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# Communicating During an Organizational Crisis: Using Facebook as a Relationship Management Tool

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Communicating During an Organizational Crisis: Using Facebook as a Relationship  
Management Tool

by

Vjollca Hysenlika

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Masters of Arts  
Department of the Graduate Program at the School of Mass Communications  
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## **ABSTRACT**

The purpose of this study was to determine how organizations communicate on Facebook during a crisis, from a relationship management perspective, and how their interactivity, responsiveness, and transparency affect their Fan page's relevance, importance, and appeal. In this study, the researcher conducted a controlled experiment to examine if a strategized Facebook Fan page that contained a high level of interaction, responsiveness, and transparency contributed to long-lasting relationships with fans or helped organizations recover/prevent a crisis. The researcher created eight different conditions (Facebook Fan Pages) presenting a crisis message, and recruited 200 students (25 participants per condition) from the University of South Florida (USF) to participate in the experiment. The findings did not demonstrate exactly what the research study was designed to find. The individual hypotheses were not supported during the ANOVA tests, except Hypothesis 1a. The ANOVA tests showed that the high vs. low interactivity, high vs. low responsiveness or high vs. low transparency did not have a significant effect on a Fan page's relevance, importance, and appeal. The variables did not have an independent influence, and they did not show any significance standing alone. However, the ANOVA tests surprisingly revealed a dramatic three-way interaction effect of all three independent variables on relevance and importance.

## **CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION**

It is evident that social media tools, the web-based communication channels serving billions of users worldwide, are changing crisis communication and the way practitioners develop and distribute information to their publics. The diverse and ever-growing social media channels including Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and blogs are restructuring how organizations connect and interact with communities in times of crisis. Social media tools and their capabilities are also reshaping organizational crisis messages and the way practitioners communicate them to their publics. “Technological advances are transforming how crisis management professionals and researchers view, interact with, and disseminate information to affected communities in a crisis situation” (Veil, Buehner & Palenchar, 2011, pg. 110).

The most popular online social media site, Facebook, has more than one billion users worldwide (Facebook, 2012). Facebook’s Founder, Mark Zuckerberg, first launched the social site from his Harvard University dorm room in 2004, and, since then, the social site has grown tremendously. In the first quarter of 2012, the social network generated an average of 3.2 billion likes and comments per day from its users, (Facebook 2012). Eighty percent of the company’s users, according to Facebook (2012), are outside the United States and Canada, and the social network is available in more than 70 languages. On May 17, 2012, Zuckerberg made history by announcing the company’s initial public offering of shares. Those shares began to trade on the NASDAQ Global Select Market on May 18, 2012. “Facebook’s mission is to make the world more open



and connected. People use Facebook to stay connected with friends and family, to discover what's going on in the world, and to share and express what matters to them" (Facebook, 2012). On the other hand, Twitter, the real-time information network consisting of short status updates of 140 characters, has more than 145 million members (Twitter, 2012). "Twitter was founded in San Francisco, but it's used by people in nearly every country in the world. The service is available in more than 20 languages" (Twitter, 2012). In addition to Facebook and Twitter, YouTube has provided a forum for people around the world to share, interact and connect through videos. "YouTube allows billions of people to discover, watch, and share originally-created videos" (YouTube, 2012). Blogs have also become extremely popular. On average, people create 1.4 blogs every second, according to Jin & Liu (2010). "And 1.5 million blog posts are made every day" (pg. 430). "Publics consider the Internet to be the most reliable source for news, especially ideal for generating timely communication, unique information, and interactive conversation" (Liu, Austin & Jin, 2011, pg. 346).

Interestingly, the interactivity among users highly increases when a crisis occurs. During a major crisis or disaster, the public spends a tremendous amount of time online discovering, analyzing, and conversing. The public also uses social media during a major crisis to seek and share information, and look for emotional support. "Social media provide emotional support for publics after crisis as well as a way for publics to virtually band together, share information, and demand resolution" (Liu, et. al. 2011). The social media tools and their capabilities have shifted the power of communication from the organizations' communicators to users. In addition, according to Veil, et al. (2011) social media tools offer more opportunities to communicate as well as provide new avenues for

global outreach in crisis communication. “These new media platforms are low cost or free forums for the expression of ideas, information, and opinion,” (pg. 110). For instance, the 2010 Haiti earthquake that killed more than 300,000 people became a hugely popular and trending topic on Twitter. According to Smith (2010), weeks following the earthquake thousands of Haiti-related tweets were uploaded every hour creating major awareness across the globe. “Through Twitter, users discussed relief efforts in Haiti, including participating organizations and individuals” (Smith, 2010, pg. 332). As a result, organizations such as the American Red Cross, public figures, and celebrities used Twitter, Facebook, and other social networking sites to communicate with the public about the disaster and raise millions of dollars. In addition, during the 2009 Mumbai terrorist attack, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and blogs became important tools used by citizen journalists to share original stories, raw and unfiltered information and opinions quickly and efficiently.

However, social media channels have also often been used to criticize and attack organizations and their crisis response strategies. Under the stress of a crisis, the immediacy of digital communication might produce misinformation and speculation, which can be daunting to organizations, (Veil et al., 2011). “Stakeholders can use social media to create and disseminate their own influence, de-centralizing the dissemination of information and reducing official control” (pg. 118). For instance, the public harshly criticized British Petroleum (BP) for its response to the Deepwater Horizon oil spill disaster that nearly destroyed the waters in the Gulf of Mexico. A few days after the disaster occurred, “An anonymous, [BP] satirical Twitter account, had four times as many followers within a week as the official BP site @ BP\_America” (pg. 118).

Despite this, organizations have doubts about the trustworthiness of social media. Many communicators also have reservations about the credibility of the social networks, while other organizations do not have a strategic crisis plan to convey their messages on those sites, according to Liu et al. (2011). But how are organizations embracing social media when a crisis occurs? Do they have a strategic communication plan to convey critical crisis messages to the public using social media tools? How does the public respond and perceive those social media messages? To determine how organizations communicate on Facebook during a crisis, from a relationship management perspective, the researcher conducted an experimental study to investigate how interactivity, responsiveness, and transparency affect their Fan page's relevance, importance, and appeal.

## CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

There's no denying that social media, especially Facebook, provides enormous opportunities for organizations to connect and create long lasting relationships with consumers. In times of crisis, particularly, Facebook serves as a two-way communication vehicle for organizations to strategically repair their image and reputation through interactivity, responsiveness, and transparency with their friends and fans. Prior to reviewing past literature on how organizations recovered from a crisis using those message strategies, it is important to understand two important terms, social media and crisis.

