

“Effective Crisis Communication Strategies in Egypt”

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Introduction

The first decade of the twenty first century witnessed numerous crises for companies and business organizations that required the application of sound public relations programs of action and communication in developed as well as in developing countries. This study offers the reader a starting point for examining the burgeoning research on crisis communication by defining the domain of crisis communication, explaining its applied value, and pointing to future directions for crisis communication. In the face of national and international crisis, the crisis communication literature ranges from the theoretical to the applied.

Public relations and Crises communication have developed to become top priority areas of study for several reasons. (1) The growth of large institutions and their sense of responsibility to the public (2) the increased changes, conflicts and confrontations among interest groups,(3) the increasing awareness of people as a result of sophisticated information technology,(4) the growing power of public opinion and spread of global democracy, (5) the growth of internet.¹ Added to that the increasing number and types of crises that the different institutions are facing nowadays. The intrusiveness, variety and power of modern media, increased the pressure on business

institutions during the process of crises management, because negative media coverage of crises is always a step ahead of the companies' communication initiatives to contain the crises. The crisis situation attracts wide and negative media coverage.²

A number of case studies in recent decades prove that corporate mishandling of public communications can further intensify the crises and cause long-term damage to the reputation of the institutions.³ Scholars have emphasized the value of analysis, prediction and issue management as shields of protection against crisis.⁴

Liese Huchison, a member of the ST. Louis University of Communication faculty, described the reality of crises communication strategies in the USA:

"Only 5 to 10 percent of organizations have some kind of crisis communications plan. Most have contingency plans on how to keep the company running if something happens, but not a plan for the communication aspects. They don't think that a crisis could happen to them or they think they do communications daily and it won't be done differently in a crisis."⁵

This logic of thinking denies the early signs of crises and underestimates the power of dissatisfied public of the organization, the government or any regime. This disregard of issue management and crisis prediction strategies as well as crisis man-

agement and crisis communication is an evident trend in Egyptian institutions, whether private, public, governmental or non-governmental, profit or non-profit.

With the same pattern of thought, the ex-Tunisian regime did not translate the early signs of growing anger and disappointment of the Tunisian people that revolted against corruption creating the Jasmine revolution. Mubarak regime in Egypt before January 2011 adopted a denial policy believing that what has happened in Tunisia could never be happening in Egypt. Accordingly, there was no anticipation of an upcoming crisis, no preparation strategies and panic decisions that led to the 25th of January revolution that ousted ex-president Mubarak and his regime within a few months of the Tunisian revolution.

The proper understanding of any crisis requires the examination of the socio-economic context, in which it occurs to recognize the roots and development of events and consequences. It is essential to provide an overview of the Egyptian socio-economic environment after the 25th of January revolution, which bears the cause of numerous crises situations for various institutions in Egypt.

According to Amin the soft state was the main reason for the revolution. It is the state, whose weakness encourages corruption and the spread of corruption further weakens that state, so corruption becomes a way of life.⁶ Mubarak regime was a fragile system that left Egypt with abundant problems, some of which date back to Nasser time. The oppression of opposition, forging of elections and police violations of citizens' rights in addition to corruption were the most obvious heritage of Mubarak era, but this was only the tip of the ice-berg.

Amin described the state of the economy as getting from bad to worse; increasing rate of unemployment, stagnant industrial growth, privatization policy leading to selling of public sector companies, laying off workers and early retirement.

The poor got poorer; the gap between the rich and poor widened causing the disappearance of the middle class in Egypt and the rise of inferior culture of the many slums in greater Cairo.⁷ During Mubarak era, business tycoons were created by the regime with increasing privileges and powers. The unfair distribution of wealth increased the tension between the different segments of the Egyptian society, the largest of which is private sector labor power that is estimated with 19 million workers.⁸ The Egyptian workers had been suffering for a long time from temporary contracts, minimal wages, no health care or insurance and employers' neglecting their rights and demands.

The 25th of January 2011 revolution was a turning point in the political, economic, business and social environment in Egypt, leading to numerous types of crises for public and private institutions, mostly in the form of strikes, sit-ins and demonstrations that could not be featured as peaceful, as there were injuries and even deaths in most of them, a fact that contributed to the complications of crises and increasing difficulty of management, even with suitable communication messages.

There were no formal statistics of companies in Egypt that encountered crisis situations requiring crisis management communications, nevertheless, local and international media dedicated their top news and headlines to the strikes of Egyptian labor, a typical intense crises dilemma for any institution. Halim Abou Seif,⁹ the public relations manager of a top public relations agency in Egypt, declared that his public relations' agency received 27 clients with crises situations in 2011, while the average number of clients was one client per year, while Rania Azab¹⁰, the founder of a well-known public relations agency said: "We have been living the crisis mood since the revolution, up until now." This research is concerned with the examination of two different crisis communication strategies implemented by Egyptian companies.

Research problem

Institutions face crises that can damage their image and reputation as well as their financial status and stability. Public re-

lations researchers argue that although effectively planned programs of communication do not stop the crises from occurring, they can reduce the negative consequences and aid the organization in the rapid restoration of image after a short while. The review of crisis communication literature and its modern theories and strategies reveal little attention to crisis communication applications in Egypt, an ancient civilization with a unique blend of cultures and a two-year old popular revolution that triggered numerous crisis situations

This study will review two strategies of post-crisis communication: namely situational crisis communication theory (SCCT) and discourse of renewal as widely used approaches of crisis management and restoration of reputation in crisis communication literature. The empirical focus of this study will investigate the application of the two strategies in Egypt for two different business organizations in crisis after the 25th of January revolution, 2011 to explore the possibilities of application and degree of success.

