R2) on the other hand argued that crisis is “any sudden event or activity that threatens the survival of the organization.” He then went further to explain that “crisis can disrupt the work flow of the organization and can have great impact on the bottom-line of the organization.” Contrary to what Respondent one (R1) said, Respondent two attributed crisis to external factors. This definition is in sync with the definition by (Bundy, Pfarrer, & Coombs, 2017) who argued that crises can cause financial and reputational damage to the organization.

##### **Organizational Reputation**

Respondent three (R.3) regarded crisis as any event that affects a company’s reputation. “Crisis can be defined as whenever there is a threat to company’s reputation. It can come from anywhere whether internal or external.” R.3 argued that it can be triggered by internal factors or external

factors. This definition is also in step with Cavalic (2015) and Bundy, Pfarrer, & Coombs, 2017) who both touched on reputation and also internal and external factors.

Respondent four (R. 4) argued that crises can be defined as “any uncertainty in the day to day running of an organization.” R.4 believes that any event that causes uncertainty in the administration of events can be termed as a crisis. Cavalic (2015) also argued in his study that crisis can hinder business routine which was also highlighted by R4.

Respondent five (R.5) also believes that “Crisis can be defined as the situations where the organization is faced with some unforeseen situation that interrupts business activities.” This definition is similar to the definition given by R4. This definition is in line with Coomb’s (2007) definition of crisis as any event that causes a significant threat to operation that can have consequences if not handled well.

Responses from these five respondents show that all the interviewees have working understanding of what a crisis is and its implication on any organization. R 4 and 5 are of the view that crisis can disrupt the day to day affairs of the state. Respondents two R2 added that it can threaten the survival of any business. R2,4, & 5 argued that crises needs to be taken seriously by any organization. It is therefore observed that crises situations can affect the very existence of any organization and this means that crisis should be very critical for every organization.

#### **4.1.3 During crisis situations which medium do you mostly use to send out information and why?**

## **Channels of communication**

R1 informed the research that during crisis, they mostly used internal communication channels like electronic mail (Email) and other PR tools like Memorandums (Memos). He noted that they have *WhatsApp pages* where information is mostly sent to. This response seems to be a follow up on his earlier response where he stated that crisis in his organization is most often internal. This may have necessitated their adopting internal communication/ direct and personal social media outlets like *WhatsApp* to meet their needs.

During crises situations, we mostly have internal communication channels where management sends out information to internal members. We have the normal memo, we also have internal network for internal members where our HR, PRO and management use in their communication and we also have department *WhatsApp pages* where we also communicate on matters relating to internal issues

It is important to know R1 believed that crises situations mostly emanate from within the organization. He noted that when the communication has to be sent outside, the organization used other social media outlets which were relatively cheaper than traditional outlets when they had to reach out to specific audience. R1 also noted that his organization does not use only social media in reaching out to audience, and sometimes used personal emails and phone calls when dealing with some customers.

When it is outside, we use the papers, TV, Radio, and most importantly we use Social Media, which can be relatively cheap. But we sometimes use personal emails and even phone calls when we are dealing with some peculiar customers

R2 also argued that while their organization has access to other traditional (TV, radio newspapers) mass media forms which are equally useful, the impact of social media is unquestionable and almost immediate. He reiterated that social media is a very significant medium because of its ability to reach out to majority of audience.

Social media has become the most important medium in communication in the 21st Century. Our generation like using social media more than any medium there is. So if you really want to reach them, you have no option than to use social media. At AirtelTigo we use Social media all the time, especially in or during crisis we send communication materials via all the social media outlets. It is mostly very useful because we see all the reactions on our corporate pages and how people feel about particular situations.

R3 posit that during crisis situation, their organization use all media outlets available because they want to reach as many audience as possible. R3 again argued that social media is one of the main communication outlets because there are more communication mediums like the TV, Radio and newspaper which according to him, is equally efficient for mass communication.

During crises situations, we use all media. Here at Vodafone we do not take chances. We invest a lot into our brand and so if we are faced with any issues we quickly meet up and strategize as soon as possible. Social media is one of our main communication outlets.

Internally, R3 informed the research that his organization uses emails and Zoom for internal communication and other close networks. He also said that they have *WhatsApp pages* for interpersonal and informal communication amongst staff. When communicating to external stakeholders, they use all available social media platforms such as *Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram*.