### *Definitions*

What is social media? Social media are the various electronic tools, technologies, and applications that facilitate interactive communication and content exchange, allowing the user to move back and forth easily between the roles of the audience and content producers, (Currie 2011). The explosion of social media, including social networking sites, blogs, and video channels has dramatically changed the way crisis communicators look and plan their overall strategic risk messages. During a time of emergency, in particular, social media can be used to broadcast “critically important information” instantly to as many people as possible. “It speeds up communication, and for all practical purposes, it speeds up awareness,” (Currie, 2011).

What is a crisis? A crisis is the “perception of an unpredictable event that threatens important expectancies of stakeholders” and can seriously affect an organization’s performance and reputation as well as generate negative outcomes (Liu et al. 2011). Heath (2001), on the other hand, defined a crisis as a major occurrence with a potentially negative outcome affecting an organization as well as its publics, services, products, and/or good name. “An issue [crisis] is a contestable point, a difference of opinion regarding fact, value, or policy, the resolution of which has consequences for the organization’s strategic plan and future success or failure,” (Liu, et al. 2011). In addition, an issue or a crisis that emerges online can take a dramatic turn more quickly than a crisis emerging offline, (Liu, et al. 2011). Therefore, the way organizations respond and manage online messages when a crisis occurs is crucial.

#### *Utilizing Facebook to Strategically Interact When an Organizational Crisis Occurs*

There is no doubt that Facebook has created endless possibilities to allow organizations to engage in two-way communications with friends and fans in good or bad times. Through fan pages, wall posts, picture comments, videos, live chat boxes, tabs, likes, and dislikes, organizations can quickly and effectively interact with their publics allowing communicators to deliver messages based on their needs during times of crisis. Because of those easy-to-use and easy-to-implement Facebook tools, organizations can be highly interactive with their publics during and after a major disaster, which can help them manage relationships and sustain their Fan page relevance, importance, and appeal. To achieve that goal, it is important for companies to think outside the box and stand out from the crowd. Facebook has thousands of interactive tools including Live Chat boxes, welcome/call-to-action boxes, apps, tags, and photo and video sections, which allow

organizations to humanize and personalize their message. As a result, every person who likes an organization's page will get special attention quickly and efficiently. Third party apps such as the HootSuite, a social media management dashboard, help organizations manage, measure, schedule, and analyze their Facebook posts.

In addition, Ki & Hon (2009) state that organizations that develop positive relationships with their publics are more effective in achieving their organizational goals. Several relationship cultivation strategies, originally adopted by Hon & Grunig (1999), including *networking*, *sharing of tasks*, *access*, *positivity*, and *openness* can produce better relationship quality outcomes, (Ki & Hon 2009). Relationship cultivation strategies, according to Ki & Hon (2009), help build and sustain quality relationships between businesses and their publics.

One of the strategies that organizations could utilize through interactivity on Facebook, is *networking*. Ki & Hon (2009) state, *networking* can be formed through conversation, friendship, information exchange, and anything that builds the basis of a relationship, (pg. 8). Ki & Hon (2009) define networking "As the degree of an organization's effort to build networks or coalitions with the same groups that their publics do, such as environmentalists, unions, or community groups" (pg. 9).

Through continuous interactions, organizations can network, develop and maintain relationships. Waters, Burnett, Lamm & Lucas' (2009) research shows interactivity plays an important role in maintaining and developing healthy relationships online with stakeholders. Additionally, Briones, Kuch, Liu & Jin's (2011) research results show, online two-way conversations are essential components to maintaining those relationships. Briones et al. (2011) conducted 40 in-depth interviews with

American Red Cross employees to explore how social media tools are used to build relationships with customers. A few participants in their research, who talked about the importance of a two-way dialogue when building relationships on social media, said, “‘You want to be part of the conversation’,” and “‘Don’t just issue a press release, try to have a conversation’,” (pg. 39).

One example of a successful Facebook campaign after an emergency is the University of Canterbury’s interactivity with users after the earthquake hit the Canterbury region in the South Island of New Zealand in 2010, (Dabner 2012). The response from the university was immediate and carefully coordinated with the university's web-based environment and a responsive site developed on Facebook, according to Dabner (2012). Research results from Dabner (2012) show Facebook became the university’s prominent source of support for many months. “A new Facebook community was immediately established, enabling ongoing dialogue and information sharing between staff at the institution and the wider educational community” (pg. 69). Dabner (2012) also states that the Facebook site went live one day after the earthquake, and “Quickly became one of the highly effective, well utilized multi-media spaces and tools used by the university to provide community support over the next 3 months” (pg. 73).

#### *The Importance of an Organization’s Facebook Responsiveness When a Crisis Occurs*

Responsiveness is another crisis response strategy, which has a great impact on organizations’ communication with Facebook users. Facebook’s interactive tools such as open or public walls, photos, videos, and link options allow organizations to engage in a back-and-forth dialogue with the user. The open-dialogue can be achieved mainly through Facebook’s comments section on the wall, below videos, photos, and links. The

features allow companies to communicate with users quickly and efficiently. It is also important to mention that those characteristics can highly increase a Fan page's relevance, importance, and appeal. Lovejoy, Waters & Saxton's (2012) research shows these dialogue-driven tools allow organizations to demonstrate responsiveness and establish a continuous dialogue with their publics. "Users direct questions and comments towards the organization using a public message [Facebook wall comments] should be acknowledged and respond to those messages," (pg. 314).

A great way to integrate responsiveness is using Ki & Hon's (2009) relationship cultivation strategies, which were originally adopted by Hon & Grunig (1999). The relationship strategy that fits well with responsiveness is *access*, which organizations or the public use to reach the other party and express or share opinions and thoughts. Ki & Hon (2009) define *access* as "The degree of effort that an organization puts into providing communication channels or media outlets that assist its strategic publics in reaching it," (pg. 6). On the other hand, Hon & Grunig (1999) define the strategy as a way for "Either party to answer telephone calls or read letters or e-mail messages from the other. Either party is willing to go to the other when they have complaints or queries, rather than taking negative reactions to third parties" (pg. 14).

A study conducted by Lovejoy et al. (2012) about how organizations engage stakeholders through Twitter, revealed that savvy organizations demonstrate responsiveness by using Twitter and social media open message boards and other related tools to present detailed information with hyperlinks, share information through retweets, and build information communities with hashtags.



