

The Role of Public Relations in Crisis Management; A comparison between Turkey and Jordan during the Coronavirus

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Abstract:

This scientific study aims to reveal the effectiveness of electronic public relations in managing the corona crisis of the Jordanian and Turkish Ministry of Health, as the country has lived through a phase of fear in the period of the spread of the corona pandemic, which prompted the Jordanian and Turkish Ministry of Health to be keen on the health crisis through Twitter, in which we relied on the method of content analysis and content analysis tool, analyzing a sample of the publications of the ministry of health. One of the results reached is the reliance the activities adopted, namely preventive measure as well as awareness campaigns, while the main actor in the management of the epidemic is the Minister of health and the official spokesperson, as well as relying on the media strategy in its management.

Keywords: Public Relations; Crisis Management; Coronavirus;

1. INTRODUCTION:

Organizational crisis management is a fascinating field: crises are very diverse, rarely follow a fixed pattern, can erupt in a wide variety of areas, and can have very different consequences. Organizational crisis management is an area where public relations experts really make their money. When organizations face crises, one of the most valuable resources is a public relations expert who knows what should be said to whom, how and when, and how to avoid letting anything else get out, if at all possible.

Crises are problems, moments, situations, political, social, health, religious, security or critical economic events that often occur suddenly without warning and may have an unknown or man-made cause, and require a quick response from decision makers in institutions, companies or organizations. As well as public relations officials. Events may follow in crises, and the causes and results may intertwine, which may make decision-makers lose their ability to control them. One of the most important causes of crises is that they may be sudden, such as earthquakes and volcanoes, or man-made, such as conflicts, scandals, and diseases.

The danger of crises lies in the fact that they threaten the administrative, political, security, economic, military or health entity by inciting fear and terror in the hearts of

the masses and distorting the reputation and image of individuals, institutions and officials, and thus causing a complete stoppage of work. Advance plans for crisis management are among the most important effective sections in managing public relations in order to minimize their impact (Barton, 2001:12).

Institutions that have prior plans for crisis management view the media as a friend, while institutions that do not have prior planning view the media as an enemy. Public relations is the art and science of communicating with the internal public and the external public benefiting from the services or products of the organization at a time of prosperity or crisis in order to gain their trust and build a mental image and a good reputation for the organization. It is the first line of defense that protects institutions when they are exposed to crises.

2. The Nature of Crisis:

In ancient Greek, the term crisis denotes a critical point, a fork in the road of development, a moment of decision. In medical parlance, a crisis refers to the critical phase of a patient's struggle against a mortal threat: will he live or die? In contemporary parlance, crisis still combines the serious threat and the escape door: the situation may look dire, but it is not hopeless. A crisis may even open unforeseen "windows of opportunity" (Kingdon, 1984). This basic ambiguity is in marked contrast to the doom implied by the Greek word for catastrophe (literally, bad alignment of the stars).

A crisis is said to occur when a group, organization, or community experiences a "serious threat to the basic structures or fundamental values and norms of a system, requiring vital decisions under time pressure and highly uncertain circumstances" (Rosenthal, Charles, & 't Hart, 1989, p. 10).

This crisis definition allows us to compare a variety of calamities: Natural disasters and environmental threats, financial crises and terrorist attacks, epidemics and exploding factories, infrastructure collapse and organizational decline. All of these events have in common that they present impossible conditions to those who are supposed to lead an operation; they force responders, public administrators, and political leaders to make urgent decisions while essential information about causes and consequences is unavailable, unreliable, or incomplete. In what follows, we will look a bit more closely at the three main components-threat, uncertainty, and urgency-that make up this classic definition.

Crises occur when core values or life-support systems of a community are threatened. Think of widely shared values such as security, welfare and health, integrity, and the rule of law that are shaken or even rendered meaningless by (imminent) violence, destruction, damage, or other forms of adversity. When critical infrastructure fails, the normal functioning of modern society is threatened. Therefore, a natural disaster evokes a deep sense of crisis: deeply held values of safety and security for oneself and one's loved ones are threatened (Raphael, 1986, p. 26). In the crisis approach, the actors of the threat are less interesting than the resulting experience of the

threat.