We have emails and sometimes Zoom for internal communication. We also have other close networks we use in the office. We also have WhatsApp for our interpersonal and informal communication which is also very effective in most instances. When communicating outside of the organization to our external stakeholders we use all our social media platforms.

We have Facebook, Twitter, Instagram. These platforms are very useful for the organization. It helps us to connect with our audience. Even though it is mostly informal, its effect is always immediate. You can reply instantly to a customer and help them out easily.

Thus, one can say that combining all these social media for both internal and external communication has proved very effective to the organization.

R4 disclosed that they use official mode of communication but they use social media a lot too.

He informed the research that they use more of *Facebook, LinkedIn* and *Twitter*.

Yes, this organization was born out of crisis. We came about as a result of the banking crisis. And within those moments we were using social media a lot. We used social media to communicate to the public about the banks takeover. We also used social media to communicate on any update regarding the takeover and also to make customers understand that their monies are safe. Aside social media we also use text messaging and emails to communicate to our clients for instantaneous information. Our main social media outlets are *Facebook, LinkedIn, and Twitter*.

This means that social media is very efficient during crises situations for information dissemination and even post crisis, communication is also effective in mass communication.

R5 noted that social media is very integral to their organization's communication efforts.

In these times, where everybody is going digital it will be unwise for an organization like us to remain adamant. We do not joke with our social media. Especially me, coming from a background in digital marketing I understand the significance of social media better because social media use to feed me. And it still does feed me.

This response from R5 brings to mind the influence of digital evolution on mass communication.

R5 believed that a communication strategy in this era is ineffective without any inclusion of digital communication media.

R5 also observed that his organization has outlets on all the major social media platforms in Ghana "We have accounts on all the relevant social media outlets. *Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn,*

*Instagram* are our main outlets.” This means that organizations are ready to meet audience wherever they can be found online.

This section sought to interrogate the media used by organization in their communication efforts during crises situation. Most of the responses were similar with all the respondents noting that their organizations combine both traditional and new media in their communication efforts. Digitally, all the respondents argued that their organization used Social Media outlets such as *Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter*. This finding is similar to those by Andoh-Quaino and Annor-Antwi (2015) who found out that some organizations had added *LinkedIn* to their communication efforts. This means that organizations have extended their communication outlets on the digital space in order to meet with growing audience on these platforms.

Traditionally, It was observed that the media mostly used are Radio, TV and the Newspapers. This shows that organizations still use traditional medium in their mass communication efforts. Some organizations also use closely exclusive communication networks like company emails, and also other personal unofficial direct messengers like *WhatsApp*. The study is similar to that of Asamoah’s (2019) who argued that some organizations have added *LinkedIn* to their outlets. This means that organizations have expanded their presence online to meet up with audience from every platform.

#### **4.1.4 What are some of the contents your organization post online and why?**

##### **Contents**

R1 said that their organization share content on their products and services. The organization provides general information about events and their updates within the organization. He informed the researcher that the organization used social media to announce government's acquisition of the company.

We mostly share content of our products and services, general information about new development within our organizations, especially when we wanted to announce that the government is acquiring the company.

Thus, one can say that social media has the power to be harnessed for communication during critical periods for utmost efficiency.

He again added that social media has helped in bringing organizations closer to the people, since it can be used during promotion and marketing campaigns and crises situations. This is because one can directly engage the audience without the interference of gatekeepers:

Social media has helped in bring [bringing] the organization closer to the people. These platforms help us engage with customers and prospective customers almost all the time. This is mostly possible during intensive marketing campaigns and promotions and also crises

This means that with the help of social media, organizations have the platform to engage their audience directly. This makes communication much easier and more interactive.

R2 noted that they used their online platforms to inform customers on updates since it helps them measure the reactions of the people.

At AirtelTigo we use Social media all the time, especially during crises situations. We send communication materials via all the social media outlets. It is mostly very useful because we see all the reactions on our corporate pages and how people feel about a particular situation.

This means that with social media, organizations can monitor feedback in real time through various social media analytics.

R3 also noted that they post adverts, updates about news information and most importantly information about products and services from the organization.

We post online very often. We have a marketing and communication team that deals with that. We post commercials, updates about news information and most importantly information about our products and services.” He argued that while online outlets helps organizations give updates of information, it also helps in giving follow on updates as well. This makes it easy to communicate to the audience any time. “When we have to give out new information, we come back with another update.

