



Strathmore
UNIVERSITY

SCHOOL OF HUMANITIES & SOCIAL SCIENCES
BACHELOR OF ARTS IN COMMUNICATION
END OF SEMESTER EXAMINATION
BAC 4104: ISSUES AND CRISIS MANAGEMENT

Date: 9th November 2022

Time: 10:30 – 12:30

Instructions

- i) Answer **question one** and **any other TWO** questions in the answer booklet provided.
- ii) Be sure to write your arguments accurately using grammatically correct language.
- iii) Poor expression of thought and language will be penalised.
- iv) Skip a line for every distinct argument.

QUESTION ONE (30 MARKS)

READ THIS ARTICLE AND ANSWER THE QUESTIONS THAT FOLLOW

Why Kenya's corporates are hopeless in crisis communication

June 10, 2018

By Eric Wamanji (rococo.co.ke)

If you are a corporate in Kenya concerned about your image, better be petrified. Chances are, your crisis communication strategy is pathetic. Indeed, recently a number of top-flight corporates have been helplessly trapped in a surge of crises and received a thorough thrashing.

Their attempts at handling the crises were hopeless. They mumbled, fumbled, lost cool and blundered spectacularly.

Defense, denial, threats

Hit by crises, the Kenyan corporate mostly takes the godforsaken turn and unwittingly slide to toxicity of defensiveness, denials and threats. Indeed, in Kenya, response to crisis is irrational, hubristic as absurdity gets hold of technocrats who become theatrical and expose their brands to dishonour.

A few choose the hilarious. They take flight. Classical example are school heads who dash into maize plantations when journalists come calling for a small chat.

Such amateurish behaviours have exposed the fraternity of Public Relations, also called corporate communication, which ought to be the compass, the solid conscience, that soberly and tactfully facilitate management of crises for corporates and individuals.

Such amateurish behaviours have exposed the fraternity of Public Relations, also called corporate communication, which ought to be the compass, the solid conscience, that soberly and tactfully facilitate management of crises for corporates and individuals.

Take the Patel Dam tragedy for instance. The owner, Mr Mansukulal Patel, has vanished. His manager took to TV to wax lyrical about their altruism and asked locals to pray for the rains to stop. It took the firm a week to buy press space to accuse rains in Dundori Forest for the tragedy. The Patels displayed gross callousness.

And remember Kenyatta National Hospital (KNH)? It was rocked by scandals real or manufactured. Still, denials and hard-line defence was the default mode of engagement. Poor handling of the crisis spawned changes of the hospital's leadership. The boss was fired! The hospital sustained a bloody nose, and an egged face!

In Kenya, the chain of unseasoned crisis management is infinite offering graduate students ready fodder for research.

This is very unflattering. The market place economy is largely driven by polish and mastery of communication nuances especially during a crisis. This is because image and reputation is big in businesses.

May be in Kenya we have regularised mediocrity. But in mature markets, a PR debacle is a sure ticket to losses. In 2017 United Airlines bungled its crisis management. It paid the price.

That's why it's scaring that even elite organisations that pour a fortune into consultants of communication can hardly hack a crisis. Their communication edifices are mere

scarecrows that are clueless on the nuanced operations of crisis mitigation and management.

Yet, in Public Relations, there is a simple but solid truism – on crisis, it's not about if, but when it will happen. Crises are innate in our systems. How to communicate during this period determines the arc of the corporate going forward.

But, there seem to be an ideological incongruity in understanding the nitty-gritties of corporate communication let alone strategic communication and their contribution to organisational growth and prestige.

Our lenses are still clouded by narcissistic yearnings for press publicity. In this persuasion, flattering media is the antidote for bad image. When the media turns hot, the script ordains, threaten them with consequences of freezing adverts.

Yet, the communication realm has undergone massive revolution. There is a monster in town that holds no franchise to anyone. A monster that explodes and burns on its own fuel like the sun. It's ruthless. It stings like a dragon. It's called social media. No amount of coercions can stop its acrid no-holds-barred fangs.

Objectification

Then there is, sadly, the ideological twist on looks. To most naïve and even aberrant corporate honchos, beauty is synonymous to PR. This cheapens the profession and objectifies women. While we know beauty drives the primitive mind, but, hey, good people, we absolutely need brains to drive the PR agenda.

And if you thought FMs killed radio journalism, our boardrooms are also killing professional communication. In this warped wisdom, anyone who has appeared in the media is hot cake ignoring the rigorous training mandatory for such a delicate and high intensity job.

For this flawed logic of engagement, it's unfair to expect much from such folks. It explains why PR people are largely treated like African maids in an Arabian castle.

And most of them are happy with organising cocktail parties and to decorate venues, or to fire press releases. Yet, the world over, PR has evolved from its propaganda and spinning stripe to a critical strategic management tool.

Indeed, at the core of corporate communication should be intellectual rigour and meticulousness whose golden strands must be entwined in the larger boardroom think.

Change Mind-set

To save this situation, organisations must change their mind-set towards corporate communication. They must reconfigure their structures to honestly anchor strategic communication thinkers in the boardrooms.

Then, any organisation worth its salt must plan for crisis. Anticipating a crisis is at the heart of any strategy. If not, you will be caught flatfooted like most people we have seen lately.

Executives should undergo thorough training on communicating during crises. Hubris, bravado, burying heads in the sand has never helped anyone. Nor is it sexy to shift blame. Be bold enough to take responsibility.

During good times construct and augment a reservoir of reputation. You'll need it in bad times. As they say, make hay while the sun shines.

But then the happenings in Kenya's corporate have offered us a peek into boardrooms, a panorama of an unpolished crisis communication management strategy. Corporates should be fretful- the fortresses are fragile.

Questions

a) From the article above:

- i) What complaints does the author raise? Raise any 5 issues. (5 marks)
- ii) Debate the validity of any three of the author's arguments. Base each of your assessment on any crisis communication theory or theories. (6 marks)
- iii) The author implies that he has several theories (informed hunches about how things work) to explain bad and good crisis response communication behaviour. Elaborate any two. (7 marks)

b) Dr Kamau, in his guest lecture, discussed key issues in a political crisis.

- i) Isolate any 3 and explain them (6 marks)
- ii) What is his advise on emerging from a crisis ? Discuss any three ideas he offered (6 marks)

Question 2 (15 marks)

- a) Relate these concepts: “shareholders; Organisational listening; reputation; crisis management; crisis aversion; issues; communication.” by building a paragraph on their relationship. Add information that will help make your paragraph sound. (5 marks)
- b) Discuss the crisis life cycle. (10 marks)

Question 3 (15 marks)

- a) What is the Expectancy Violation Theory (EVT)? (6 marks)
- b) Why do we call a crisis a product (3 marks)
- c) How is crisis communication a relevant discussion in the Public Relations field? Offer 3 reasons. (6 marks)

Question 4

- a) Prof Timothy Coombs suggests that there are three primary types of social media crises. Discuss them and suggest how you deal with each. (12 marks)
- b) Isolate any other theory discussed in class apart from EVT and suggest how you would use it to restore the reputation of an organisation lost as a result of a social media crisis. (3 marks)