This approach does not focus too much on categorizing events as "natural," "manmade," or "terrorist." It is about the perception of threat. A threat may cause widespread fear (even if objectively there is little cause for concern) that compels authorities to act. Threats that do not pose immediate problems - think climate change or future pension cuts - do not trigger a widespread sense of crisis. Experts may raise red flags, but most politicians (and most people) do not sleep over problems whose horizons exceed their political lifespans. Time compression is a crucial element of the crisis: the threat is there, it is real, and it must be addressed now.

2.1 What is Crisis Management ?

Crisis management is about handling crises in a way that minimizes damage and allows the affected organization to recover quickly. Dealing with a crisis in the right way can be particularly important for a company's public relations efforts. There are different forms of crises, and it is recommended that a company create a crisis management plan in advance (Parsons, 1996:32).

2.2 Types of Crises

There are several types of crises that require critical attention in terms of crisis management (Khodarahmi, 2009:45):

2.2.1 Accidental Disasters

Unintended disasters are those that occur unintentionally through human causation. Fires are an example of accidental disasters that can affect the workforce and leave major damage throughout the organization. Especially in fields such as mining and construction, where physical labor and the use of large machinery are required, drastic accidents that happen to employees while performing their jobs can have serious consequences.

2.2.2 Natural Disasters

Natural disasters are generally environmental crises that man cannot prevent. Earthquakes, hurricanes, and floods are examples of natural disasters.

2.2.3 Technology Disasters

Most ventures in an organization involve technology in one way or another. In some cases, a small disruption in the technological structure of an organization can cause the entire operation to grind to a halt. Some technological crises can occur by accident, while others can be caused maliciously. Under technology disasters, you can find examples such as:

- ✓ Malevolence Crisis - Criminal technology attack by adversaries; hostile employees with malicious intent to destabilize the organization.

- ✓ Cybercrime crisis - Intentional theft crime through technology.
- ✓ Critical virus attacks - accidentally or maliciously infected.

2.2.4 Conflict of Interest Crisis

A crisis involving a conflict of interest can be very difficult to manage because it involves political factors. There is no specific step-by-step guide, as such crises are usually different each time. However, this does not mean that there are no best practices and strategies that can be used. Some events that would fall under a conflict-of-interest crisis are:

- ✓ Rumors: false news about an organization and its products. An example is the spread of rumors that a particular organization's products are contaminated or defective. Bad news travels fast, and once such a rumor is started, intensive PR strategies may have to be employed to calm the fire. Such a rumor can completely destroy a company. In such cases, companies can spend considerable sums to keep their image clean.
- ✓ Product tampering: Adversaries can buy a competing company's products in large quantities, manipulate them, and then put them on the market. This type of strategy occurs between malicious business rivals. An example of product tampering occurred at Pepsi Corporation in 1993, when it was claimed that syringes were found in Pepsi cans. After a thorough investigation and the arrest of the guilty parties, Pepsi Corporation had to conduct an intensive campaign to restore public confidence in the company.
- ✓ Headhunting: poaching top managers or executives can occur between companies that are competing head-to-head. Business rivalry is the main reason for this type of crisis.

Other types of crises include workforce violence and worker confrontation crises such as boycotts, work stoppages, picketing, and sit-ins aimed at "forcing" the company to meet demands. These are just a few of the many unforeseen problems a company can face. In all cases, the goal is to resolve the problem at hand and put structured measures in place to prevent future occurrences.

3. Public relations and crisis management:

3.1- The role of public relations during a crisis:

The crisis usually passes in the following three stages (Regeester, 2008:41) :

3.1.1 The first phase: pre-crisis, (Prevention or Preparedness), although it is not possible to predict the time of the crisis, but the organizations' departments must develop plans for crisis management that include the worst scenarios necessary to manage the situations as a preventive measure. This step is in the following form: clear, simple, and continuously updated. It is published in a guide, which the executive management of the organization prepares as a preventive measure to deal with crises. The plan aims to reduce human and material losses and get out of the crisis with minimal losses. The plan

is divided into two parts:

- ✓ The administrative plan for crisis management: It includes procedures, policies, scenarios, and administrative instructions to deal with the crisis in all its stages.
- ✓ Plan Management Crisis: It includes instructions and scenarios for communicating with the internal and external public and the media before, during and after the crisis as a precautionary measure to protect the image and reputation of the institution and restore public confidence in its products and services. Institutions must have written media plans to manage potential crises in order to avoid confusion, chaos, anxiety, media misinformation and rumors. Such a plan will give credibility to the organization and protect its reputation.

