

The effects of social media and apology response strategy on a brand in crisis communication in Vietnam

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ABSTRACT

In the digital era, media crisis can happen to any brand. The popularity of social media can make the crisis uncontrollable. Vietnamese consumers are increasingly utilizing social media such as Facebook for seeking and sharing crisis information. On the other hand, social media can be a channel for brands to respond to the crisis effectively and timely. However, literature on social media users' expectation on brands' crisis response method is inadequate, especially in the Vietnamese context. By conducting a case study analysis of 4 brands' crises, this paper explores the opinions given by prospects on social media, by means of interpreting data from their actual posts, comments and shares on Facebook. Content analysis of 447 items was examined to present the insights regarding the dimensions and themes consumers seek on brands' crisis communication. The most frequently observed dimension is response method, and apology is recognized as the top response method preference. The case study research and content analysis on social media explored the expectations of Vietnamese consumers in relation to the crisis response during crises. In brief, apology response strategy in a timely manner can enhance brand image, brand awareness and promote brand trust. This also contributes to the reduction of the crisis's damage and supports brand recovery after the crises. This paper contributes to Vietnamese marketing communications literature by revealing the factors prospects most commonly seek on a brand's crisis response. Through understanding the consumers' expectations, brands can more accurately implement communications strategy in handling crises. The findings also provide exploratory information for further investigation in this field.

Key words: crisis communication, apology, crisis response, social media, Vietnam

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History

- Received: 17-5-2022
- Accepted: 02-12-2022
- Published: 31-1-2023

DOI :

<https://doi.org/10.32508/stdjelm.v6i4.1070>



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INTRODUCTION

In the digital era, social media has become a network for every person to share experiences and receive information¹. In other words, social media users are not only the ones contributing to the spread of the crisis, but they are also the subject of crisis creation², with the rapid rise of digital platforms, social media and the Internet have become an integral part of Vietnamese life³. Furthermore, We Are Social and Hootsuite⁴ indicate that with 72 million social media users in 2020. It means 73.7 percent of the Vietnamese population uses social media, making it the fastest communication medium for conveying crisis information. As a result, social media should be the most popular crisis communication medium, these platforms significantly influence brands during crises in Vietnam. However, Vietnamese organizations frequently solve crises silently, give indirect crisis responses through the press or solve the problems in private^{2,4}. Many previous studies presented that social media crisis have become a concern for brands, and crisis communication could positively or negatively impact crisis management strategy. Nonetheless, research in

Vietnamese public relations and crisis communication received little attention. Among the few literatures on this topic, scholars had studied the use of social media in crisis communication and compared types of communication channels. No study has been dedicated to exploring the impact of crisis responses on brands and proposing any methods to solve the problems in the country. Therefore, the author sees that there should be research into (1) how social media and apology crisis response has effects on brands in a crisis and (2) how Vietnamese consumers perceive the brands via crisis communication strategy. This study is expected to contribute to the literature, the current crisis communication practice in Vietnam and to help brands understand what their consumers actually look for in brands' crisis response. The paper will include a literature review of relevant aspects, followed by the methodology session and discussion of the research findings.

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Cite this article : Le-Ngoc H, Le T. **The effects of social media and apology response strategy on a brand in crisis communication in Vietnam.** *Sci. Tech. Dev. J. - Eco. Law Manag.*; 6(4):3841-3854.

Crisis definition and classification

Scholars have established classification systems of crisis types to assist businesses in recognizing a crisis, assessing the extent of perceived responsibility, and preparing accordingly, as well as to make the crisis communication effort better⁵. Coombs⁶ defines crisis as the perception of an unexpected event that affects stakeholders' perceived interest in an organization and needs quick attention and intervention. This researcher also states that current crisis management practice is primarily based on the traditional type, while social media crises are the ones that start or worsen because of communication on social media and damage an organization's reputation. Therefore, the business project will investigate the social media crises to find effective crisis communication strategies to deal with this category.

In this review, the term 'organization' is used mostly because adopting and developing academic studies are applied to various forms of organizations, not a specific term of 'company' or 'brand'; and the general term 'stakeholders' is used to describe the other key parties including consumers.

Social media and crisis communication

From stakeholders' perspectives, social media is an ideal channel to communicate with organizations, and the channel gives them a chance to put their evaluations about a brand⁷. In the pre-crisis phase, individuals browse social media to raise their critiques and questions, give opinions and contribute to the sharing process⁷. During a crisis, people use social media to quickly seek information from their connections⁸. After a crisis, social media users still follow the event, give feedback on the crisis management, and continue their conversations relating to the crisis on the channel⁶. Thus, stakeholders believe that social media provides up-to-date and more reliable information than traditional channels⁸. In addition, Coombs⁶ states that stakeholders expect to know crisis management methods, as well as information on what organizations are doing to address complaints and warning indicators.