The importance of this study is embedded in the recurrent crisis situations in Egypt after the revolution, the growing need for effective crisis management strategies and approaches. In addition to a scientific value as the review of literature in this field revealed that while foreign studies focused on the analysis of crisis communication strategies in organizational units, Arabic studies were interested in the effects and consequences of utilized communication programs.¹¹

Research Objectives

The main objective of this study is to analyze the crisis communication strategies and messages in two different Egyptian companies during their crises. This study aims to evaluate, whether these companies followed scientific strategies in crisis communication or not and to assess the effectiveness of post-crisis communication strategies for business companies in Egyptian environment.

Review of literature

There was growing concern with crisis communication studies in the last decade

of the 20th century in contrast to crisis management studies before that period. Crisis management research studied the political, economic and managerial aspects of the crisis with minimal emphasis on communication. The last two decades witnessed tremendous concern with the study of crisis communication as a vital function of public relations. The survey of literature indicated that some studies set theoretical basis for issue management and crisis communication while other studies offered cases and empirical applications in crisis communication in specific economic units. The researcher reviewed the previous studies related to this research in the light of three main domains; crisis communication, theories of crisis communication and public relations practices in crisis.

Crisis and Crisis Communication

Harvard Business review defines crisis as "a situation that has reached a critical phase for which dramatic and extraordinary intervention is necessary to avoid or repair major damage¹². Scholars agreed that an organization crisis is 'an unexpected, and no routine event or a series of events that cause a threat to the organization along with a short term response that may change as clarity emerges'. Crisis can also be defined as a 'definitive, yet unexpected abnormal events associated with mistakes, oversight, or system deficiency that create higher levels of anxiousness and confusion and threaten a company's long term goals¹³. Other scholars have perceived corporate crisis as normal events and a natural stage in the development of any organization, which occurs to replace outdated elements and allow for new development and maturation.¹⁵ Seven instant warning signs appear in a crisis: surprise, insufficient information, escalating events, loss of control, increased outside scrutiny, siege mentality, and panic.¹⁶

From a management perspective, Lee identifies three core elements that unite the study of crises: (1) significant threats; (2) unpredictability or suddenness; and (3) urgency or immediacy to categorize an organizational crisis.

Moving from conditions of crises to categories of crises, Seeger reviewed the

work of several scholars who categorized crises of organizations into nine types; public perception, sudden market shifts, product failure, top management succession, cash crisis, strikes and job actions, hostile takeovers, adverse international events, and regulation and deregulation.¹⁷

Crisis communication is an interdisciplinary science that involves organizational communication with mass communications and public relations in addition to management, for the decision making processes, objectives and results precede the communication actions and strategies and affect the course, process, consequences of crisis communication.

According to Seeger et al, communication is generally recognized as a key emergency management and response activity serving a variety of important functions before, during and after a crisis. These include: (1) clarifying risk and encouraging preparedness; (2) announcing evacuations and issuing warning; (3) providing information to the general public; (4) enhancing coordination, cooperation and logistics among response agencies; (5) facilitating mitigation on the part of the public and affected communities; (6) helping make sense of the disaster; (7) reassuring, comforting and consoling those affected; (8) recreating order and meaning; (9) providing general information to the larger public; and (10) facilitating renewal, learning, and disseminating lessons.¹⁸ In many cases, communication activities and processes were very important factors in the resolution of crises situations and in other cases, insufficient, ineffective or deficient communication made a crisis much worse and caused short and long-term damages to organizations.

The review of crisis communication literature asserts the absolute necessity of communication to organizational crisis; the vitality of an external audience-centered focus; and an interest in both application and theory. In the crisis management literature, many studies analyzed existing crisis situations and communication efforts during a crisis. Other research studies have recreated crises situations to test factors related to crisis management and crisis communication. Both types of studies were seeking ideal effective communica-

tion strategies in crisis. Research can be classified into models and strategies, publics¹⁹ and media.

Numerous scholars emphasized the importance of truthful internal communication during crisis. Lack of accurate information could make organization members to be open to rumors, thus disbelieving in their institution and consequently contribute to the escalation of crisis and lack of credibility in the institution.²⁰

German scholars have analyzed the German media coverage of international conflicts, revealing that most researches have studied crises in the climactic stages of conflict and ignored the pre- and post-escalation phases, while proactive crisis communication can assist in the resolution of international conflicts.²¹

While many researchers and academics focused on crises management, crisis and risk communications in the American and European countries, the attention to this field of study is very limited in the Arab world. Few Arab studies focused on the role of communication in crisis management on the national and international levels in the sectors of health, tourism, finance, industry and security.²² It is notable that most of these studies, if not all of them, were conducted on ministries, public-sector institutions or on the state level. The former Egyptian governments and institutions with their limited or non-existent public relations programs can not produce a model of two-way communication in crises that may be applicable to private economic units.²³

Geneid's review study of the crisis management and crisis communication research concluded that while foreign studies focused on the analysis of crisis communication strategies in organizational units, Arabic studies were interested in the effects and consequences of utilized communication programs and their effectiveness in crisis management.²⁴