R4 also reiterated the assertion by many of the respondents who also noted that social media is useful for promotion of goods and services and sending important information to customers:

Our social media outlets are used to promote our products and services and also to send important information across. We make sure that our platforms are always active so we are always engaging our clients by posting as often as possible.

Thus, one can say that beyond its use in promoting products and services, social media can be harnessed for engaging with clients on a regular basis.

R4 and R5 added that sometimes organizations use online platforms as its official outlets in giving out information adding that if the media needs further details about anything, they can go and check out any of the platforms.

On social media we post something and the whole country gets to know about the information. The media can also pick information from our platforms. This means that we are controlling our own communication.

Thus one can say that unlike traditional media where journalists would have to directly reach out the organization by either calling or sending letters, in more recent times, journalists can just get access to information from organization's social media pages.

R5 again added that they also use social media when they have to send emergency information out to the public.

When we have to tell customers our network is down due to some technical fault, we normally resort to social media or sometimes use text messages since we have the numbers of all our customers. It is very effective I must confess.

This means that beyond social media, organizations are using all available platforms to get to their clients in times of crises. This also means that organizations are constantly finding ways to get access to their clients and stakeholders.

From these responses, one can say that social media has become very instrumental in the communication activities of organizations. Organizations use social media for Marketing and communication activities as crises mitigation medium. This result is similar to a finding by Andoh-Quaino and Annor-Antwi (2015) who asserted that social media is an effective PR tool for organizations to engage their audience directly. Rousseau (2015) also argued that, all in all, social media is an important tool for corporate communication, employee relations, customer relations and media relations; a finding that is being corroborated by the results of this study.

#### **4.1.5 During Crises situations, how often does your organization post online?**

##### **Crisis Communication Online**

All the respondents agreed to the assertion that their organizations had adopted social media into their communication both internal and external publics. R1 noted that his organization used social media "almost all the time". He also said that during crises situations: "it is important to

note that our organization use social media very often.” This was corroborated by R2 who also said that his organization used social media very often. Similarly, R1 also said that his organization “is in constant engagement with stakeholders and most importantly, our customers. Social media gets the information to them fast and timely.” This means that social media is viewed by respondents as being very fast and timely.

Respondents 3,4 & 5 all agreed to the fact that social media has now become part of their communication medium within their respective organization. This means that they are compelled to use social media very often. While most of them could not specify the number of times their organization posted online, they all agreed that the post is normally affected by the events of the organization. Meaning that during marketing and promotion, they post lots of contents online to get a lot of engagement from their clients. Also, during crises situations, it is also important to post often to also update stakeholders on new information.

R3 posit that during crisis their social media outlets are mostly used for relevant content regarding the crisis. He also added that the platforms are mostly used for situational updates during crises situations.

We don't often post all the time but we make sure all communication contain relevant facts and we always stick to the issue. When we have to give out new information, we come back with an update. So during crisis there is no time limit on the number of contents we should publish. We publish according to how situations turn out.

This means that during events like crises, organizations use social media as a channel to provide regular and timely information to the public. This also means that social media can help fill communication gaps and also provide clarity to situations.

During promotion for instance, their social media is mostly flooded because they need to create awareness for their product and service. During crises, R4 noted that they are very much calculated in how often they post. He said that sometimes, they can post just once on a developing issue and wait for other useful updates. This means that while organizations use their social media often, they are also very cautious of what they post often. The response corroborates with Kelly (2014) who also argued that, the proliferation of social media post by organizations will depend on activities and events happening within the organization be it marketing, promotion or during crises situations. Response from R3 is in sync with earlier results obtained from Asamoah (2019) who found that employees of Vodafone use social media a lot for their corporate communication efforts.

#### **4.1.6 How does your organization engage with its stakeholders during crises situations online?**

##### **Dialogic Communication tool**

When asked how their respective organization use social media, Respondent one (R1) argued that his organization uses internal communication networks like *WhatsApp* for internal communication and other social media platforms like *Facebook*, *Twitter* and *Instagram* for its external communication. Respondent two further explained his assertion by adding that:

During crisis, my department and the communication department come together to work to bring the situation under control. Every communication is carefully scripted and edited over and over again just so we make sure that we can get it right. We don't always get it right but most of the times we get it right. We use all available platforms to get to our stakeholders. But then again we don't rely completely on who we want to send information to. This means that even if we use Social media, we do not often use it. We also use traditional media outlets.