In terms of organizations, they can utilize social media platforms in a crisis to update stakeholders, keep them informed, and collaborate to find a satisfying solution¹. Research by Schultz et al.,⁹ determines speed, easy accessibility and personal communication are benefits of social media. These benefits could help improve a brand or a firm's reputation during and after a crisis^{10,11}. In the review of crisis communication literature, Ly-Le¹² recognizes that literature and practice appreciate a quick response in crisis management

because a slow response can lead to rumors and critiques.

On the other hand, social media enhance stakeholders' voices, making them more visible and approachable to a wide range of public and, more broadly, to any organizations engaged⁷. Thus, the channels become uncontrollable when users spread negative comments faster than the response of organizations^{6,13}. Therefore, due to the rapidity of spreading a message, social media allows crisis communication to stop or rise faster than any other channel.

In brief, social media has tremendously enabled consumer information sharing, allowing users to participate in the broadcasting process¹. In other words, thousands or even millions of consumers could reach crisis information within hours¹⁴. This requires crisis management which is to minimize damage and maintain the organizational reputation¹⁵ including protecting brands.

Brand and crisis communication

Brands are affected by several types of crises, whether they are caused by a brand's intentional violation or by forces and actions beyond the brand's control¹⁶. According to Coombs¹⁷, a brand's response methods to a specific crisis led to consumers' views of that brand. While existing literature on the impact of crises and the crisis response on brands is quite little, there are reports that the types of crisis response impact brand equity. When a brand responds to a crisis, its post-crisis brand equity does not decline, while denial and no-response tactics resulted in a considerable reduction in brand equity¹⁶. Brand equity consists of four dimensions: brand loyalty, brand awareness, perceived quality, and brand associations^{18,19}, and prior research shows that a crisis can influence the components of brand equity. In particular, brand awareness and brand associations are investigated to be enhanced after a crisis, but the perceived quality of the brand and the customers' loyalty will decrease. In brief, when brand equity is vulnerable due to crises, this eventually threatens the relationship between the brand and its customers²⁰, and the crisis response could protect brand equity, help consumer-based brand equity be recovered^{21,22}.

Brand trust not only maintains a long-term relationship between consumers and brands²⁰ but also represents consumer-brand relationships playing a vital role in a crisis²³. Edelman Trust Barometer investigates that 51% of respondents believed positive information about a trusted company, while only a quarter of respondents believed negative information. In

contrast, when it comes to a mistrusted company, 57% believed negative information and only 15% believed that positive information about the company is true²⁴. The results imply that since the damage to the trusted brand may be less severe, post-crisis recovery would be easier, thus brand trust plays a vital role in protecting a brand from the negative effects of a crisis¹⁶.

Crisis communication in Vietnam

Firstly, in terms of crisis response methods, the existing literature emphasizes the sincerity and responsibility of involved organizations, and those do not avoid or deny the issues, because people would look more into the nature of a response content and reaction²⁵. Besides, social media facilitates organizations to join the conversation and respond to users which is the target audience¹². In addition, while the content of crisis response was considered as important as the speed of the response, public relations practitioners underappreciated sincere content, so these content strategies are often overlooked and underused²⁵.

Secondly, existing literature in Vietnam also investigates response time and channels of organizations when a crisis happens. Ly-Le²⁶ concludes in a study that stakeholders in Vietnam want more timely and responsive actions from organizations on social media channels during times of crisis. Specifically, the Vietnamese public prefers that organizations respond to crises with a formal and carefully crafted approach²⁶. When it comes to response channels, scholars on the issue of crisis communication in Vietnam emphasize that social media is increasingly important from both organizations and stakeholders' perspectives.

In terms of organizations' aspects, they believe that as stakeholders seek and share news on social media frequently²⁷, they would like to see a reaction on the same social media platform if a social media crisis occurs²⁶. Additionally, this researcher states that stakeholders expect organizations to use both the online platform and the traditional one. Hence, social media is used as frequently and considered as useful as traditional media in crisis communication¹². However, the findings in practice are that in various crises in Vietnam over the years, social media has not been a prioritized platform, even if the crisis began on social media^{12,25}. A reason is that Vietnamese organizations are concerned about its uncontrollability²⁷.

Prior research shows that Vietnam is a country in which the public's truth in the media is low. Positive coverage of organizations is considered due to financial incentives to journalists²⁸, and stakeholders

still lack trust in information from traditional media, even though it is more credible than social media²⁶. Additionally, stakeholders see social media information as untrustworthy and thus have few positive reactions to organizations responding on this channel¹². Hence, the combination of the use of both types of response platforms is a mutual expectation of Vietnamese organizations and stakeholders, and organizations should select channels based on the preferences of their stakeholders and the features of each crisis¹². However, in comparison to both kinds of channels, Vietnamese people evaluate better and hold a positive perception of organizations giving crisis responses on social media²⁶.

Recently in Vietnam, crisis communication has become a significant issue for brands, because explosive crises occurred in different industries, leading to serious impacts on many brands²⁹. However, in an investigation of 73 brands with 110 crises in Vietnam, nearly 40% of brands remain silent, allowing the problems to pass on their own, while others will offer formal crisis response through the traditional channels (frequently press releases or press conferences and representatives) or settle disputes with involved parties in private². This encourages the author to propose an approachable and specific strategy in crisis communication for brands in Vietnam to manage crises in the social media context.