3.1.2 The second phase:

Crisis Response: Among the most important steps to respond to the crisis are the following:

- ✓ Verify the Situation Crisis: By collecting correct and clear information and facts from its various sources about the causes of the crisis, the extent of its impact on society and those affected by it, and the measures that were taken to control it, and then classifying, analyzing and making a decision based on facts and not on personal opinions, and then informing the crisis management team and the means Notification of developments in the situation.
- ✓ Notification and Assignments: Determine the tasks and roles required of all team members, employees, and the management of the organization, and contact the internal public, informing them immediately after the occurrence of the crisis, that is, before they know about it from the media.
- ✓ Communication Management: Communications with employees and the media must be updated and their questions answered through a hotline, Internet sites, social networks, the company's website, press releases and press conferences.
- ✓ Develop Messages: After diagnosing the crisis and verifying the veracity of information, figures and facts from all sources, the crisis management team formulates warning, indicative and educational communication messages for the target audience (internal and external) of the crisis in the form of press releases, flyers, pictures, videos and advertisements. Journalists and interviews in order to give a full picture of the reality of the situation and how the crisis was successfully contained.
- ✓ Monitor and give feedback: The crisis management team must monitor media coverage and social networks to know the positive and negative points that the media focused on. This is done with the aim of correcting the errors that have been stuck in the minds of the public and answering their questions in order to preserve the reputation of the institution and its management.

3.1.3 Third phase: Post – Crisis

Phase of recovery from the crisis and return to normalcy, as well as the formation of a committee to assess the strength of the crisis management action plan and follow up on correcting the mistakes that have occurred.

4- Public Relations Strategies and Crisis Management (Corona Crisis)

The role that the public relations department can play in hospitals and health institutions is very important, because it works to control the Corona crisis. This role can be explained as follows (Coombs, 2007:6) :

4.1 Pre-crisis public relations management: this phase attempts to manage crises before they occur. This phase depends on planning, which is the most important point in crisis management. Planning generally helps to avoid crises.

4.2 Public relations management during a crisis: There are many tasks that public relations must take care of in hospitals during crises, the most important of which are those related to the hospital image.

4.3 Public Relations Department after the crisis: Public relations activities are characterized by continuity, as its activities continue even after the crisis ends. This is done by following up the situation and studying the case in the future.

5. The necessary capabilities to support the role of public relations in managing the crisis (Bruce, 2008:108) :

On December 31, 2019, the World Health Organization revealed the number of pneumonia cases in the city of Wuhan, eastern China. A few days later, scientists in China found out that it was a virus from the Corona family. The epidemic was initially limited mainly to China, but it quickly turned into a global epidemic.

Since the World Health Organization declared that the Corona virus is a global epidemic, and with the start of recording the first Corona case in Jordan (coming from Britain) on March 2, 2020, the Jordanian government has coordinated with all the authorities responsible for the crises. The Ministry of Health was among the most important government agencies that dealt with the epidemic, through several methods: such as, preparing hospitals to receive cases, sending epidemic investigation teams to all governorates of the Kingdom of Jordan, in addition to providing a daily press briefing on the number of infected cases and the number of cases recover from the virus.

The Corona crisis has been dealt with in 3 stages:

- ✓ Immediate response with the aim of protecting citizens.
- ✓ Epidemic adaptation stage.
- ✓ Recovery phase.

As for the official website of the Jordanian Ministry of Health on Twitter, the Ministry of Health dealt clearly with citizens, by publishing the real numbers of injuries and deaths and the number of recoveries. It was also recommended in more than one publication, and throughout the crisis period, to close facilities, mosques and restaurants, and to stay at home while adhering to social distancing. As mentioned in Twitter, the Ministry of Health conducted daily checks, as the number of checks reached 19,900 daily checks (August 2021), compared to 400 daily checks at the beginning of the crisis.

The Ministry of Health launched a website, which it announced via Twitter. As the site displays the number of daily cases, the number of deaths, and even the number of daily examinations, the site also includes instructions on how to prevent the Corona virus.

Summary, the Ministry of Health's management of the Corona crisis was crowned with success. Especially at the beginning of the crisis, according to the official website of the Jordanian Ministry of Health on Twitter. According to studies, Jordan ranked first in the success index published by the Oxford Tracker, which measures governments' public health responses to the Corona crisis around the world by preventing travel and closing borders between countries.