The crisis communication and crisis management review of Egyptian research suggests four recent studies that examined the role of public relations and communication strategies in crisis, depending on case studies of national crises like the Luxor terrorist attack and the epidemic bird flu, or

crises in public sectors, like the tourism sector and public hospitals or national media institutions like Al Ahram.²⁵ The Arabic literature lacks research studies of crisis communication in private business organizations, which constitute a totally different environment worth studying. In comparison to

governmental or public sector institutions in Egypt, private or business profit-institutions are more vulnerable to reputation distortion and negative attitudes of general publics, have no or very limited media accessibility, than the governmental or public sector institutions in addition to limited financial resources. Nevertheless, the private business institutions in Egypt, whether local or international, value the professional standards of public relations practices and many of them adopt short-term and long-term public relations programs that facilitate the crisis communication and image restoration in the case of crisis.

This study will examine the application of crisis communication theories and approaches in two different private business institutions in Egypt to assess the real applications of image restoration approaches and their effectiveness in crisis management within the realm of current Egyptian post-revolution status. The survey of modern crisis communication theories and approaches in communication literature must precede their test of application in Egypt.

Crisis communication Theories and Studies

The western communication literature is rich in theories, models and approaches related to crisis communication. A common feature of all scientific disciplines in this field is that they are applicable and adaptable to the real practice of public relations and crisis communication in all types of organizations, during various crises and within the contexts of different cultures. This study will briefly discuss the excellence theory of public relations, the contingency approach, image-restoration theory and the two theories subject to testing in the empirical part of this study; the Situation Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) and the discourse of renewal.

Seeger identifies three methodological categories in communication and crisis research: (1) a frequency-based approach using survey and content analysis; (2) descriptive/exploratory approaches using case studies; and (3) critical approaches using a rhetorical lens. All three approaches are applicable to both internal and external audiences and appear frequently in the literature.²⁶

Excellence theory of Grunig et al depends on the two-way symmetric communication model that aims at achieving mutual understanding and acceptance between an organization and its various publics. This theory acknowledges the audience as an interpretive community responding to crisis in ways shaped by culture.²⁷ The value of this theory lies in its adaptability feature to different types of organizations in diverse cultural environments. As a development of Hunt and Grunig's original four models of public relations, the excellence theory provides a wide range of public relations practices that are functional to both profit and non-profit organizations.²⁸

The role played by cultural diversities in an audience orientation approach to crisis communication was the focus of Betty Lee in her contributions to the crisis management literature. She argues that individuals are motivated to engage in symbolic communication to make sense of the world, viewing the public as a communication phenomenon.²⁹

The contingency approach to public relations strategy rates the proactive measures of any organization, including the assertive and collaborative approaches, as higher in value in crisis prevention than the reactive and responsive public relations activities that deal with existing problems.

This approach suggests that the public interest dimension of crisis management does not necessarily conflict with self-interest of the organization during crisis communication process.³⁰

Image restoration has generated a rich body of case-based research and provided a very detailed picture of the image restoration strategies for organizations facing a post crisis context.³¹ Benoit's work remains the most comprehensive theoretical framework for understanding post crisis

communication. Benoit's five image-restoration strategies include denial, evading responsibility, reducing offensiveness of the event, corrective action, and mortification. Within these five categories are some 14 distinct rhetorical strategies. Hearit suggests to employ five major strategies to repair the reputation of companies; denial, counterattack, differentiation, apology and legal.³² The value of the image-restoration strategies lies in their practical rhetorical aspects that guide the institutions during the crisis to quickly overcome the consequences and possible damages to image and reputation, the most valuable asset of any organization.

Recent research studies indicated that strategically managing blog-mediated public relations may be critical for crisis managers and assisting in maximizing opportunities of image restoration. Scholars suggested models for public relations professionals to navigate blogosphere and respond to influential bloggers as part of the image restoration strategies using social media and internet.³³

Coombs' strategies of image restoration tackle threats to image but are more closely associated with post crisis public relations. His response typology offers the link and line of continuation between the communication strategies of both the defensive and accommodative responses to crises. He suggested seven major strategies to help repair a company's reputation; attack accuser, denial, excuse, justification, ingratiation, corrective action and full apology.³⁴ The application of this strategy in a recent study indicated that equivocal responses were considered suitable only in avoidance-avoidance goal conflicts and relate to a positive corporate reputation in specific situations, where messages satisfy the multiple goals of the crisis situation.³⁵

The work of Coombs that spans more than a decade, moves crisis communication from a case-study approach to the development and application of situational crisis communication theory (SCCT), an approach that acknowledges the distinct features of situations, including audiences and explains how communication protects an organization's reputation during a crisis. The value of his studies to the communication discipline lies in the way they provide

a communication theory that anticipates how stakeholders will respond in terms of the reputation threat imposed by the crisis.

Coombs had enriched this field with numerous empirical studies, through which he emphasized the value of the procedures of developing crises management plans as a way for organizations to optimally prepare for and handle their consequences. After examining the importance of the initial responses to a crisis designed to repair the organization's reputation by influencing stakeholder perceptions, he further studied the perceptions of stakeholders to the strategies of the Situational Crisis Communication Theory.³⁶ He and other scholars discussed the conflicting choices between the public relations view of full disclosure and the legal view for limited disclosure of crisis related information

and some advocate the benefits of cautious full disclosure.³⁷ He was one of the few scholars who studied crisis communication from an international scope, where companies use crisis communication strategies with stakeholders from multiple, diverse cultures following the two-way symmetric model.