In addition, a study by Briones et al. (2011) shows that organizations such as American Red Cross utilize a variety of social media tools, including Facebook, to develop and maintain relationships focused on recruiting and maintaining volunteers, updating the community on disaster preparedness and response, and engaging the media. “By having a two-way dialogue through social media, the American Red Cross reports providing faster service for the community, generating more media coverage, and receiving positive and negative feedback from stakeholders to improve the organization” (pg. 41). Briones et al. (2011) suggests that the organization has been successful in the use of social media because its communicators have used the technology “dialogically” (pg. 41). The non-profit organization has used that strategy through “active responses to posts, and allowing the organization to gain ideas from its various publics” (pg. 41).

In addition, the back-and-forth dialogue gives users a human voice and personal commitment toward a crisis or tragedy. For instance, after the 2010 catastrophic 7.0 magnitude earthquake that hit Haiti killing 316,000 people and leaving millions homeless, many people turned to Facebook and other social media tools to express support and give contributions. The earthquake destroyed homes, schools, churches, and commercial buildings in Haiti’s capital, Port-au-Prince, and the surrounding region leaving survivors desperate. “One user declared, ‘#withmyrefundcheck I’d donate to #haiti,’” and another stated, “Time to get ready for work to take care of people, continue to pray for the people of Haiti,” (Smith, 2010, pg. 332).

Another example includes the Middle Eastern uprising in 2011 where millions of citizens in countries such as Egypt, Iran, and Tunisia took to the streets to peacefully overthrow the repressive regimes in hopes of replacing them with more liberal and free

governments. According to Hjorth & Yonnie (2011), Twitter and Facebook helped mobilize citizens in Iran, Egypt, and Tunisia to take action. Japan's 9.0 magnitude earthquake that killed more than 15,000 people and injured another 6,000 in 2011, was another disaster that sent millions around the globe to social media to spread news, share videos, pictures, and help victims. The earthquake triggered tsunami waves reaching 40 meters and traveled up to 10 kilometers inland, according to Hjorth & Yonnie (2011). "In the case of Japan's earthquake, grief took on new techno-cultural routes in its connection of different communities" (Hjorth & Yonnie, 2011).

The experiences in Haiti, the Middle East, and Japan demonstrate that responsiveness through open dialogue can help people recover faster from a crisis. Similarly, when organizations respond through open dialogue they could also prevent or recover faster from a crisis. For instance, Sweetser & Metzgar's (2007), research results on blog usage during a crisis showed responsiveness and customer service played a large role in reducing the perception of crisis.

#### *The Importance of Message Transparency on Facebook When an Organizational Crisis Occurs*

Transparency is another effective crisis response strategy that plays a tremendous role when an organizational emergency or crisis occurs. Transparency, according to Seeger (2006), is necessary to build credibility, trust, and commitment. "Effective crisis communicators are honest, candid, and open in their public communication. Such honesty fosters credibility with both the media and the public" (pg. 239). In addition, Seeger (2006), who discusses best practices in crisis communications, suggests that organizational crisis messages containing openness, candor, truthfulness and honesty are more effective. According to Seeger (2009), it is important to

communicate “The entire truth as it is known, even when the truth may reflect negatively on the agency or organization” (pg. 239). Waters et al. (2009), also, suggest that practitioners should be transparent in their online communication activities. The open and honest activities help companies create a relevant, important, and appealing Fan page. The open features such as wall comment spaces, video options, and links allow companies to show fans who they truly are, and that they are willing to accept ideas and suggestions to better improve each user’s experience on their Fan page.

Another way to implement transparency into crisis messages is for organizations to take into consideration another strategy from Ki & Hon’s (2009) relationship cultivation strategies. The strategy that goes hand-in-hand with transparency is *openness/disclosure*. According to Ki & Hon (2009), openness is a situation where both organizations and publics are open and honest with one another, share opinions, concerns, and express how satisfied or dissatisfied they are with each other. Ki & Hon (2009) define openness/disclosure as “An organization’s efforts to provide information about the nature of the organization and what it is doing” (pg. 8).

Facebook tools allow companies to show complete transparency during and after a crisis. Through status updates, photos, videos, links, and notes, organizations have the opportunity to openly inform users about the crisis as information develops, in real time. Waters et al.’s (2009) research results indicate that companies that were somewhat open and transparent on Facebook recovered faster from a crisis. On the other hand, Veil et al.’s (2011) research proves honesty and openness on social networking sites help companies reduce a crisis or a threat. “Sharing available information openly and honestly

before and during a crisis is vital in minimizing additional threats as well as meeting the public's needs for information so they do not turn to other sources" (pg. 111).

A company that made several errors when responding to a series of incidents was the Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now (ACORN). Those incidents involved two political activists who published hidden-camera recordings of their visits to the organization posing as a prostitute and a pimp, in order to elicit damaging information from the organization's employees (Sisco 2012). Those videos went viral becoming some of the most talked about scandals on Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube in 2008 and 2009. "The decision to withhold information from the public, and revealed only much later was severely damaging to the organization. ACORN's decision to hide the embezzlement only made the organization more vulnerable in the subsequent crisis situations" (pg. 94).

*Facebook Interactivity, Responsiveness & Transparency's Effect on Organizational Fan Page Relevance, Importance, and Appeal*

Scholarly research shows interactivity, responsiveness, and transparency on Facebook are key when responding to an organizational crisis, incident or scandal. Research also proves that those strategies have an effect on relevance, importance, and appeal-which ultimately affect user's trust and commitment toward an organization's brand. Facebook tools including Live Chat Boxes, easy-to-navigate photos, fast-downloading videos, and other Live and personalized interactive features allow companies to personally connect with fans and develop relevant, important, and appealing Fan pages. By doing that, they can create messages that are tailored specifically, and eventually develop long lasting relationships. Organizations that used Facebook tools and features to engage in an immediate, honest and compassionate two-

way communication with their publics appeared to suffer fewer consequences. For example, one of Coombs' (2008) crisis response strategies, "deal posture," was used in many successful crisis messages. "Deal posture represents a set of strategies that seek to improve the organization's reputation in some way" (pg. 267).

Through these strategies, organizations can show high concern about victims and accept responsibility when a crisis occurs (Coombs 2008). This pattern was seen through the organizations' continuous interactivity, responsiveness, and transparency with the public. Some deal posture strategies, which Coombs emphasizes, include concern, regret, and apology. "By protecting victims and accepting responsibility, crisis managers encourage stakeholders to judge the organization more positively or less negatively" (pg. 267). Therefore, crisis managers responsible for communicating those messages to the public, shared and disseminated the information in a very timely fashion using Facebook features such as status updates, links, videos, and photos demonstrating their sympathy for the victims (if any), regret, and concern about the situation. According to an experimental research design conducted by Sweetser & Metzgar (2007), which investigated the impact of blogs using relationship management during a crisis, the perceived state of crisis decreased as communication increased and got closer to the organization itself. "These findings suggest that organizations in crisis should continue to employ open communication practices during crisis situations," (pg. 342).