Apology response strategy

Research on crisis communication strategies has attracted many studies. Previous scholars developed some theories and models mentioning apology as critical a crisis response method to help organizations minimize the damage of a crisis^{17,30-36}.

The first perspective defines the traditional crisis communication strategy spectrum. It was found that the Model of Crisis Communication Content had three distinct aspects (Instructing information, Adjusting information, Internalizing information)³⁰. Instructing information provides instructions on how to react to the crisis; adjusting information helps people emotionally code with the crisis, and internalizing information builds a good image of the organization. Besides that, based on the apology approach, the Image repair theory of Benoit also argued compensation is to minimize the number of negative effects³¹. This theory also mentioned strategies of corrective action and mortification³¹, which indicates that organizations can apologize and repair their actions. Although these theories are significantly useful in the scholarship, they have not investigated social media. Situational Crisis Communication Theory has identified

the primary crisis response strategies for a crisis including denial, diminish and rebuild options¹⁷. However, the theory states that organizations must first provide instructing and adjusting information to the public and show sympathy to the victims. When an organization shared high crisis responsibility, crisis managers could adopt the third strategy which is 'rebuild crisis response' to make compensation and give an apology. It is obvious that employing the rebuild option can be successful in minimizing the damage of brand awareness following the crisis¹⁶. Although this theory did not investigate the influence of social media³², developing studies have contributed to the literature in online contexts^{6,37}.

The second perspective defines social media crisis management literature. In general, the crisis management research in the social media context does not alter or critique the traditional perspective. The blog-mediated crises communication model of Jin & Liu is based on Situational Crisis Communication Theory^{17,32}, then was suggested changing the name into the social-mediated crisis communication model³⁴. This study considered crisis message form and crisis message source which affect how organizations should engage with the public. In addition, six response options were proposed, which included the base, deny, diminish, rebuild, reinforce, and punish. The model categorized the 'Adapting information: Corrective action' in the base strategy, compensation and apology was also mentioned in the rebuilt one. The networked crisis communication theory of Schultz, Utz & Göritz³⁵ and was extended by Schultz, Utz & Glocka⁹ by examining stakeholders' expectations of organizations' crisis management in using social media. In particular, the theory proposed three factors in crisis communication: Apology, Sympathy, and Information. Moreover, the theory has emphasized the message and the media type during crisis communication.

To combine classic theories of crisis communication strategy with the newly emergent social media crisis management literature, an Interactive crisis communication model is proposed. The model of Cheng generated five main crisis responses (base, denial, evasion, justification, and concession) and 28 strategies applied in specific crisis phases³⁶. Particularly, the information providing method is suitable in the pre-crisis stage accompanied by sympathy and during the event's period. In addition, compensation and apology strategies should be implemented in the crisis event phase. Furthermore, the model also emphasized the content between the organization and stakeholders. Another significant finding is that social me-

dia crisis management research has focused on the 'interaction' or 'dialogue' between the organization and stakeholders^{36,38-41}. However, there are few studies clearly mentioning when and how to interact, as well as what kind of content and messages may be employed for the response.

In brief, the focus of this paper is to investigate the apology crisis response, so that the author summarizes mentioned factors and components such as apology, sympathy, corrective action, etc. in previous literature as themes. After analyzing previous research, the author identifies the three most common dimensions (response method, response time, interactive platform). Additionally, there will be an analysis of five specific themes of the response method dimension (Table 1):

- Response method: The dimension is related to brand reactions, how brands respond to the incidents, and how they delivered the crisis response. This dimension includes five themes to suggest a detailed solution for brands in dealing with crisis communication:

1. Apology
2. Attitude
3. Corrective action
4. Content
5. Dialogue

- Response time: The dimension describes the expectation of time that consumers and society want to know the official crisis response from brands involved in a crisis.
- Interactive platform: The dimension indicates the suggested types of media or suitable channels (traditional or online media or the combination), that should be used by these brands to release the crisis communication.

METHODS

Case study

A case study is an empirical investigation that analyzes a current event in depth and within its real-world environment⁴². Case study research was used because the purpose of this paper is to understand a real-world case and assume that the understanding is likely to involve important contextual conditions.

The paper was conducted based on the case study of brand crises experienced by two Vietnamese brands - Bitis and Khaisilk; and two global brands - KFC and Dove. The reason is that these brands all used apology

Table 1: Themes of response method in apology crisis response in crisis communication.