Most research on crisis communication depends on case studies with little focus on how stakeholders respond to crisis. Coombs works provide an evidence-based framework to guide organizations towards the way to better protection of their reputations during crisis. Coombs argues that 'after an organization's initial obligation of containing harm is dealt with, crisis managers can turn their attention to factors identified by Situational Crisis Communication Theory.'³⁸

Coombs classified organization crises into three clusters based on attribution of crisis responsibility with regard to the reputation threat: (1) victim cluster, which defines the organization as a victim in the crisis and it would require weak attributions of crisis responsibility and mild reputation threat;

(2) accidental cluster that recognizes the organization's actions as unintentional; whereby there will be minimal attributions of crisis responsibility accompanied with moderate reputation threat; (3) preventable cluster, according to which, the organization knowingly placed people at risk. This

cluster is the causes severe reputation threat and demands strong attribution of crisis responsibility.³⁹ These three clusters help to determine the crisis response strategy. The theoretical link between crisis situations and crisis response strategies is grounded in the issue of responsibility.

Discourse of renewal (DR) extends the focus of crisis communication to include the communities and stakeholder relationships with regard to the organizational communication activities, primarily in the post-crisis phase. DR utilizes the stakeholder theory that emphasizes the mutually beneficial relationships between institutions and their publics.⁴⁰ Discourse of renewal associates humanistic ethics and values of social responsibility, social justice, care and support with crisis communications messages. DR is a framework of communication that is closely related to the field of restorative literature in crisis communication. The golden rule for this field is that the crisis is an opportunity to create and maintain good relationships with the publics of the organization and that the communication strategies should not concentrate on reducing the offensiveness of the situation, rather maintain a positive image and facilitate two-way communication between the public and crisis leaders with the objective of helping victims and the general public to make sense of the crisis event within a general social context.⁴¹

Seeger identifies two key components that underlie restorative rhetoric: (1) while there are often identifiable victims of these events, there is a wider public/audience that is also traumatized and therefore, must be included in the response dialogue and; (2) crisis sense-making is a dynamic, transactive process, neither linear, nor unidirectional as traditional image restoration theory frameworks might suggest.⁴² The DR is easily enacted in organizations that have democratic leadership that is frequently measuring attitudes, identifying the issues of concern and needs of its internal and external publics and enjoying a healthy relationship with its publics through continuous public relations' efforts and corporate social responsibility programs.

Scholars identify the main purposes of

restorative rhetoric to be 'restoring faith in a system by reconnecting with a core set of values and beliefs, to facilitate healing of those directly affected by the crisis and wider audiences who serve as witnesses to the destruction, to create a sense of security during the resolution of the crisis, and to establish a vision for the future.'⁴³

Restorative language follows similar stages of crisis management. These include: (1) initial reaction, (2) assessment of the crisis, (3) issues of blame, (4) healing and forgiveness, and (5) corrective action and rebuilding.⁴⁴ DR acknowledges the silver lining effect of a disaster, which is the light of hope or opportunity embedded inside any crisis and obscured by panic, despair and feeling of loss and destruction. The discovery of this silver lining will enable the organization to utilize the opportunity in its crisis situation and quickly launch the renewal process through persuasive messages to be brought forward to public communication. According to Tolkein, organizations may not live a crisis situation to apply the discourse of renewal; they can rather witness other organizations in their industry experience a crisis and capitalize on the opportunity to learn from their failure.⁴⁵

A post crisis discourse of renewal is characterized by four dominant features: prospective focus; the opportunities inherent in the crisis; provisional rather than strategic responses; and ethical communication grounded in core values.⁴⁶ The main difference between image restorative theory and discourse of renewal is that the first describes or interprets past events or actions, while the latter addresses future goals and development of ways to reconstruct better organizational forms.⁴⁷

Crisis communication literature paid equal attention to the practices and public relations tools and techniques before, during and after a crisis as it did to the theories and models of crisis communication.

Practices in Crisis Communication

The added value of public relations theories and approaches is gained in the empirical test of those theories, when their efficiency is experimented in real life situations. The synthesis of public relations reported practices, observations,

discourse analysis and experts testimonials, created a list for best practices in crisis communication. Seeger, Sellnow and Ulmer pointed to four specific strategies used by public relations practitioners in the implementation of crisis communication: (1) identification and development of a crisis-management team; (2) appointment of an appropriate crisis spokesperson; (3) identification of areas of high risk; and (4) the structuring, implementation, and maintenance of an overall crisis communication plan, including contact lists and checklists.⁴⁸ The detailed steps of an effective crisis communication plan are suggested to be:

1. Process approaches and policy development
2. Pre-event planning
3. Partnerships with the public.
4. Listen to the public's concern and understand the audience.
5. Honesty, candor, and openness
6. Collaborate and coordinate with credible sources
7. Meet the needs of the media and remain accessible
8. Communicate with compassion, concern, and empathy
9. Accept uncertainty and ambiguity
10. Messages of self-efficacy

According to the scholars, who proposed these steps to be the best practices in crisis communication, these ten steps are to be used as temporal responses appropriate to a particular set of circumstances in a given historical moment, guided by theory.⁴⁹

The review of literature of crisis management indicated that scholars differed in their conception of crisis as some defined crisis as an unexpected series of events that cause a threat to the organization, other scholars have perceived corporate crisis as a normal event and a natural stage in the development of any organization, which occurs to replace outdated elements and allow for new development and maturation.