6. The Turkish Ministry of Health's practices for managing the Corona crisis

Turkey kept the threat of COVID -19 away from its borders until March 11. Since then, the number of cases has been on the rise. As of April 15, about a month after the first official COVID -19 case was announced, Turkey has 69,392 known cases, 1,518 deaths, and 5,674 recovered patients (Ministry of Health - COVID 19 database). The trend of the number of COVID -19 positive cases compared to some other countries is given. The number of COVID -19 positive cases has not yet reached the expected peak in Turkey and continues to increase with a smaller proportion. The Ministry of Health and its Scientific Council are constantly evaluating the situation and precautionary measures have been tightened based on their feedbacks (Varol and Tokuç, 2020:579).

After analyzing the official page of the Turkish Ministry of Health on Twitter, Turkey is considered one of the countries that have taken the most effective measures in combating the Corona virus and has taken its place on the international media agenda with its strategy to combat the virus. Being one of the first countries to take early measures to combat the virus, and due to the success of these measures when applied in practice, Turkey's model has come to the fore.

In this circumstance, Turkey sent medical aid, including masks and respirators, to many countries, including the United States of America, England, Spain, Italy, and the Balkan countries. Turkey's fight against Corona began long before the first case appeared on March 10, 2020. In this context, Turkey favored the strategy of "crisis pressure" at this stage, and took serious measures with which it achieved successful

results.

COVID -19 is a major problem throughout the world, and the magnitude of the problem is forcing government authorities to take strict precautions. These precautions result in students and educators being greatly affected by the pandemic COVID -19. Due to social distancing measures, schools are immediately closed in many countries, and countries are struggling to maintain educational services under these extreme conditions. Due to the severe spread of COVID -19 in Turkey, the Turkish Ministry of

Health, in coordination with the Ministry of Health and the Science Council, has decided to close schools from March 17, 2020 to the end of April 2020. Since the health and welfare of the society is a priority, it has been decided that all teaching will continue via distance learning. Distance education will be offered through the EBA portal and through national channels TV.

For the broadcast of TV, the MoNE has collaborated with TRT and is now broadcasting educational materials on the three national television channels. Therefore, during the pandemic period COVID -19, students can participate in distance learning through both the online portal and television.

LITERATURE REVIEW:

Research problem:

The research problem is represented in the lack of studies that explain the role that public relations play in managing health crises, and also in the lack of studies that focus on the difficult strategies in resolving crisis management. In addition, the research problem stems from the type of material, human and technical needs necessary to support public relations in managing crises such as the Corona virus crisis.

Research importance:

The importance of the research appears in that it coincides with the global and international interest by higher administrations, doctors, media professionals, or even all other groups interested in resolving the Corona crisis, whether in Jordan or in Turkey. And that is by following the methods that limited the spread of the virus, and all this by supporting the role of public relations in crisis management. The importance of the research can be summarized as follows:

- ✓ The importance of the research stems from the fact that there is a significant lack of studies that compare the strategies used in Jordan to solve the Corona crisis compared to the strategies used in Turkey.
- ✓ Providing assistance to all people, whether doctors or academics, interested in the field of public relations and crisis management, especially the Corona crisis.

Research objective:

The research aims to determine the role played by public relations in managing the Corona crisis. The main objective of the research can be achieved through the following objectives:

- ✓ Studying the strategies and programs that public relations can use in managing the Corona crisis.
- ✓ Emphasis on the roles in which hospitals can cooperate with public relations in managing the Corona crisis.

Search limits :

- ✓ Spatial limitation, Strategies related to managing public relations within hospitals will be studied, in addition to that, the strategies that Jordan followed in eliminating the crisis will be studied, compared to the strategies followed by Turkey.
- ✓ Temporal limitation, The research deals with the role played by public relations in managing the Corona virus crisis during the time period from 2019 to 2021, with the possibility of future plans after the specified period.

Research questions:

- ✓ What is corona virus?
- ✓ What is the concept of public relations and what are its functions?
- ✓ What role can the Public Affairs Department play in addressing the Corona crisis in Jordan and Turkey?
- ✓ What are the strategies used by public relations to manage the Corona crisis?
- ✓ What are the obstacles that public relations may face in managing the Corona crisis?