Theme	Theories addressing this theme
Apology: The action of saying/publishing that a brand is sorry and accepts responsibility for the incidents that occurred.	Image repair theory ³¹ , Situational Crisis Communication Theory ¹⁷ , Social-Mediated Crises Communication Model ^{32,34} , Networked crisis communication theory ³⁵ , Interactive Crisis Communication Model ³⁶
Attitude: The way of thinking and behaving that a brand expresses such as sympathy, sincerity, etc.	Situational Crisis Communication Theory ¹⁷ , Networked crisis communication theory ³⁵ , Interactive Crisis Communication Model ³⁶
Corrective action: The action that is done to make up for the false, which can include compensation.	Image repair theory ³¹ , Situational Crisis Communication Theory ¹⁷ , Social-Mediated Crises Communication Model ^{32,34} , Interactive Crisis Communication Model ³⁶
Content: The ideas in the announcement, message, explanation, answer, or images, etc. released by a brand in crisis communication.	Model of Crisis Communication Content ³⁰ , Situational Crisis Communication Theory ¹⁷ , Social-Mediated Crises Communication Model ^{32,34} , Networked crisis communication theory ³⁵ , Interactive Crisis Communication Model ³⁶
Dialogue: The conversation, discussion between a brand and social media users that is written or said.	Interactive Crisis Communication Model ^{36,38-41}

crisis response in their crisis communication strategy, but they applied in separate ways. In other words, through observing their use of apology and the influence of social media, the research findings would have diversification in Vietnamese consumers' evaluation.

The case of Bitis

On 10 October 2021, Bitis - a Vietnamese popular shoes brand, faced two incidents in a marketing campaign to introduce a new product, which has a key message of taking inspiration from the culture in the Central region of Vietnam. Both began on Facebook and were propagated by this social platform. Firstly, Bitis was exposed to using the cloth materials sold on Taobao - an e-commerce platform in China. Secondly, the texture claimed to be Tay Nguyen's brocade is the Cham ethnic community's dog's foot pattern. On the evening of 12 October, Bitis gave a response to the public about the issues: using inadequate quality fabrics and false in the research process. Accordingly, the brand admitted to having bought brocade from China and mistakes related to the origin of the pattern. Next, the company also proposed solutions to mitigate the incidents:

- Replacing the fabric with a Hue pattern to keep the product's meaning of symbolizing the Central of Vietnam.
- Editing media publications within 24 hours.
- The version delivered to consumers will be the updated version.

- Refunding pre-ordered customers who do not want to buy products made with new materials.
- Continually committing to maintain the amount of monetary contribution to the Central areas.

As publicly apologizing on the brand's Facebook fan page and offering solutions to the problem, Bitis has increased brand awareness and received compliments for the quick handling of the crisis.

The case of Khaisilk

In October 2017, Khaisilk - once positioned as a Vietnamese high-end silk brand for 30 years, faced a scandal of made-in-China products under the Vietnamese trademark. The crisis occurred when a business in Hanoi, which is Khai Silk's customer discovered a scarf with two labels, one was "Made in China" and the other was "Khai Silk Made in Vietnam". The business then posted a complaint on Facebook about the issue. According to the post, the company bought 60 Khaisilk scarves, and one scarf had two tags while the remaining were labelled "Khai Silk Made in Vietnam". When the event had just become known, the brand's owner denied that there had been an incident of label swap. The brand also asserted that this was an unintentional problem of a warehouse staff when inaccurately taking the product produced for a Hong Kong partner. The inadequate explanation quickly led to a more severe crisis. As being surrounded by increasingly negative information from social media users,

Khaisilk lately admitted in an interview with an online newspaper that half of the products were from China. The brand also claimed to recall made-in-China products and provide compensation to customers.

Many Khaisilk shops in Vietnam have been closed at the same time because of this problem and their ineffective crisis management. This has become one of the most scandalous brand crises in Vietnam's business world.

The case of KFC

In February 2018, more than 800 KFC restaurants in the UK were forced to close temporarily because of supply chain issues. In particular, these outlets were running out of chicken to sell. On the Internet and social media platforms, plenty of unpleasant comments about the issue has begun and spread out.

When they noticed signals of a crisis on social media, they quickly created a crisis communication strategy. A full-page newspaper advertisement in two British magazines placed the brand's apology and a humorous graphic of the company name rearranged from KFC to FCK.

The fast-food brand could have shifted the blame on DHL, their supply chain partner, and refused to accept any responsibility, but they did not choose to do this method. Moreover, the brand also kept updating the way they had been dealing with the situation. Two days after the news was released, they said that 'some chickens have now crossed the road, the rest are waiting at the pelican crossing' and provided a link to a new page that updated the re-opened eateries. The crisis only lasted one week, and the crisis response went viral quickly via social media.

The case of Dove

At the end of 2017, Dove posted a three-second video on its US Facebook page showing that a Black woman was becoming white when she removed her shirt. The clip was widely shared on social media, and Dove was in crisis mode due to a Facebook advert.

They seemed to imply that using Dove would help them become cleaner and promote diversity. However, the brand experienced a public relations disaster due to racism. The beauty brand quickly apologized and said on Facebook and Twitter that the clip had been removed. In addition, the brand encouraged customers to mitigate their anger directly. The call for dialogue did not undo Dove's error, but it did assist them in minimizing the damage, and the crisis only lasted six weeks.