This means that despite the proliferation of social media and digital communication, organizations still make sure of traditional media because communicators believed that they would be able to effectively reach all stakeholders.

This indicates that during crisis, social media is used as a dialogical tool to engage the audience directly. R2 indicated however that they do not only rely on new media when communicating during crisis but have to also rely on traditional outlets.

### **Traditional and new media for crisis communication**

Respondent three's (R3) claim is similar to that of R2. He said that during crises his organization does not only rely on social media but harness all available forms of communication:

Here at Vodafone we do not take chances. We invest a lot into our brand and so if we are faced with any issues we quickly meet up and strategize as soon as possible". He added however that social media is one of their main medium. "Social media is one of our main communication outlets. We have emails and sometimes Zoom for internal communication" R3 added that during crises social media is used to connect with the audience. Since the platform provides them the opportunity to give direct information to their publics.

These platforms are very useful for the organization. It helps us to connect with our audience. Even though it is mostly informal, its effect is always immediate. You can reply instantly to a customer and help them out easily.

R3 informed the researcher that at Vodafone, whenever there was a crisis, there is usually a meeting and the people at the meeting normally depend on the type of crises. "During crisis situation, before anything else there are usually meetings. The people at the meeting will depend on the nature of crises". He added that the medium of communication usually depend on the people they are trying to reach: he reiterated that:

We always try to plan on how to deal with the issue collectively and depending on the nature of the crises and how and who we want to communicate to, will depend on how we communicate it. We use the three most important social media outlets thus, *Facebook*, *Twitter* and *Instagram*. We do our communication strategically.

### **Communication tool for crises situations**

R4 noted that during crises situations, they mostly give updates online and most of the time, the media go there for information. This is because they (the organization) mostly want to control their own communication.

During crisis our communication departments ensure information is distributed effectively. So we use efficient medium. Social media is an important tool in our communication. On social media we post something and the whole country gets to know about the information. The media can also pick information from our platforms. This means that we are controlling our own communication.

Respondent five (R5) seems to agree with R3 on the point that his organization also used social media during crises for providing updates on information and also to inform clients on current developments[updates].

Social media is not only useful to us during crisis communication, we practically use it for all our corporate communication. We use social media almost every time we want to send information to the people. Any communication plan without social media strategy would be criticized. So our organization is very much into social media. We also try to engage our publics as often as possible through social media.

#### **4.1.7 How has social media generally helped your organization in its communication efforts?**

Respondents were asked to describe in their own terms how social media had helped their organization's communication efforts.

## Access to direct communication channel

Respondents one (R1) noted that social media has helped eliminate the stress of having to deal with gatekeepers who usually have control over the content that is to be published.

When they were asked how social media had specifically helped their organization in its crisis communication efforts, this is what they had to say;

I think by now we should all know the importance of social media to every organization. I know you know more of those too. But for us in this department one thing I can share from my experience so far is that social media seems to have taken away the time content would have passed through before being published and has also eliminated all the middlemen (when I say middlemen I mean the editors, and all other gatekeepers whom under earlier circumstances would had [previously] wanted to review the contents before they are published.

R1 added that social media helps save time and energy. Unlike traditional media where you have to go through processes to get your materials published, social media has made things more simple and easier.

With social media you just have to click a button and your content is online. So if we have to communicate internally for instance, my boss will just send one *WhatsApp* and everybody within the department will receive it. Also if we have to engage the public, *Facebook* and *Twitter* can also make it easy for us. we only need to make sure that the IT team create some nice designs that will attract the audience to read. Needless to say, information on social media is very timely.

R2 also posit that social media helps their organization monitor people's activities and how they relate to organization's information. He added that this provides useful information that can help the organization engage its audiences better.

Social media has made communication much easier, comfortable and mutually beneficial. This is because; you can sit behind your computer and monitor in real time how your communication piece is faring. And in instances where the audience do not seem to understand, you can engage them

directly. This is good for establishing relationship with your audience. We have a team that normally engages customers online whenever customers register their displeasure to certain issues online.

Respondent 3 corroborated R1's assertion that social media can help the organization control their own information from their online platforms.