### **CHAPTER 3: RELATIONSHIP MANAGEMENT THEORY**

Over the last decade, relationship management has received growing attention in the world of communications. Public relations practitioners as well as scholars have extensively discussed the definition of relationship management and its implementation into a business' communication plan. One researcher defines relationship management as "Your ability to jointly and proactively define, build, maintain, and leverage strategic relationships so that your business outcomes are optimized," (Murray, 2012).

Relationship management has become a central focus of public relations (Waters & Bortree, 2012). "Numerous studies have examined the quality of relationships in various public relations specializations including community relations, business-to-business, and fundraising" (pg. 123). Several studies show that relationship management helps a business achieve success.

Ki & Hon (2009) state that organizations that develop positive, long-term relationships with their publics are more effective in achieving their organizational goals. "Goals are developed around relationships, and communication is used as a strategic tool in helping to achieve those goals" (Ledingham & Bruning, 1998, pg. 63). Those quality, positive, and long-term relationships between organizations and their publics are essential during an emergency or crisis. Brown & White's (2011) research shows the status of organization-public relationships (OPR) have a significant effect on the perception of a crisis. "Relationship history, especially a negative relationship history, has an effect on

the perception of the organization during a crisis” (pg. 78). To avoid negative outcomes, OPR can easily be developed on Facebook and other online social media channels.

According to Seltzer & Mitrook (2007), computer-mediated communication employing principles, first investigated by Taylor, Kent & White (1998), including the use of dialogic loop, easy to use interface, conversation between visitors, generation of return visits, and providing useful information to the public, allow organizations to establish a dialogic relationship with the public on the Internet. Levenshus (2010) suggests dialogic communication is critical when creating dynamic and enduring relationships with their publics. “Although the [Taylor, Kent & White (1998)] article predates the participatory power of today’s Internet, more current studies have underscored that the dialogic principles are still relevant to public relations practitioners’ efforts to use the Internet to build relationships with key publics” (pg. 316).

#### *Organization-Public Relationships*

What is OPR? There are several definitions of OPR, but Broom, Casey & Ritchey (2000) developed an interesting definition based on a two-way communication perspective—which fits with this research topic:

Organization–public relationships are represented by the patterns of interaction, transaction, exchange, and linkage between organization and its publics. These relationships have properties that are distinct from the identities, attributes, and perceptions of the individuals and social collectivities in the relationships. Though dynamic in nature, organization–public relationships can be described at a single point in time and tracked over time. (p. 18)

Hung (2009) defines OPR in a similar way. According to Hung (2009), “OPRs arise when organizations and their strategic publics are independent, and this interdependence results in consequences to each other that organizations need to manage constantly” (pg. 396). Hung (2009) also points out that OPR starts when there are consequences created by an organization that affect its targeted publics, or when the behaviors of publics have consequences for an organization.

### *The Types of OPRs*

According to Hung (2009), there are two types of OPRs, *communal* and *exchange* relationships. Hung (2009) says these two types of OPRs have been mostly researched and developed by psychologists Clark of Carnegie Mellon University and Mills of the University of Maryland, (pg. 396).

*Communal.* A communal relationship expresses concern that one person has about the benefit and safety of the other party, according to Hung (2009). “In communal relationships, benefits are given to please the other” (pg. 396).

*Exchange Relationship.* The exchange relationship suggests that members benefit each other in regards to specific benefits received in the past or expected in the future, according to Hung (2009). “Exchange relationships are [usually] derived to economic exchanges” (pg. 396). Hung (2009) also says, “I believe that, for OPRs, the relationship often begins with exchange relationship and gradually evolve into communal relationships” (pg. 397).

Other OPR types include *covenantal* and *contractual* relationships. A covenantal relationship means that both sides, organizations and the public “Commit to a common good by their open exchanges and the norm of reciprocity” (Hung 2009, pg. 398).



Similarly, Bennett (2001) sees covenantal relationships when both parties involved “Ask for insight, to provide criticism, and to place a claim upon some of the individual’s time” (pg. 89). On the other hand, contractual relationships start when two groups agree upon one another’s role in the relationship, according to Hung (2009). “It is like writing a contract at the beginning of a relationship. Contractual relationships cannot promise equal relationships” (pg. 398). Hung (2009) says depending on whether organizations try to develop exchange, communal or other relationships, “Different degrees of trust, control mutuality, relational commitment, and relational satisfaction might result” (pg. 398).

Ledingham & Bruning (1998) developed five dimensions of relationships between organizations and the public. According to Hung (2009), those five dimensions included *trust*, *openness*, *involvement*, *investment*, and *commitment*. Ledingham & Bruning (1998) said, “An organization-public relationship centered around building trust, demonstrating involvement, investment, commitment, and maintaining open, and frank communication between the organization and its key public does have value and that it impacts the stay-leave decision in a competitive environment” (pg. 61).

*Trust*. This term, Ledingham & Bruning (1998), refer to as the feeling that those in the relationship can rely on each other, and that the organization will do what it says it will do. “Dependability, forthrightness, and trustworthiness are key components” to a positive and long-term relationship between the organization and its targeted public (pg. 58).

*Openness*. Ledingham & Bruning (1998) see openness as sharing the organization’s plans for the future with public members, and communicating the activities/programs that build the organization-public relationship.

*Involvement.* According to Ledingham (2009), involvement is about the organization being involved in the welfare of the community. “It demonstrates that the organization and the public are engaged in furthering each other’s interests” (pg. 185).

*Commitment.* Ledingham (2009) says commitment involves the decision to continue a relationship. “It describes both parties’ choices to maintain the relationship” (pg. 185).

*Investment.* Investment, on the other hand, includes parties’ willingness to give time, energy, and resources to building strong relationships, according to Ledingham (2009).

Ledingham & Bruning’s (1998) research shows relationships flourish when: balance exists in the relationship, both parties in the relationship feel that the other is investing time and themselves, both parties are willing to make a commitment to the relationship, and both parties can be trusted to act in a manner that supports the relationship (pg. 58). In addition, Ledingham (2009) states “Managing OPRs around common interests and shared goals, over time, results in mutual understanding and benefit for interacting organizations and publics” (pg. 190).