The review confirms that crisis communication is an essential, vital component of crisis management and involves various strategies of communication in pre-crisis, during-crisis and post-crisis phases.

Many variables intervene in the course of crisis and contribute to its complication

like the lack of information and preparation, negative media coverage during the peak of the crisis and panic.

The review of Arabic studies suggests that Arabic literature in crisis communication lacked the study of crisis communication strategies and messages as compared to western studies in the same domain.

There are many theories of public relations that best diagnose and describe the crisis communication and its strategies like the excellence theory, contingency approach, and image restoration post-crisis theories. Discourse of renewal asserts the belief that the crisis is a golden opportunity for the institution to communicate effectively and efficiently with its different publics to boost the image and reputation of the institution.

The best practices in crisis communication rely on the identification and development of a crisis-management team, the appointment of an appropriate crisis spokesperson, identification of areas of high risk, and the structuring, implementation, and maintenance of an overall crisis communication plan.

Research Questions

This study of post-crisis communication strategies in Egypt seeks to answer the following research questions:

RQ1. What is the model of crisis communication strategy applied by the top public relations professionals in crisis situations in Egypt?

RQ2. What are the variables affecting the application of scientific crisis communication strategies in Egypt?

RQ3. To which extent did Tora Cement Company apply SCCT in its crisis?

RQ4. How did Nestle Water Company integrate DR in its crisis communication efforts?

Research Methodology

This research is a descriptive study that has the purpose of documenting facts and current realities to provide a better understanding or explanation of a phenomenon. It is a qualitative study that seeks to identify and evaluate the messages of crisis communication in Egypt.

Qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to

make sense of, or to interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them. Qualitative research is intended to penetrate to the deeper significance that the subject of the research ascribes to the topic being researched. It involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to its subject matter and gives priority to what the data contribute to important research questions or existing information.⁵⁰

This research aims to relate two crisis communication theories, SCCT and DR, to the strategies implemented by two Egyptian companies in crisis: the first company is Tora Cement Company, which suffered from strikes and sit-ins of its workers leading to bloody confrontations with security forces and a complex crisis situation for the management in July 2012. The second company is Nestle Waters Factory in Bahha, which suffered from devastating fire in February 2013.

The tools of the study will be in-depth interviews with three top public relations professionals and crisis communication experts* in Egypt as to provide the researcher with first-hand information concerning the procedures and practices of crisis communication in the Egyptian environment.

The study of the crises communication

of the two companies will depend on discourse analysis of the companies' messages in reportorial and access media during their crises. The researcher detected three releases by Tora Company in July 2012 and three releases, one print advertisement in addition to two mobile messages by Nestle Water Company in February and March 2013. The communication messages of Tora Company will be analyzed in contrast to the situation crisis communication theory SCCT while the messages of Nestle Water company will be analyzed according to the discourse of renewal DR approach to reach generalizations concerning the effectiveness of the crisis communication activities and messages.

Results

RQ1 asked about the most common scientific model of crisis communication used by the most renowned public relations professionals in top agencies in Egypt. The researcher conducted two in-depth interviews to explore the reality of crisis communication in Egypt. Results indicated that the crisis communication manual, also referred to as the ABC manual of crisis communication, was the base of all crisis communication strategies regardless of the

Table 1: Crisis Communication Manual
Courtesy of Rada Research Agency

Pre- crisis plan	During crisis plan	Post-crisis plan
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Analyze organizational internal and external environment, ● Consider the issues of concern to the internal and external publics, ● Forecast possible crises, making crisis management plans a regular item ● Respond immediately and actively to a certain threat or accusation ● form your crisis team, including a team leader, spokesperson, gate-keeper ● Use skilled executives as Advisors/ experts in communication, legal, Personnel, production, security, technical, safety, and media. ● Identify your stakeholders ● Use two way communication to allocate any gap between the organization performance & stakeholders expectations ● Use issue analysis in your communication ● Train your spokespersons ● Prepare a set of holding statements, ● Prepare relevant core messages 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> I. Assessment of the situation=Situation analysis II. Decide on the communication strategy and plan: high or low profile communication, Accept/deny responsibility III. Update/ prepare your Holding Statements: The holding statement is a ready-to-use statement, previously prepared that primarily communicates to the target audience, and aims to buy time for creating a communication strategy, compatible with the crisis. Consult legal department on final version VI. Decide on the messages: work on your messages. Make your messages short and concise. V. Brief relevant people: Thoroughly brief everyone involved and keep briefing them. Ensure that all information comes into – and goes out from - a single source throughout. IV. Start Communication immediately, since the first 24 hours are the Most Critical in crisis communication. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Strong media relations to change public opinion, manage reputation to resolve issues. ● Community relations, including corporate social responsibility programs, ● Reaching for the support of community leaders and aiming for third party endorsement.

* Halim Abou Seif, Public relations manger of Radaresearch agency, Egypt
Rania Azab, Founder and managing director of 4PR public relations agency, Egypt
Rania Sabry, Managing partner of Trilogy Consultancy and Development, Egypt

difference in the type of crisis.