Social media has helped make communication very easy. You know with social media we don't have to call any editor or journalist. You control information yourself. You go to a journalist when necessary or they will want to reach you when they need first-hand information. So social media is very useful to us.

Respondent 4 reiterated that social media helps in reaching out to a lot of people. "With social media, we are able to reach a lot of people. This makes information distribution very easy and simple too." This according to him is because majority of Ghanaians who are smart phone users are online and this makes it easy to reach out to your audience without having to deal with all the stress of doing so. R4 in a follow up noted that sometimes, getting access to editors and journalists can be very stressing, especially when they are busy with other engagements. However, social media serves as a very reliable medium because here the communication is controlled by the organization rather than the journalist. This response also corroborates the assertion of Emre, Cemberci, & Eralp (2016 ) that with social media, information is not subjected to gatekeeping philosophies but to organizational needs.

Respondents 5 noted that social media provides the opportunity to directly engage customers in real-time. This according to him makes the customers feel special and helps the organization keep up with the competition.

Banking has become very open and engaging because of competition. Like every other institution in a capitalist society we are interested in making money for our shareholders and by extension ourselves. In order to do that we need to stay ahead of competition, this means being market oriented. That is why we don't joke with our customers Social media has really helped revolutionize communication. Now we can engage the customers directly and give them real time feedback. It makes them feel very special when we do that. Sometimes we can see a complaint online and call the person

directly on the phone to probe further and help them solve the problem. Sometimes they are surprised that we have their number but then they also feel very special when we do that. They believe that we care about them a lot.

These set of responses from the respondents suggest that organizations are more comfortable with controlling their own communication than depending on media houses and journalists. This is in sync with Cavalic's (2015) argument that social media provides the opportunity for users to generate their own content and share it to the world. Communication practitioners believe that social media gives them the freedom to determine for themselves the type of content they would want to broadcast unlike news media publications. Most communication practitioners however argued that they still use the traditional medium since they believe that not all customers are online.

#### **4.1.8 How organizations use social media during crisis communication**

##### **Communication during crises**

From the response gathered so far, it was revealed that organizational use social media for most of their corporate communication. This means that organizations agree to the fact that social media is equally a very effective channel for corporate communication. This section discusses how organizations use social media during crises communication.

Respondent 1 noted that social media is very effective for crises communication. This is because social media platforms have very large and accessible audience who can get your information almost easily. He also noted that social media provides organization the chance to study public reactions during crises.

Social media has a relatively large audience base than most of the media outlets. It is highly likely that everybody with a smartphone has one or more social media account. This makes their audience based very large and very convenient for mass

communication. This also means that social media can be a very good platform for customer engagement. Now when you can engage your customers there, it means you can sell there too. Plus during crisis, you can use that avenue to assess public reaction and also communicate with the people.

R2 and R3 all noted that social media is very effective during crises because it can help organizations fill their information gap.

Social media has helped us in many ways; it has helped us increase our awareness about our brand and boost sales. Social media gives us relatively cheap platform to advertise online. You pay less for boosting your product online than in traditional media outlets. Social media also help us fill the information gap during crises and connect to our customers anytime, any day as explained since everyday almost everyone is online.

R3 added that a post on social media has referral value for its audiences. “It also saves time and makes sure that your content is always available for readers to go back and reference”.

R4 and R5 all agreed to the assertion that social media is very significant to crises communication. This is because during crises situations, communication is very important. Apart from providing information, it also helps customers obtain timely information. This according to R5 helps his organization’s communication needs.

Sometimes crisis is all about communication. For instance just last week someone called to ask why we took a huge amount of money from his savings after he used his VISA at a different bank’s ATM. We took our time to explain things to him and he sort of understood. He wasn’t happy but he understood that it is not our fault. This person can go online and write something that might spark some controversy but we were able to reach out and explain things to him. This is how important communication is to crisis. And with social media, we can trace the inception of crisis and send the person a message. Just yesterday we got some information that someone mentioned our name online. When we checked we noticed that it was a customer who wanted our nearest ATM so we reached out and directed the fellow. That’s progress to me.

This response from R5 is in sync with Cavalic (2015) and Diers-Lawson's (2017) argument on the importance of communication to crises. Cavalic (2015) also noted that in crises communication, it is important to provide adequate information to fill the gap and inconsistencies that may accompany crisis. R2 and R3 noted that with social media, they can fill this information gap and make sure that they provide adequate information as possible.