Data collection method

A data collection method selected for this paper is content analysis. There are two reasons leading to this choice. Firstly, according to Krippendorff, the content analysis method enables the gathering of naturalistic data without the interference of researchers⁴³. This illustrates the nature of the positivism paradigm. Secondly, this method could be examined with both qualitative and quantitative approaches^{43,44}. The content collected, which is online comments and online sharing posts on an online platform, was used to investigate the expectations and evaluations of Vietnamese social media users on brands' crisis communication.

A social media site is a useful source of data collection because prospects' information seeking is shown through their thinking and opinions on the virtual environment. In other words, as the rapid information transmission of social media significantly contributes to crisis communication, actual online conversations provide insights into consumers' expectations. The most popular social media platform in Vietnam - Facebook¹² was chosen to collect data for this research.

Facebook is popular for having a massive range of fan pages and group communities so that the relevant comments can be found by searching posts and sharing of Facebook users, which is illustrated in Figure 1. The data collection process started with searching all content on fan pages of these brands associated with the crises.

Next, the author collected posts, sharing, and following comments on other fan pages publishing content related to these topics, which is shown in Figure 2. In the period from the time these events occurred to the end of 2021, all the content used in this research was publicly visible.

However, because the method was conducted depending on conversations of social media users in a virtual context, there is an ethical consideration to be concentrated on. The identifiable information such as Facebook accounts and usernames were not recorded to protect the content publishers' privacy.

Additionally, content analysis has some difficulties in providing validity and reliability. Firstly, the online content may be unstable⁴⁵. Because stability is essential in content judgement⁴³, the author copied the data to Excel files for coding and keeping stability during the procedure. The second challenge is due to the nature of the content. In the process of analyzing data, besides understandable and unambiguous content, the author has collected the latent content, which



Figure 1: Data collected on a brand's fan page.



Figure 2: Data collected on Facebook's groups.

is the meaning being not observable on the surface of messages^{43,46}.

Hence, to ensure the validity and reliability of content analysis in this business project, the author implemented a two-step process of interpreting data based on the guides of Potter & Levine-Donnerstein⁴⁶: developing the coding scheme based on rules and standards, then comparing the coded result with a consistent set of criteria. Particularly, the author coded and allocated the understandable content into categories to create the coding scheme (Table 1). After that, the coding rules and standards were applied to compare the coding decisions. There was an independent coder to help the author categorize the latent content. Because the author could make decisions based on subjective interpretation, the judgement with consistency between two coders led to intersubjectivity. Each coder worked separately in the coding process, and the different results were gathered and reviewed together to come up with the coding conclusion. The data coding which could not be agreed upon by the two coders was deleted from the data collection. The paper applied this process across qualitative and quantitative testing to ensure the accuracy of research findings.

Data collection reached 447 items which are posts, sharing and arising comments written in the Vietnamese language. After the author carefully filled up all data into three dimensions (response method, response time and interactive platform), a coding frame was designed to propose 5 themes in the response method. The independent coder joined in the coding process of two steps mentioned above to categorize the data. After the coding process, there are 306 items remaining for analysis (n = 306). In terms of qualitative analysis, the author separately picked out the content showing the effects of these brands' crisis response methods on brand equity to interpret the insights and expectations of Vietnamese toward brands in crisis management. For the quantitative analysis, the content judgement was measured by the rating scale of theme relevance. Since there are five themes in the response method, the weighting score is from 0 to 5 (0 - not related at all; 5 - key focus of the data). This value was used to calculate the rating of each theme. Because the content collected did not include identifiable information, the author could not classify the data based on demographic sectors such as genders, ages, jobs, and educational backgrounds, etc. The author recognized the collected content from Vietnamese due to the language used.

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

Data were analyzed to explore the expectation of Vietnamese consumers regarding crisis communication that social media users seek from brands. The results reveal insights into which prospects expect to see brands' reactions on social media in a crisis. There are four types of data found. The first type can be easily understood via the first-time reading while the other three types are vague and require a deeper interpretation.

The first type is opinions mentioning a single theme or a single dimension. This type clearly expresses a particular theme or dimension that a prospect was totally looking for, for example, "I will buy this pair of shoes because this is the first brand in Vietnam bravely apologizes." This opinion emphasizes the importance of an apology of a brand in crisis management.

The second type is mentioning multiple dimensions or themes in the response method. This is illustrated by the comment: "Putting aside the cultural story, the way Bitis listens to consumers, quickly admits mistakes, and offers a solution, deserves 10 points (the highest mark in the Vietnamese educational system - noted the author)." This statement mentions two dimensions, which are response time and response method. In addition, it not only mentions the writer's expectation of quick crisis response from Vietnamese brands but also highly appreciates the themes of apology and corrective action.

The third type belongs to open opinions, which includes general compliments on the brands' crisis communication or criticizing them for their strategies, and the final one includes contributing opinions and suggestions on the brands' products.