Abou Seif indicated that the effective crisis communication starts from the preparation stage when the organization is not suffering or expecting a crisis and is living in a hospitable environment. This would allow for prior planning, training of spokespersons, compiling holding statements, spreading the culture of crisis management and crisis communication among managers and internal publics. Unfortunately, this is not how public relations are practiced in Egypt. According to Rania Sabry⁵¹ most of the national Egyptian companies, if not all of them do not seek professional public relations expertise, unless they are in a major crisis situation. Sabry added that multinational organizations operating in Egypt adopt issue management and suitable crisis communication plans prepared centrally by the headquarters.

Azab agreed that this model of crisis communication is an essential basis for guiding the communication during crises, but she does not consider this model applicable to all types of crisis situations in Egypt, which lead to providing answers to the second research question. RQ2 asked about the variables that interfere with the sound application of scientific crisis communication strategies in Egypt. The results of the in-depth interviews suggested the following variables:

The turbulent, chaotic nature of the political, economic and social environment in Egypt after the revolution, thus creating a non-ending 'crisis mood' with serious developments and repercussions.

The ever-changing nature of crisis situations: from peaceful protests, to strikes of labors, to violent clashes and lately to kidnapping of top management of organizations.

The shift of the public relations crisis management objectives, from restoring image and reputation of companies, to merely ensuring the right environment for company operations to continue.

The limited role given by management of organizations to public relations consultants, who merely counsel the management concerning the political situation, prepare scenarios, and offer communication solutions and strategies that may be ig-

nored by the management.

These variables provided by the interviewed experts relate to the view of Public Relations professionals, intellectuals and media specialists, who refer this unprecedented increase in crises for business, governmental and non-governmental institutions after the revolution to three main reasons: First, the newly discovered power of the average simple Egyptians to form a strong public opinion and cross the fear barrier to overthrow the head of authority at the time of the revolution. For more than two years, the strikes, demonstrations and sit-ins have been increasing in number and intensity in all the governmental, public and private institutions. Second, the increasing freedom of the media to unveil and discuss the unfair economic practices and corruption cases in institutions as well as violent clashes between groups in the society and police authorities, which fuel the conflicts and confrontations. The third reason is related to the failure of the elected authority to ensure the basic life necessities for different groups of the Egyptian society, namely; bread, liberty and social justice.⁵²

Added to that is the lack of security, deteriorating economic situation, downsizing and social injustice.

Many organizations in Egypt, national, international and multinational had to face crucial crises since 2011 for the first time in their history of existence. The scenarios and results of crises management differed from one company to the other. To handle such crises events, professionals and academics have advocated a variety of different corporate communication strategies. Dina Hashem, managing director of Universal Media stated that the Egyptians felt more empowered and in control of their future, which created both positive and negative implications.⁵³

Abou Seif classified the crises in Egypt after the revolution to be for one of two main causes; either because the owner of the company is arrested or imprisoned or the workers are on strike.

In the former crisis, an integrity statement needs to be issued with a limited communication strategy. The latter crisis requires the application of situation crisis communication programs, with planning,

comprehensive communication strategies and media exposure.

This research focuses on studying the crises communication programs and messages in two companies in Egypt to reveal the role of communication in crises management on the theoretical and empirical levels in a disturbed, insecure business environment and a dissatisfied public with the performance of all types of institutions in Egypt.

Case 1: SCCT for Torah Cement Company

RQ3 questioned the extent to which Tora Cement Company applied SCCT in its crisis that was widely covered by the media in July 2012. Torah Cement Company had belonged to the public sector until 2005 as 80% of it was privatized. Over 1200 workers are employed in this company, most of them with temporary contracts and have been working in this company for as long as 17 years through contractors. In July widespread struggles erupted by temporary workers to win full-time and permanent status. In early July, the temporary workers occupied the factory to demand permanent contracts and medical insurance and held some engineers and human resources manager as hostages. As the sit-in continued from 11 to 25 July, the holding company decided to close the factory, thus cutting off 30% of the cement supply to the Egyptian market. The Torah Cement labor strike developed into a violent confrontation between the striking labors and the management guards, who attempted to force-open the factory in mid July, fired at the labors and injured one of them. After continuous negotiations with the workers, the crisis was resolved.

The public relations consultants issued a number of statements and releases, the most important of which, was the statement to the Ministry of Labor and Immigration, announcing the adjustment of the workers' conditions and the reopening of the factory 'as a sign of care for the well-being of the company employees, protecting their rights and preventing the negative impact on the cement market economy.' This statement was released to the daily newspapers by the public re-

lations office of Refaat Hassan, Minister of Labor Force and Immigration.⁵⁴

Coombs suggested seven major rhetorical strategies to help repair a company's reputation in the post-crisis communication phase; attack accuser, denial, excuse, justification, ingratiation, corrective action and full apology. The SCCT procedures of crisis communication could not be fully applied in this case, as the public relations consultants did not have the privilege of pre-crisis planning steps that ensure effective crisis communication, nevertheless, the during crisis image restoration procedures were partially applied in this case.

The discourse analysis of the three Tora cement company press releases indicated that the company utilized the strategy of attack accuser by stating: 'the workers were not peaceful and they attempted to break into the factory to destroy its facilities'. The release also described the workers behavior as 'irresponsible actions'.