#### **4.2 Chapter summary**

This chapter analyzed and discussed data collected from respondents obtained through interviews with them. The researcher interviewed five practitioners from four different reputable institutions within the capital city of Accra. It was found that organizations view social media as a very important medium used for corporate communication and by extension, crises communication. It was also found that traditional media is still a very instrumental outlet for organizations despite the proliferation of digital and new social media. It was also found that practitioners liked using social media because it provided them the opportunity to control their own communication, especially during crises.

The next chapter summarizes some of the main findings, makes recommendations for policy and further research and concludes the study.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### SUMMARY OF MAJOR FINDINGS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

#### 5.0 Introduction

This chapter will discuss summary of findings, provide some recommendations, discuss limitations and also give conclusion to the study. The chapter will discuss the findings by corroborating the findings with findings from other related studies which featured in our literature review. The recommendations would be recommendations from policy point of view and also recommendation for further research. The chapter also outlines some challenges the researcher faced when conducting the study.

#### 5.1 Summary of Findings

##### 5.1.1 How selected organizations use social media in their communication efforts.

As discovered by Cavalic (2015), Andoh-Quaino and Annor-Antwi (2015), Raj, Joseph and Rousseau (2015), and Asamoah (2019), social media is a very important medium used by organizations for corporate communication, customer relations, employee relations, and media relations. Response from this study also indicate that organizations like Vodafone, Fidelity Bank, Consolidated Bank and AirtelTigo have effectively used social media for more than just corporate communications. Respondent one argued that at AirtelTigo, social media is used in the facilitation of employee relations as he asserts that social media has become a very important tool for internal communication. “We also have department *WhatsApp* pages were [where] we also communicate on matters relating to internal issues.” Respondents 3,4,and 5 all agreed to the assertion that they use *WhatsApp* for informal communication which has proved to be effective.

Respondents also noted that they used social media for effective communication. Respondent 1 argued that they use social media for general information about new product offerings and services and also about the organization. Respondent 1 argued that AirtelTigo uses social media a lot during the time Government acquired the company. Respondent 4 added that social media provides organizations the freedom of providing information to the audience directly. Respondent 2 argued that social media is again very useful because the platform allows them to reach out to stakeholders and also to ascertain respondent reactions that come up as well as ways of dealing with situations.

As indicated by Cheng (2016), Raj, Joseph and Rousseau (2015), and Andoh-Quaino and Annor-Antwi (2015), the response from practitioners indicate that organizations in Ghana use online outlets such as *Facebook, Twitter, Instagram* in their communication. Respondent noted however that when they have to use work remotely, they use *Microsoft Teams or Zoom* through which they engage in virtual meetings.

Respondents however argued that even though social media is very useful in their communication efforts, they still rely on other traditional mediums in their communication. Respondent 3 argued that at Vodafone they do not like to take chances by relying on only one outlet.

### **5.1.2 Importance of social media in crises communication**

From the responses gathered, it was found that social media is very significant to organizations' crises communication efforts. Social media is used by organizations mainly for communication and updates during crises communication.

Findings obtained from this study also demonstrates that social media allows organizations to control their own communication. Respondents believed that social media gave them the opportunity to produce their own content that is not subjected to editorial policy and control and frame. Having their own social media outlet means that having their own medium to share content. This means that organizations now can reach out to the people themselves without the help of any organization. These finding goes to trigger the debate on the significance of traditional media in corporate communications. But when pushed further to comment on the significance of traditional media, respondents 3 argued that Vodafone Ghana does not rule out traditional media in its communication efforts adding that traditional media can add some credibility to your content because of the processes of news manufacturing in the caution given by Fisher Liu, Austin and Jin (2010).

The study also found that social media provided an avenue for direct engagement with the audience. All the respondents also agreed to the assertion that social media provides them with the platform to directly engage with their customers and the public at large. This engagement helps in dialogic communication which forsters the establishment of two-way communication Ford (2011). This according to respondent 5 helps in the establishment of “new relationships and the maintenance of old ones.” The response is in sync with Grunig& Hunt’s (1984) conceptualize of two-way symmetrical communication and its significance in helping in the establishment of lasting relationships.

## **5.2 Recommendations**

### **5.2.1 Recommendation for policy formulation**

From the results obtained from this study, it is recommended that organizations continue to invest in social media as a very important medium for crises communication. It is also recommended that organizations hire professional digital communicators and digital marketers whose job will be to help strengthen communication and bring on board their technical competence on how to effectively use social media professionally.