## **CHAPTER 4: HYPOTHESES**

As seen in the literature review, many scholars have focused their research studies on organizational crisis messages on social media and how their messages affected the consumer's trust and commitment. The researcher in this study went one step further and examined how organizations communicate on Facebook when a crisis or emergency occurs and how their interactivity, responsiveness, and transparency affect their Fan page's relevance, importance, and appeal. Interestingly, the researcher went beyond the obvious and studied how high tech and personalized Facebook tools and features increase an organization's Fan page relevance, importance, and appeal.

Relevance on Facebook has to do with an organization message design. Relevance occurs when organizations use thousands of interactive tools including Live Chat boxes, welcome/call-to-action boxes, and photo and video sections to tailor and personalize their message for each fan. Austin, Liu & Jin (2012), who studied how audiences seek out information on social media during and after a crisis, suggested that audiences select certain types of social media based upon the functions relevant to them. "These forms of media tend to match audiences' perceptions and ways of thinking and reinforcing their beliefs" (pg. 191). Sallence, Briggs, Harris & Fishwick (2007), who studied how patients evaluate and make use of online health information using Internet users, suggest that one of the most important aspects of a trusted social site was that the information and advice presented was framed in a manner consistent with the patient's

query. Sallence et al. (2007) study results also showed that “participants were also looking for sites that were written by people similar to themselves and that were obviously aimed at ‘people like them’” (pg. 1858).

Importance on Facebook, on the other hand, has to do with an organization’s message selection and when and how they should present it to the fans using dialogic features. McAllister (2012), who studied practitioner perceptions of importance, function, and actual utilization of dialogic Internet tools, suggests that using dialogic features on social media to present a message helps organizations and their practitioners receive better results. “Users perceive dialogic features as important, and expect organizations to use them when presenting an important message” (pg. 224). McAllister (2012) conducted a survey using participants from various areas including professional organizations, colleges, and elementary schools. In this study, McAllister (2012) found that almost 78 percent of the participants indicated that the most important function of new media tools is to allow users to engage and interact with organizations when they present a message.

Appeal has to do with the simplicity, look and feel of the Facebook Fan page. A Fan page has great appeal when it is easy to use, and easy to navigate. Sallence et al.’s (2007) study suggested that two factors led participants to reject or mistrust a site quickly. “The overwhelming majority of comments were related to the design of the website. The look and feel of the website was clearly important to the participants. Visual appeal, plus design issues relevant to site navigation appeared to exert a strong influence on their first impressions of the site” (pg. 1858).

Through this experimental study, the researcher's goal was to reveal Facebook users' behavioral and psychological reaction toward Facebook pages containing high and low interactivity, high and low responsiveness, and high transparency and low transparency.

*Hypothesis 1 Through 3*

**H1a.** High interactivity when a crisis occurs on Facebook will increase relevance of an organization's Fan page more than low interactivity.

**H1b.** High responsiveness on Facebook when a crisis occurs will increase relevance of an organization's Fan page more than low responsiveness.

**H1c.** High transparency on Facebook when a crisis occurs will increase an organization's Fan page relevance more than low transparency.

**H2a.** High interactivity on Facebook when a crisis occurs will increase importance of an organization's Fan page more than low interactivity.

**H2b.** High responsiveness on Facebook when a crisis occurs will increase importance of an organizational Fan page more than low responsiveness.

**H2c.** High transparency on Facebook when a crisis occurs will increase the organization's Fan page importance more than low transparency.

**H3a.** High interactivity on Facebook when a crisis occurs will increase an organization's fan page appeal more than low interactivity.

**H3b.** High responsiveness on Facebook when a crisis occurs will increase an organization's Fan page appeal more than low responsiveness.

**H3c.** High transparency on Facebook when a crisis occurs will increase the appeal of an organization's fan page more than low transparency.

## CHAPTER 5: METHODOLOGY

To test the proposed research hypotheses, the researcher conducted a controlled experiment to analyze the effects of interactivity, responsiveness, and transparency as Facebook strategies when a crisis occurs, and how it affects an organization's Fan page relevance, importance, and appeal. To achieve the goal, the researcher created a 2x2x2 factorial design resulting from eight different conditions. Those eight conditions include: high interactivity vs. low interactivity, high responsiveness vs. low responsiveness, and high transparency vs. low transparency.

To start off, the researcher conducted a controlled experiment using 200 participants, 25 participants per condition. The researcher conducted this type of experiment to demonstrate whether the independent variables including *interactivity*, *responsiveness*, and *transparency* have an effect on the dependent variables, *relevance*, *importance* and *appeal*. The purpose of the test was to examine the validity of the hypothesis and the theory, and discover new information to benefit public relations and the growing social media field. To measure these effects, the researcher used a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly agree) to 5 (strongly disagree).

### *Research Participants*

Research participants were recruited from a population of mass communications undergraduate students at the University of South Florida (USF). Students were asked to volunteer for the study, and teachers had the option to offer extra credit to students who

participated in the study. The researcher held several different experiment sessions on several different days to ensure that the groups did not interact with one another.

### *Stimulus Material*

To achieve the 2x2x2 factorial design, eight treatment conditions were created involving eight different custom-made Facebook pages using the latest and most up-to-date Facebook features, tools, and capabilities (see Table 1). Stimulus material for the eight treatments included eight official Facebook fan pages using an organization and a crisis created specifically for the purpose of the experiment. The organization used in the experiment is called the Airline Company. The Facebook pages were manipulated to address the organization's interactions with fans during and after the crisis. To be specific, the researcher created a crisis message, which was inspired by Spirit Airlines' crisis that arose when the airline refused to refund a \$197 ticket to a dying 76-year-old veteran from Clearwater, Fla. After the crisis, Facebook users developed a "Boycott Spirit Airlines" fan page which currently has more than 40,000 fans, (Facebook 2012). Interestingly, the crisis, which gained national attention after Fox News picked up the story through Tampa Bay Times, occurred in the Tampa Bay area in April, 2012. Because the story was local and relevant to the research topic, the researcher decided to create eight different messages using a twisted version of the Spirit Airlines crisis.

The eight different messages, which contain three paragraphs each, describe the organization's response on Facebook explaining what happened, why it happened, and what actions the company is taking to resolve/not resolve the issue. In addition, the conditions describe the course of the event in eight different ways (Table 1).