Denial strategy was used in a specific press release dated 19th of July. It stated: 'the company denies using armed thugs against the striking workers'. This was a typical response release after the strong negative media coverage of armed thugs, shooting and wounding one of the striking workers, who according to media news stories, had been treated inside the factory premises.

The excuse communication rhetoric was not used by the company, but justification appeared in the third release as the company referred the reasons for closing the factory and not fulfilling its obligations towards the local agents to its desire to 'guarantee a safe working environment to resume operations.'

Ingratiation was utilized by Tora Company in its third release dated August 1st, which showed that the company suffered enormously from the strike and that it was a victim, just like the workers. The company stated: 'the company lost 22million pounds, because of the workers' strike.' The release involved the workers in the ingratiation as it indicated: 'the workers' annual profits for their shares in the company will also be negatively affected by the closing period due to the strike'.

The company corrective actions were reported in an official release by the min-

istry of labor force and immigration, which added credibility to the company image restoration messages. The corrective actions were mainly 15% increase in wages, monthly meal, and full medical care for 1500 workers.

Nevertheless, the company never used the apology rhetoric in any of its messages or releases. It rather stressed that it values producing high quality products for the market, improving income and living conditions of the company workers and the contractors' labor, despite the severe economic challenges and its working according to the rules and regulations of the Egyptian law.

Abou Seif commented on the Tora Company strategy that it depended on continuous assessment of the situation followed by communication of precise messages to the internal public, since they constituted the priority public in this case. Low-profile communication with the media was functional in this case to encounter the wave of negative publicity in print and electronic media.

Azab added that in most cases of labor strikes and sit-ins requesting higher wages, the public relations professional might resort to leaking the wage ranges of the workers of the client company to the media people as to gain third-party endorsement. In a poor society, suffering from a percentage of 40% unemployment and extremely low income, the public opinion will not sympathize with workers, who earn over L.E. 8000 per month and strike against their company to request higher wages.

The researcher detected five news stories and one feature in the daily newspapers, covering the issue of Tora strikes from the perspective of workers and their rights to have permanent jobs, medical insurance and a secure and safe environment for work that does not endanger their health. The news stories covered basically the injustice of organizations towards the labor force and the managers were not interviewed nor quoted in these stories.

The conclusion reveals the use of five crisis communication strategies out of seven ones suggested by Coombs in his SCCT of image restoration after crisis by Tora Cement Company and its communication

consultants. The company messages included accusing the attacker, denial, justification, ingratiation and corrective action. The communication messages of the company did not include excuse or apology.

Case II: DR for Nestle Water Company

Discourse of renewal is considered an advanced concept of image restoration strategies of crisis communication. Seeger identified the characteristics of Discourse of Renewal and restorative rhetoric as follows:⁵⁵

"Similar to discourse of renewal, restorative rhetoric shifts post-crisis communication from reducing the offensiveness of the occurrence and maintaining a positive image to facilitating dialogue between the public and crisis leaders, and helping victims and the general public to make sense of the crisis event. Restorative rhetoric involves a more generative and spontaneous dialogue that is shaped not just in response to the crisis itself, but by contextual and social dimensions that layer the crisis event and influence response to it."

DR concentrates on the role of crisis communication in post crisis stage, as it highlights the value embedded in any crisis situation that should be seized by the company to establish and maintain two-way relationships with its stakeholders and publics. Restorative language follows similar stages of crisis management. These include: (1) initial reaction, (2) assessment of the crisis, (3) issues of blame, (4) healing and forgiveness, and (5) corrective action and rebuilding.

RQ4 questioned how Nestle Water Company integrated DR in its crisis communication strategies. Nestle Water Egypt S A E is a private company categorized under Soda Water Manufacturers and located in Cairo, Egypt.⁵⁶ The company suffered from fire in one of its factories in Banha on the 22nd of February 2013.

Very-well structured, consistent apology messages were delivered to the stakeholders using various media and communication forms. First, Nestle Water Company, through its media department, reserved half a page in all the top daily newspapers like Al Ahram and El Masry

El Youm for a public relations' advertisement in different days immediately following the date of fire. The public relations advertisement is a controlled technique of communication that allows the company to disseminate its desired messages to the stakeholders. Second, the Nestle crisis team, the trained call center staff and customer service Nestle members, launched a personal phone-call campaign with all the customers to confirm the apology and renew the promise of resuming delivery as soon as possible. This was an intelligent, simultaneous method of opening channels for two-way communication with the stakeholders. The third tool utilized in this crisis communication strategy was the press releases. On the very same day of the fire, Nestle Water contributed professional press releases in Arabic and in English to communicate with the media, one of the most valuable stakeholders of the company as well as the Egyptian community at large. The company also used their access media of the Nestle Egypt website to update all concerned parties with the latest news of the situation and renew the stakeholders trust in the company.

Depending on the discourse analysis of three releases, one print advertisement in addition to two mobile messages by Nestle Water Company in February and March 2013, the researcher detected perfect application of DR crisis communication. The initial reaction of the company was the immediate communication with its customers and the media through personal phone calls to all listed customers on the company database on the same day of the crisis as well as press releases in Arabic and English to the media. Half-page blue background print advertisements appeared in the following two weeks in all major newspapers.

All communication messages started instantly with the word 'apology'. The messages were emphasizing human values directed to the customers of Nestle Water. All messages were emotional, conversational and engaging.