### **5.2.2 Recommendation for future studies**

Results obtained from the study again indicates that organizations use social media for communication and also to engage audience. It is there important to study how organizations employ the use of social media to engage audience. The study also recommends that future studies look into how organizations use analytics to identify target groups and how they employ social media strategies to engage audience.

## **5.3 Limitations of the study**

The first limitation was to get access to five different practitioners from five different institutions who were willing to participate in the study. The researcher when faced with this predicament had to improvise by getting five respondents from four (2 from *AirtelTigo*, 1 from Vodafone Ghana, 1 from Consolidated Bank and another 1 from Fidelity Bank) institutions who were willing and ready to help in the data collection process.

Ideally, conducting a study on only four organizations within the capital can be said to be inadequate. Since there are many organizations within the capital city of Accra and the country. Therefore, selecting just four for a study which potentially add to the debate on the role of social

media in crises management in Ghana can be considered as inadequate. Even though the researcher would have wanted to extend the study to other organizations, time and resource constraints did not allow this. Notwithstanding, these constraints the study can be replicated within other jurisdictions. This can help expand the debate and also provide invaluable insights on the phenomenon under study.

#### **5.4 Conclusion**

This section brings to closure the whole research. The analysis and discussions answer all the research questions asked in the beginning of the study. By making meaning out of the data collected from respondents, it was found that the role of social media in crises communication is unquestionable. This study has provided invaluable insights on some organizations in Ghana which widely use social media outlets like *Facebook, Twitter and Instagram* since most of the population use these three outlets. The study also found that organizations use *WhatsApp* for internal communication and sometimes use *Microsoft Teams or Zoom* for virtual engagements. They also use electronic mail (email) very often.

The study also found that during crises communication, organizations used social media mostly for communication and updates on situations. Social media is also used to fill the gap in information flow in the organizations studied. It was also used as a medium to provide information which is always very useful in crises communication.

Organizations also used social media to scan their environment by monitoring public discourse online. This helped them access public reaction to products or services and also provide them opportunities to find out strategic ways of dealing with issues.

It was also found that social media had given the organizations studied and their publics power to take control of their own communication. This enabled them to engage with their publics more directly.

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## **APPENDIX-A**

### **Interview Guide for research participants**

I am a graduate researcher at the Ghana Institute of Journalism (GIJ) currently reading Public Relations. In partial fulfillment of the requirement of this degree, I am undertaking a study on the role of social media in crisis communication. I would appreciate if you spared some of your time to answer a few questions in relation to the study. All responses provided in this interview will be strictly used for academic purposes and under no circumstance will your identity or response be compromised.

The Main objective of the study is to determine the role of social media in crisis communication. This interview will be divided into three parts. The first part will investigate how selected organizations use social media in their crisis communication efforts. The second part will determine how often organizations use social media during crisis communication and the final part is going to explore the importance of social media during crisis communication.

### **Information about the respondent**

- i. Which organization do you work with?
- ii. How many years of experience do you have working within your current organization?
- iii. Which department are you currently working in?
- iv. How many years of experience do you have in total?

**How selected organizations use social media in their crisis communication efforts.**

- i. Does your organization have a social media account?
- ii. What do you understand by organizational crisis?
- iii. Has your organization ever experienced any crisis situation since you joined it?
- iv. During crisis situations which medium do you mostly use to send out information and why?
- v. How have you incorporated social media use in your crisis communication efforts?

**How organizations use social media during crisis communication.**

- i. Which social media outlets do you use in your corporate communication efforts and why?
- ii. How often does your organization engage its stakeholders online?
- iii. What are some of the contents your organization mostly post online and why?
- iv. Which contents do you think mostly give your organization most opportunity for engagement online?
- v. During crisis situation, how often does your organization post online?
- vi. How does your organization engage its stakeholders during crisis situation?
- vii. In your own words, how do you describe your engagement with stakeholders online?

### **The Importance of social media in crisis communication**

- i. How has social media generally helped your organization in its communication efforts?
- ii. How has social media specifically helped your organization in its crisis communication efforts?
- iii. In your own words, describe in three sentences the importance of social media to your organization.
- iv. Do you have anything else to add to this interview?

Thank you for your views and time.