Table 1: Eight Experiment Conditions

Condition	Interactivity	Responsiveness	Transparency
1	High	High	High
2	High	Low	High
3	High	High	Low
4	High	Low	Low
5	Low	High	High
6	Low	Low	High
7	Low	High	Low
8	Low	Low	Low

*Procedures*

The research experiments were conducted in three different computer classrooms in the Communication and Information Sciences building at the USF Tampa campus. After participants arrived in the computer lab, each participant was randomly assigned to one of the eight conditions resulting from a 2x2x2 factorial design. To measure the variables of interest, participants were told to sit at any computer in the lab where they found a set of documents containing an informed consent form, experimental directions, a questionnaire, and a Facebook page already uploaded in the computer-including one of the eight conditions. At the beginning of each session, participants were given instructions about the purpose of the experiment and a background statement about the organization involved. After the directions were given, participants were asked to sign the informed consent form, read the experiment directions once again, and then look at the messages individually. After participants read the Airline Company’s Facebook messages, they were asked to answer the 20 questions presented in a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly agree) to 5 (strongly disagree). They were asked to spend approximately 15 minutes to complete the experiment. Participants were given the



opportunity to decline to participate at any time if they did not wish to view the material. During these sessions, one person dropped out of the experiment voluntarily due to unknown personal concerns.

### *Dependent Measures*

To measure the dependent variables (relevance, importance, and appeal) the researcher used a five point Likert scale. For relevance, the researcher used a scale ranging from 1 (not relevant) to 5 (very relevant), and asked the following question, “How relevant is it to you the organization’s Facebook communication message when a crisis occurs?” For importance, the researcher used a scale ranging from 1 (not important) to 5 (very important), and asked the question, “How important is it to you to stay informed on Facebook when an organizational crisis occurs?” For appeal, the researcher used a scale ranging from 1 (not interested) to 5 (very interested), and asked “How interested are you in getting the latest and most up-to-date information on Facebook when an organizational crisis occurs?”

The researcher also asked three demographic questions, which involved age, gender (male or female), occupation, and highest level of education. For the age portion, participants were asked to choose their age range between 18-27, 28-37, 38-47, 48-57, or 58 or older. On the other hand, the researcher used a fill in the bank option for occupation, if any. And for the level of education portion, the participants were asked to choose between high school, associate degree, bachelor’s degree, master’s degree, and doctoral degree. To see these results see tables I and II in the appendix.

### *Data Analysis*

The researcher used SPSS 20.0 for MAC to analyze data. The statistical procedures to test each hypothesis included ANOVA. In addition, to compare the means for each response message across the eight strategy definitions, the researcher used the multivariate and univariate analysis of variance (ANOVA). ANOVA measured every response and strategy definition as the dependent variable with eight levels.

## CHAPTER 6: RESULTS

The experimental research study sought to explore how organizations communicate on Facebook when a crisis occurs and how their interactivity, responsiveness, and transparency affect their Fan page's relevance, importance, and appeal. To draw a picture of how an organization's crisis message on Facebook affects the user's behavioral and psychological reaction to the Fan page communication tools and features, the researcher recruited 200 participants ranging from 18 to 37 years of age. Of those, 48 were males and 152 were females. The researcher presented eight different conditions, and 25 participants took part in each condition. Descriptive statistics were used to measure demographics, which included age, gender, occupation, and education (to see details see table I and II in the Appendix section). To test hypotheses one through three, the researcher tested between-subjects effect using analysis of variance.

### *Hypothesis 1 Analysis-Relevance*

Hypothesis 1a posited that high interactivity on Facebook when a crisis occurs increases relevance on an organization's Fan page more than low interactivity. As expected, participants who were exposed to the high interactivity condition believed high interactivity had a more significant effect on organization's Fan page's relevance ( $M=1.81$ ,  $SD=1.11$ ) than those participants exposed to low interactivity ( $M=2.15$ ,  $SD=1.32$ ). The first hypothesis 1a, which had a significant effect ( $F=3.888$ ,  $p=.050$ ) on relevance, was supported.

Hypothesis 1b suggested that high responsiveness on Facebook when a crisis occurs highly increases relevance of an organization's Fan page more than low responsiveness. Results indicated that participants who were exposed to high responsiveness conditions (M=1.99, SD=1.16) were slightly more likely to believe that

Table 2: ANOVA Results on Relevance

**Tests of Between-Subjects Effects**

Dependent Variable: Relevance

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected Model	18.480 <sup>a</sup>	7	2.640	1.776	.094	.061
Intercept	784.080	1	784.080	527.408	.000	.733
Interactivity	5.780	1	5.780	3.888	.050	.020
Responsiveness	.020	1	.020	.013	.908	.000
Transparency	.980	1	.980	.659	.418	.003
Interactivity *	1.280	1	1.280	.861	.355	.004
Responsiveness						
Interactivity *	.320	1	.320	.215	.643	.001
Transparency						
Responsiveness *	2.880	1	2.880	1.937	.166	.010
Transparency						
Interactivity *	7.220	1	7.220	4.857	.029	.025
Responsiveness *						
Transparency						
Error	285.440	192	1.487			
Total	1088.000	200				
Corrected Total	303.920	199				

a. R Squared = .061 (Adjusted R Squared = .027)

high responsiveness has an effect on Fan Page relevance than those participants exposed to low responsiveness ( $M=1.97$ ,  $SD=1.30$ ). The negligible difference failed to reach statistical significance ( $F=.013$ ,  $p=.908$ ), and hypothesis 1b was not supported.

Hypothesis 1c suggested that high transparency on Facebook after a crisis occurs is more likely to increase relevance of an organization's Fan page than low transparency. Participants who were exposed to transparency conditions ( $M=2.05$ ,  $SD=1.19$ ) believed high transparency has an effect on Fan Page relevance more than those participants exposed to low transparency conditions ( $M=1.91$ ,  $SD=1.27$ ). The difference, however, was not statistically significant ( $F=.659$ ,  $p=.418$ ), thus hypothesis 3c was not supported. Interestingly the results revealed a three-way interaction effect of interactivity, responsiveness and transparency on relevance ( $F=7.22$ ,  $p=.029$ ).

As Figure 1 shows, when the transparency of a fan Page was high, low interactivity and low responsiveness actually produced the highest relevance score. High interactivity, when combined with low responsiveness, produced the lowest relevance score. The effect of interactivity was clearly moderated by the level of responsiveness, and vice versa, in the high transparency condition.

Figure 2 shows that, when transparency was low, high responsiveness was the most effective when combined with low interactivity. When interactivity was high, however, high and low responsiveness showed negligible difference in their effects on relevance. Similar to the high transparency condition, the moderating effect between responsiveness on interactivity was clearly present in the low transparency condition as well.