Qualitative findings

Apology

The first theme, an apology, has been the most common and emphasized factor of Vietnamese consumers in this research. However, there is not any study investigating this approach in Vietnamese crisis literature. Thus, this analysis highlights a type of crisis response that is using an apology.

"Bitis did the right thing. I do not understand why in Vietnam, an action that can be considered as obvious things as brands apologizing to consumers, are really rare to happen. I do not understand why the most basic thing in business, which is respecting consumers, is ignored by other brands. Continue to support and praise Bitis, let brands take it as an example."

"The sincere apology goes into the hearts of consumers. It is rare to have a Vietnamese brand behave like this."

These opinions indicate that there are limited brand crisis management strategies that use an apology. While consumers prefer an apology and solution, organizations are not willing to solve a crisis, thus they choose a method of silence or hire the truth²⁶. Moreover, these users also highly appreciated the brand using an apology in managing a crisis and the positive effect of the apology in crisis management. Taking full responsibility and apologizing tends to create a stronger link between the brand's image and consumers' minds¹⁶. Therefore, it can be inferred that the apology theme, which shows an acceptance of responsibility for the incidents that occurred, is a crucial component of crisis response for brands to protect the brand image in customer perception. Prospects also mentioned the trust, such factors are raised regarding apologizing and taking responsibility.

"Over the years, people who bought Khaisilk's products believe that they are Vietnamese silk products. Many people even choose Khaisilk products as a high-class gift to give to international friends as the pride of our country's silk. However, Mr. Khai explained irresponsibly like this. Money can be refunded, but once trust is lost, it can be regained."

"Once the trust of customers is lost, it is difficult for a brand to be rebuilt as before. Khaisilk will be an unforgettable lesson for businesses."

In the case of Khaisilk, the brand first blamed an accident to evade responsibility and then committed to compensation to reduce offensiveness³¹. However, these opinions implied that Vietnamese consumers prefer an apology as soon as the crisis begins rather than any other method. When a brand is blamed for the crisis responsibility, consumers expect the brand to be fully or partially responsible for the crisis, because this action would contribute to consumers' trust in and commitment to the brand¹⁶. Although there are a few opinions emphasizing the brand trust via a crisis response, these imply a positive effect of apology crisis response on brand recovery after the crisis.

Attitude

The second theme associated with the response method links to brand loyalty. This is illustrated through the following comment of a Facebook user, which highlights the straightforwardness and sincerity of the brand's crisis response.

"I do not judge or criticize anything, just want to say that as a customer, I really like the attitude of listening, sincerity, and goodwill. A frank and sincere apology deserves loyal customers."

In this comment, the consumer not only mentioned the first theme but also emphasized the attitude expressed through the apology. Hegner, Beldad & Kamphuis op Heghuis stated that after a crisis, loyalty values may even increase¹⁶. Hence, showing a good attitude of frankly and sincerely accepting responsibility can help brands enhance brand loyalty after the crisis.

Corrective action

Thirdly, opinions on solutions required more practical and proactive reactions rather than a speech or a message announced via the media. Prospects evaluated corrective actions such as compensation and changes to mitigate the crisis's impact.

"Apologizing with actions is the sincerest apology. In this approach, Bitis not only satisfied the current customers but also increased the number of prospects, who love and want to keep the Vietnamese national culture."

"The mistake in 30 years, how to erase it all with an apology????"

These opinions emphasized the corrective actions, which are the most crucial component of a crisis management strategy. In other words, consumers expect to know how brands do things to correct their mistakes. In addition, based on analyzing this user's opinion, it is possible to believe that appropriate corrective actions in managing a crisis help a brand protect the brand image and attract more customers. Furthermore, many users said that they had known about the product launching campaign of Bitis due to its crisis communication with solutions provided. Thus, an apology crisis response including the theme of corrective action provides a positive effect on brand awareness and brand image during and after a crisis.

"There should always be learning and correction when doing wrong. To be honest, I did not pay much attention to this product when Bitis introduced it, but thanks to this case, I am closely interested in it."

Content

In terms of crisis response, the theme of content plays a vital role in accurately delivering and expressing the brands' message and attitude. While the reviewed literature also emphasized consistency and sincerity in content, the value of content was underappreciated by Vietnamese organizations²⁵. Thus, this theme does not only reflect the focus on crisis response content of Vietnamese consumers but also highlights some aspects of the content. First, the content can increase brand trust and facilitate brand recovery after the crisis thanks to giving response with transparency.

“The transparent openness can turn the tide, not only strengthening consumer’s trust but also helping businesses attract more new customers.”

In addition, most comments relate to the crisis information (e.g., explanations or reasons for the incidents), but there are various opinions evaluating the vocabulary use, grammar, spelling mistakes, etc. Hence, before publishing a crisis response, brands should carefully check the content, because consumers tend to analyze the response to give a critique, especially on social media.

“This post is like an official press release of Bitis, so I think Bitis needs to be more elaborate on the words and sentences.”