In the company assessment of the crisis it put the safety of the workers on top of its priorities. The messages stated 'We would like to assure everybody that the

workers and employees are safe and unharmed'. This statement preceded the facts about the large damage to the factory facilities. This order of information reflected the higher value of human lives over equipment for the company.

The issue of blame was tackled by the company in all its spoken and printed messages, as it held itself responsible for not fulfilling the needs of its customers concerning delivery of water. It stated: 'We understand the needs of our customers and apologize for stopping the delivery service for a while.' Healing and rebuilding rhetoric was detected in the company phrases: 'We have started to undo the damage to our facilities' and 'we are working round the clock to provide our customers with our high quality water as soon as possible.'

The analysis of the communication rhetoric and crisis communication strategy indicated the following:

1. Nestle Water Company's prompt response to the unexpected crisis in such professional manner imply that the company was involved in numerous crisis communication pre-crisis plans and previously-set scenarios of crisis management.

2. All the smart communication activities of crisis communication point to long training of staff members prior to the crisis time, to get them to act in such coherent manner in no time.

3. The crisis communication strategy of Nestle Water specifically applied the discourse of renewal in its messages; namely its focus on human aspects and the value of stakeholders to the company. The rhetoric of the messages exceeded the normal apology that usually serves the acceleration of the process of restoration of image and reputation.

4. The messages that typically addressed the needs of the customers and the personal attention and two-way communication provided through the personal calls, guaranteed the customers' involvement, attachment, sympathy and most importantly renewal in their trust in the company.

5. The company's crisis communication strategy seized the opportunity inherent in the crisis to communicate directly and effectively with its stakeholders, confirming the ethical values of the company and the

community, and showing the human face of the company, thus realizing the discourse of renewal of post-crisis communication strategies.

Conclusion

Crises of different kinds are increasingly common. Although issue management and continuous communication between the organization and its publics may prevent a controversial issue from turning into a crisis, public relations alone can not prevent the occurring of crisis. The literature of crisis communication addresses the nature of communication in the pre-crisis, during crisis and post crisis stages. Crisis communication has been approached from several perspectives including Situation Crisis Communication Theory SCCT, image restoration theory and apologetic discourse, from the framework of covenant renewal discourse. Much of the current communication-based research on post crisis communication emphasizes the role of strategic responses in repairing an organization's damaged image following a crisis.

Interviews with top public relations experts in Egypt confirm that the pre-planning of crisis is extremely essential to successful crisis communication. Research results suggest that crisis communication conducted by professional public relations specialists with good media relations is a key component in achieving the desired objectives of communication before, during and after the crisis.

This research focused on two crisis communication strategies, the SCCT and DR. The tracing of the application of the two strategies in Egyptian environment was achieved through in-depth interviews with professional public relations experts in Egypt in addition to the discourse analysis of crisis communication messages of two companies in Egypt suffering from different crises. Torah Cement Company was used as an example of a company experiencing labor strikes and protests, a redundant typical crisis situation for many companies in Egypt after the revolution. SCCT was examined in the crisis communication messages and techniques of the company. The results indicated the unavailability of pre-crisis plans, low-profile

communication strategy with the media and the community and dependence on negotiations with the labors according to frequent situation analysis. No post crisis communication activities or messages were detected for the company.

The discourse analysis of the company messages reveals the use of five crisis communication strategies out of seven ones suggested by Coombs in his SCCT of image restoration after crisis by Tora Cement Company and its communication consultants. The company messages included accusing the attacker, denial, justification, ingratiation and corrective action. The communication messages of the company did not include excuse or apology.

DR was evident in the core communication strategy of Nestle Water, which suffered from fire in one of its factories in Egypt. Effective crisis communication messages and techniques were applied by the company exceeding the normal aim of repairing the damaged image of any company due to the crisis to renewing the bond between the company and its stakeholders. Messages stressing human values and commitment to meet the needs of its publics and the community at large turned the crisis into a golden opportunity for the company to renew the trust in its values and procedures eliminating all threats at the same time. The discourse analysis of typical DR strategies detected through the analysis of the messages showed the instant dissemination of information regarding the fire, the confirmation that the damage was only to the factory facilities not to the workers or employees highlighting the higher value of human lives over machines and equipments, apology for the customers, who will not be receiving delivery for a while, prompt, sincere, round the clock actions of restoration of the production line, thus highlighting the value of customers' time and convenience, and confirmation of long-term relationship and consumers' trust in the company.

The discourse of renewal is closely associated with the larger tradition of restorative rhetoric. As Coombs (2009) suggests, discourse of renewal may be limited to specific contexts and limited kinds of

crises and disasters. Considered along side the more established image restoration theory approaches, a more complete view of the complex and dynamic process of post crisis communication is emerging.⁵⁷ Communication is not only critical to image repair following a crisis but also plays a central role in recovery, rebuilding, and renewal.

The researcher admits that limiting the study of effective crisis communication strategies to two cases only does not provide a full scope of crisis communication strategies and solutions. The two crises are different in nature, which may be another limitation in this research. The study, nevertheless, aimed at testing the possibility of application of scientific strategies of crisis communication in Egyptian environment, which proved to be possible and achievable. The turbulent environment of Egypt after the revolution and the regenerated, everyday crisis situations call for more research to explore effective crisis communication strategies that can help all types of institutions to survive their crises and restore their reputation.

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