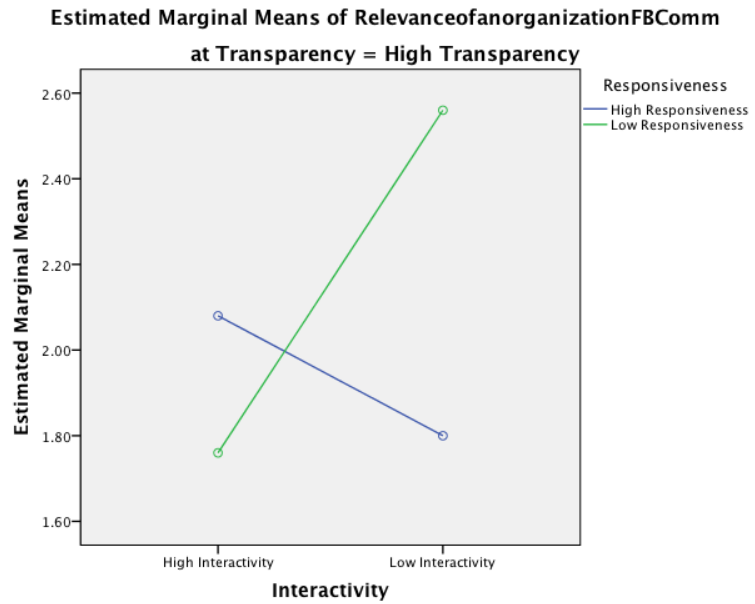


Figure 1: ANOVA Results on Relevance with High Transparency

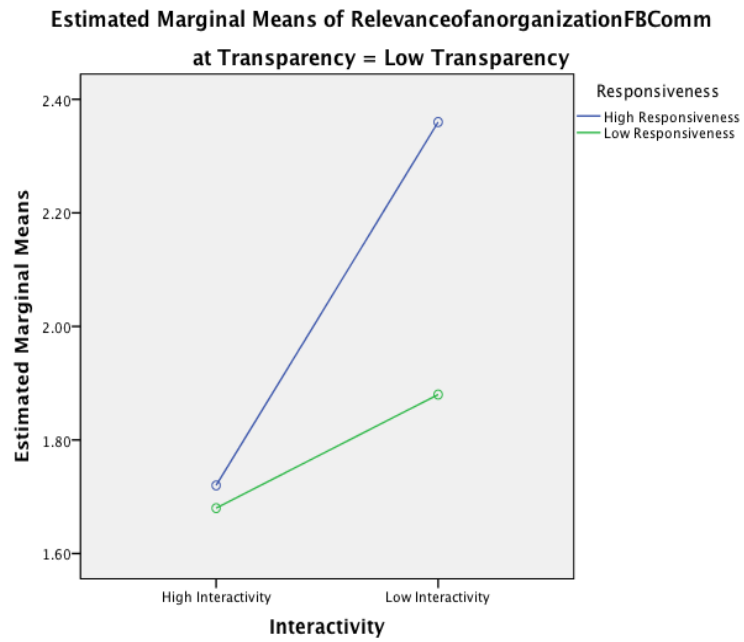


Figure 2: ANOVA Results on Relevance with Low Transparency

### *Hypothesis 2 Analysis-Importance*

Hypothesis 2a proposed that high interactivity on Facebook increases importance on an organization's Fan page more than low interactivity. The research found participants who were exposed to high interactivity conditions ( $M=1.66$ ,  $SD=1.07$ ) were more likely to think that high interactivity had some effect on Fan page importance more than those participants exposed to low interactivity ( $M=1.17$ ,  $SD=1.21$ ). Hypothesis 2a was not supported, and it was found that interactivity had no significant effect ( $F=.61$ ,  $p=.902$ ), and the hypothesis was not supported.

Hypothesis 2b posits that high responsiveness increases an organization's Fan page importance more than low responsiveness. Participants exposed at high conditions ( $M=1.69$ ,  $SD=1.10$ ) were more likely to believe an organization's Fan page importance has some effect than those participants in low responsiveness conditions ( $M=1.67$ ,  $SD=1.18$ ). Hypothesis 2b showed no significant effect ( $F=.015$ ,  $p=.902$ ), and it was not supported.

Hypothesis 2c suggests that high transparency increases an organization's Fan page importance more than low transparency. Participants exposed in high transparency conditions ( $M=1.80$ ,  $SD=1.14$ ) were more likely to believe that an organization's Fan page importance has some effect than those participants in low transparency conditions ( $M=1.56$ ,  $SD=1.13$ ). Hypothesis 2c shows no significant effect ( $F=2.197$ ,  $p=.140$ ). Similar to relevance, however, ANOVA results revealed a significant three-way interaction effect of interactivity, responsiveness and transparency on rated importance of the Fan Page ( $F=5.78$ ,  $p=.037$ ).

Table 3: ANOVA Results on Importance

**Tests of Between-Subjects Effects**

Dependent Variable: Importance

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected Model	9.840 <sup>a</sup>	7	1.406	1.072	.383	.038
Intercept	564.480	1	564.480	430.627	.000	.692
Interactivity	.080	1	.080	.061	.805	.000
Responsiveness	.020	1	.020	.015	.902	.000
Transparency	2.880	1	2.880	2.197	.140	.011
Interactivity * Responsiveness	.980	1	.980	.748	.388	.004
Interactivity * Transparency	.080	1	.080	.061	.805	.000
Responsiveness * Transparency	.020	1	.020	.015	.902	.000
Interactivity * Responsiveness * Transparency	5.780	1	5.780	4.409	.037	.022
Error	251.680	192	1.311			
Total	826.000	200				
Corrected Total	261.520	199				

a. R Squared = .038 (Adjusted R Squared = .003)

Figure 3 and 4 show the dramatic moderating effects of the independent variables on each other: In the high transparency condition, high interactivity + high responsiveness and low interactivity + low responsiveness had nearly identical effects on rated importance; in the low transparency condition, low interactivity + low responsiveness resulted in the highest importance rating.