Moreover, in crisis communication, businesses should choose a clever step to create sympathy with customers to help them forget negative situations happening. Sense of humor in the content of public announcements is an interesting factor found in apology crisis response.

“From the story of KFC, sometimes, humor is the best tactic, but we need to do it within a limit to avoid the customer misinterpreting what we want to express.”

Overall, the findings of the content theme primarily relate to explanations, words, sentences, and humorous factors. It is also a tool supporting apology and attitude expression in crisis response.

Dialogue

Finally, regarding crisis response on social media, while only a few users mentioned the type of communication channel, many collected comments referred to interacting with brands and other social media users to discuss the crisis response.

“Obviously, though Dove was wrong and could not correct the false, the willingness to have a dialogue with customers, and find out the problem makes them angry helped to end this crisis more simply. At the same time, [the brand] appeases public opinion, instead of being boycotted as predicted.”

“Proactively listening to the concerns of customers to know the root cause of the problem to solve easier, because this is a two-way relationship and communication is a dialogue.”

Besides contributing to reducing the damage of a crisis, the dialogue can assist a brand in managing the crisis and create a positive effect on brand recovery. The reason is that consumers perceive organizations responding on social media are caring and willing to talk with them, leading to better evaluation²⁶.

Furthermore, the data also reveal an additional factor, constructive feedback. Although there are few mentions regarding this aspect, they are a critical point for

brands to investigate the consumer’s insights. In the case of Bitis, for example, some users raised discussions about the product’ features and designs, not only the crisis involved model but also many other items.

“Today, I see the brand handles thoroughly. It is worthy for me to have supported it for years. I have bought [the brand’s product] for years, but the bottom of my shoes comes off easily. Hope the brand makes the bottom better.”

Quantitative findings

Quantitative analysis was performed to calculate how often a dimension and a theme were being mentioned on social media, to indicate the importance of this factor in the insights of Vietnamese consumers. In addition, to identify the most effective approach in apology crisis response, the author also calculated the rating score of each theme to reveal the most necessary reactions that brands should do in handling crises.

Vietnamese social media users pay more attention to brands’ response method in crisis communication.

The first result is in relation to the number of three dimensions in this project. While the response time and interactive platform (the use of social media and traditional media) have been a focus in previous research on Vietnamese crisis communication, there are few collected opinions mentioned these dimensions. The first dimension of the response method has been common attention of Vietnamese social media users in this research. In particular, there were 35 opinions mentioning response time and only 5 opinions mentioning interactive platforms. This means these dimensions account for 11.44% and 1.63% respectively (n=306).

Another finding is that, while the count of mentions on response time is low (35), there were 33 items highly appreciating rapidly response. This data reveals that brands should provide a rapid crisis response to answer the public and the Vietnamese do not significantly focus on the communication channels.

Comparison of five themes in response method

Table 2 presents the comparison of five themes, which were categorized by the author after analyzing the dataset. The count of frequency illustrates the frequency to which that theme was raised by Vietnamese social media users when evaluating the brands’ crisis communication. This indicates the most common reactions preferred by Vietnamese consumers. The sum

Table 2: Frequency and sum of ratings of collected data regarding each theme (n=306).

Theme	Frequency	Percentage	Percentage rank	Sum of ratings	Sum of ratings rank
Apology	68	22,22%	1	423	1
Attitude	56	18,30%	2	299	3
Corrective action	44	14,38%	4	272	4
Content	46	15,03%	3	307	2
Dialogue	29	9,48%	5	167	5

of ratings is the total results of the rating scores, which were calculated by interpreting each theme in a data and weighting it relative to the overall focus of the opinion. Hence, the data reflected not only the core theme perceived by Vietnamese consumers but also the aspects they expected to know.

The first dimension was mentioned in types of data; thus, the author performed the frequency calculation based on the rules that the coders just counted the themes recognized in the first and second types of data. However, for rating standards, to have a more specific evaluation of the importance of these themes, the author also investigates the third and fourth types of data. In particular, if a data just mentioned a single theme, it was rated 5 and the four remaining themes were rated 0. For the second type of multiple themes, the coders rated based on our individual perceptions ranging from 5 for the core theme and 1 for the least focus. A data was rated 1 in all five themes if it was classified as the third type and 0 in all five themes for the fourth type.

According to the frequency, the top preference is an apology. This theme is ranked highest on both the frequency and sum of ratings. It is obvious that Vietnamese consumers expected to receive an apology with a suitable attitude from brands in handling crises. The attitude is ranked second in frequency, indicating that prospects significantly care for the attitude that the brands expressed in the apology crisis response. The third popular theme belongs to the content, which mentioned the explanation, grammar, vocabulary, image, etc. Because the crisis response can be considered as the answer of brands for the crisis information, the public's questions and relevant negative rumors, consumers tend to closely consider the text, image, etc. of the response even if it was released on social media or traditional channels. However, when it comes to the sum of ratings, the content is ranked second, and the third rank belongs to the attitude. Consumers have more interests in crisis information, which can satisfy their curiosity. Moreover,

the content of the response can show the brands' attitudes such as sincerity and responsibility, thus consumers would weigh the content higher.