Research Methodology :

- ✓ Theoretical approach: This is done by reviewing the data and information that will be reached through previous studies related to crisis public relations management.
- ✓ Analytical approach: This was done by analyzing the official website of the Jordanian and Turkish Ministry of Health on Twitter. And then compare publications and extract the role of public relations in managing the Corona crisis in Jordan and Turkey.

Definitions:

Coronavirus: COVID -19 is a respiratory illness caused by the SARS-CoV-2 coronavirus discovered in 2019. The virus spreads primarily from person to person through respiratory droplets and small particles produced when an infected person coughs, sneezes, or talks. The virus spreads easily in crowded or poorly ventilated

indoor environments. The course of the disease can range from mild to severe, although not everyone infected develops symptoms. Adults 65 years and older and people of any age with underlying diseases are at higher risk for severe disease (<https://www.who.int/>).

Crisis: is an emotional state; an internal experience of confusion and anxiety to the extent that formerly successful coping mechanisms fail and ineffective choices and behaviors take their place. As a result, the person in crisis may feel confused, vulnerable, anxious, fearful, angry, guilty, hopeless, and helpless. Often perceptions are altered and memory may be distorted (Coombs, 2007:6).

Public Relations (PR): is the set of techniques and strategies used to control how information about a person or company is disseminated to the public, and especially to the media. The main objectives are to disseminate important company news or events, maintain brand image, and portray negative events in a positive light to minimize their impact. PR may take the form of a company press release, a press conference, an interview with journalists, a post on social media, or other venues (Jefkins, 1983:11) .

Crisis Management: is the application of strategies to help an organization deal with a sudden and significant negative event. A crisis can occur as a result of an unforeseen event or as an unforeseen consequence of an event that had been considered a potential risk. In either case, crises almost always require that decisions be made quickly to limit the damage to the organization (Regeister, 1989:109).

7. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION:

Traditional crisis management approaches are useful for containing the crisis and dealing with the immediate aftermath, but they do not help us understand what we continue to face: Crises that are expressions of systemic dysfunction in our governments and organizations. If we are to understand, prevent, and manage such crises, we need a different perspective: one that challenges our implicit assumptions of rationality and makes us aware of the psychodynamic dysfunction in organizations. This perspective will help us better understand the nature of organizational crises and enable us to intervene at a deeper level of organizational functioning, address the root causes of the crisis, and restore healthy functioning. Once we have succeeded in this restoration, we can successfully implement the existing practical advice of crisis managers. Until then, their good advice may be in vain.

The work of the Public Relations Department in crises is not limited to the therapeutic function only, but also includes the preventive function that may prevent the occurrence of pain. Public relations are closely related to crises through its main functions: (planning, evaluation, coordination, and implementation). It is worth noting that public relations do not end its function when the crisis ends, and this is what was observed in the model of the Turkish and Jordanian Ministry of Health. Even the Jordanian and Turkish Ministry of Health is still publishing to this day about the number

of cases of infections, how to treat, and urging people to take the Corona vaccine.

Public relations crises affect organizations of all sizes - negative reviews and events make no difference. While PR nightmares are hard to predict and even harder to prevent, an effective crisis communications plan can help companies and organizations minimize damage, restore trust and strengthen bonds with the public. Finally, the PR team should also help maintain consistency in spoken messages, such as executive interviews or press conferences and customer service calls. It can be very easy for a customer, partner or member of the press to misunderstand or misinterpret a spoken statement. Training press officers to stick to the message can help maintain the overall tone of the crisis response.

Many crisis management public relations teams hold training sessions before a crisis hits, and then provide key points to each spokesperson to review and reference as needed. With this type of preparation, your team can help ensure that the overall organization is “saying” exactly what it should be. Overall, Public Relations plays a critical role in crisis management by providing strategies, guidance, and support to organizations when it comes to handling sensitive and critical situations. It helps organizations to communicate effectively, protect and enhance their reputation, and minimize negative impacts on the business.

A good crisis management plan can provide reliable guidance for managing PR unexpected events and can be used to avoid losses, establish clear chains of command, and create quick and effective responses while communicating them. Therefore, it is important to have such a plan in place to prevent an unexpected problem with customers from becoming a chaotic situation. There have been numerous public relations crises in the past, and here are some of the roles a PR professional plays during a crisis.

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