CONCLUSION

This study addresses an increasingly important concern for brands in the public relations field, which is crisis communication. The findings showed that all the themes and dimensions summarized from the literature were presented in the dataset. The analysis expressed an overview of the dimensions that Vietnamese consumers frequently emphasize and expect to know and reveals the consumers' attitudes toward brands on crisis response methods.

Response method is most frequently discussed, followed by response time, and the third dimension of the interactive platform receives little attention. This implies consumers agree on the use of social media in crisis communication, but brands can also combine online and traditional channels to rapidly spread the crisis response. Popular themes that were mentioned in previous literature were identified as the top response method preferences, such as "apology" and "attitude". The content theme was mentioned less often but was highly weighted following the apology. Prospects also often seek corrective action and dialogue in brands' crisis response.

However, there are limitations to this study that should be considered when interpreting the reported results. First, data collection came from a single social media site, Facebook. Data from other social media sources could be considered in future studies. Second, as not being collected identifiable information, the opinions from the younger generation can dominate the dataset, because they tend to actively discuss on social media. Finally, this research only explores the initial findings about the crisis management in Vietnam, there are many potential research questions that could be further developed.

In summary, the research provides an approach in terms of crisis response, which would be beneficial for the brand communication strategies in Vietnamese

literature and crisis management in practice. Brand managers and public relations practitioners can further understand Vietnamese consumers' insights so that they can use effective communication strategies in handling crises.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest.

AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

Author Le Ngoc Han is responsible for: idea initiation, theoretical synthesis, data collection, data analysis and conclusion.

Author Le Dinh Minh Tri is responsible for: research structure, orientation and additional comments.

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Tác động của mạng xã hội và chiến lược phản hồi bằng lời xin lỗi đối với một thương hiệu trong khủng hoảng truyền thông tại Việt Nam

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TÓM TẮT

Người tiêu dùng Việt Nam ngày càng sử dụng mạng xã hội nhiều hơn để tìm kiếm và chia sẻ thông tin về khủng hoảng. Tuy nhiên, tài liệu nghiên cứu ở Việt Nam về kỳ vọng của người dùng mạng xã hội vào phương pháp ứng phó với khủng hoảng của các thương hiệu hiện không đủ. Bằng cách thực hiện phân tích nghiên cứu điển hình về các cuộc khủng hoảng của 4 thương hiệu, bài báo này khám phá ý kiến của các khách hàng tiềm năng trên phương tiện truyền thông xã hội, bằng cách diễn giải dữ liệu từ các bài đăng, nhận xét và chia sẻ của họ trên Facebook. Phân tích nội dung của 447 dữ liệu đã được kiểm tra để trình bày những hiểu biết sâu sắc về các khía cạnh và chủ đề mà người tiêu dùng tìm kiếm trong quá trình xử lý khủng hoảng truyền thông của các thương hiệu. Khía cạnh được quan tâm thường xuyên nhất là phương pháp phản hồi, và lời xin lỗi được công nhận là phương pháp phản hồi ưu tiên hàng đầu. Nghiên cứu điển hình và phân tích nội dung trên mạng xã hội đã khám phá những kỳ vọng của người tiêu dùng Việt Nam liên quan đến ứng phó với khủng hoảng trong các cuộc khủng hoảng. Tóm lại, chiến lược phản hồi bằng lời xin lỗi kịp thời có thể nâng cao hình ảnh thương hiệu, nhận thức về thương hiệu và thúc đẩy sự tin tưởng thương hiệu. Điều này cũng góp phần giảm thiểu thiệt hại do khủng hoảng truyền thông và hỗ trợ phục hồi thương hiệu sau khủng hoảng. Bài báo đóng góp vào tài liệu nghiên cứu trong lĩnh vực truyền thông và tiếp thị tại Việt Nam bằng cách tiết lộ các yếu tố mà khách hàng tiềm năng thường tìm kiếm nhất trong phản ứng khủng hoảng của một thương hiệu. Thông qua việc hiểu được mong đợi của người tiêu dùng, các thương hiệu có thể triển khai chính xác hơn chiến lược truyền thông trong việc xử lý khủng hoảng.

Từ khóa: khủng hoảng truyền thông, xin lỗi, phản hồi khủng hoảng, mạng xã hội, Việt Nam

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Lịch sử

- Ngày nhận: 17-5-2022
- Ngày chấp nhận: 02-12-2022
- Ngày đăng: 31-1-2023

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.32508/stdjelm.v6i4.1070>



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Trích dẫn bài báo này: Hân L N, Trí L D M. Tác động của mạng xã hội và chiến lược phản hồi bằng lời xin lỗi đối với một thương hiệu trong khủng hoảng truyền thông tại Việt Nam. *Sci. Tech. Dev. J. - Eco. Law Manag.*; 2022, 6(4):3841-3854.