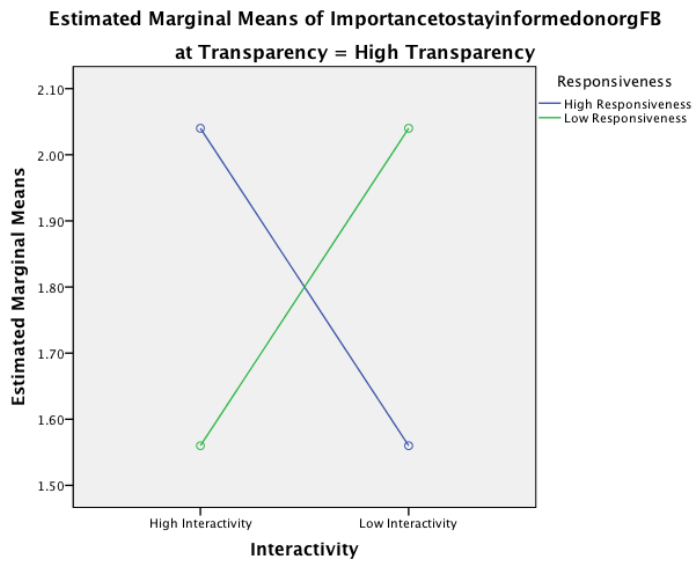


Figure 3: ANOVA Results on Importance with High Transparency

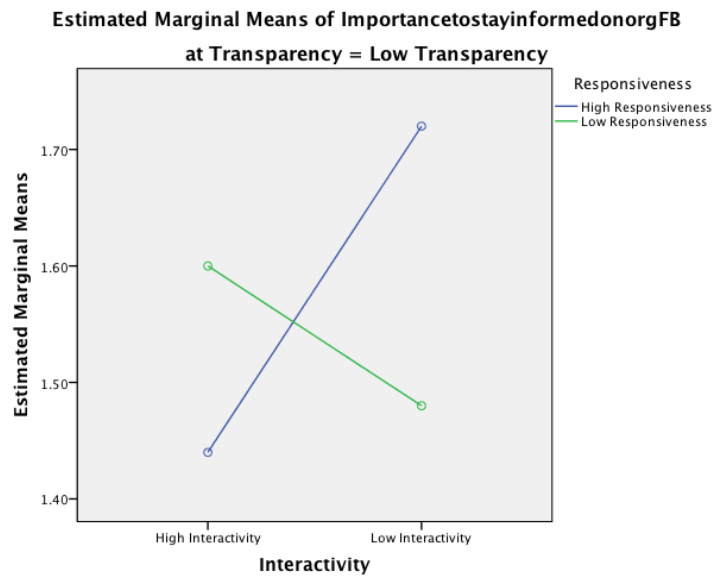


Figure 4: ANOVA Results on Importance with Low Transparency

The results presented so far clearly indicate the need to examine interactivity, responsiveness and transparency simultaneously. On one hand, none of these manipulated factors was able to independently exert its influence on rated relevance or importance of the Fan Page. On the other hand, each factor was able to moderate the effects of other factors and thereby produce some interesting and surprising overall effects.

### *Hypothesis 3 Analysis-Appeal*

Hypothesis 3a suggested that high interactivity on Facebook increases appeal (interest) on an organization's Facebook page more than low interactivity. Participants who were exposed to high interactivity condition ( $M=1.68$ ,  $SD=1.13$ ) had a more favorable attitude toward appeal in an organization's Fan page than those exposed to low interactivity ( $M=1.73$ ,  $SD=1.33$ ). Hypothesis 3a shows no significant effect ( $F=.082$ ,  $p=.776$ ), and the hypothesis was not supported.

Hypothesis 3b claims high responsiveness on Facebook increases a Fan page's appeal (interest) more than low responsiveness. Those in high responsiveness condition ( $M=1.68$ ,  $SD=1.27$ ) believe an organization's Fan page appeal has more effect than those in low responsiveness ( $M=1.73$ ,  $SD=1.20$ ). Despite all, hypothesis 3b shows no significant effect ( $F=.082$ ,  $p=.776$ ), and the hypothesis was not supported.

Hypothesis 3c claims high transparency on Facebook increases a Fan page's appeal (interest) more than low transparency. Those in high transparency conditions ( $M=1.82$ ,  $SD=1.22$ ) are more likely to believe an organization's Fan page appeal has more effect than those in low transparency conditions ( $M=1.59$ ,  $SD=1.24$ ). Hypothesis 3c shows no significant effect ( $F=1.725$ ,  $p=.191$ ), and the hypothesis was not supported.

Table 4: ANOVA Results on Appeal

**Tests of Between-Subjects Effects**

Dependent Variable: Appeal

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected Model	11.275 <sup>a</sup>	7	1.611	1.051	.397	.037
Intercept	581.405	1	581.405	379.280	.000	.664
Interactivity	.125	1	.125	.082	.776	.000
Responsiveness	.125	1	.125	.082	.776	.000
Transparency	2.645	1	2.645	1.725	.191	.009
Interactivity * Responsiveness	2.205	1	2.205	1.438	.232	.007
Interactivity * Transparency	.405	1	.405	.264	.608	.001
Responsiveness * Transparency	3.125	1	3.125	2.039	.155	.011
Interactivity * Responsiveness * Transparency	2.645	1	2.645	1.725	.191	.009
Error	294.320	192	1.533			
Total	887.000	200				
Corrected Total	305.595	199				

a. R Squared = .037 (Adjusted R Squared = .002)

Unlike relevance and importance, there was no significant interaction effect between the independent variables on the dependent variable appeal.

## **CHAPTER 7: DISCUSSION**

There is no doubt that Facebook has become a big part of organizations' communication strategy. The social media giant has created possibilities for organizations to engage in two-way interactions with users on their Fan pages. Facebook tools and features such as wall posts, Live Chat Boxes, Welcome tabs, call-to-action boxes, applications, tagging, messaging, videos, photos, and "likes" allow organizations to communicate with their fans quickly and efficiently.

Third party applications such as HootSuite and Facebook Open Graph (tagging app) are giving organizations the opportunity to boost networking on their Fan pages, increase interactivity and maximize engagement. These applications are designed to help companies communicate with their fans to create personal and long-lasting relationships with them. According to Helft & Hempel (2011), Facebook is at the center of the universe, and much of what people do online these days starts there. "As a result, thousands of websites and apps have essentially become satellites that orbit around Facebook" (pg.41). Because of Facebook's easy-to-use and easy-to-implement tools and features, it allows organizations to be simultaneously interactive, responsive, and transparent with the public, especially when a crisis occurs.

For that reason, this research sought to explore how organizations communicate on Facebook when a crisis occurs, from a relationship management perspective, and how

their interactivity, responsiveness, and transparency affect their Fan page's relevance, importance, and appeal.

As seen in the results, the findings did not demonstrate exactly what the research study intended to reveal. All of the individual hypotheses were not supported during the ANOVA tests, except Hypothesis 1a. The ANOVA tests showed that the high vs. low interactivity, high vs. low responsiveness or high vs. low transparency did not have a significant effect on a Fan page's relevance, importance, and appeal. The variables did not have an independent influence, and they did not show any significance standing alone.

However, the ANOVA tests showed a far more interesting result. The findings surprisingly revealed a dramatic three-way interaction effect of all three independent variables on relevance and importance (as seen in figures 1-4).

### *Relevance*

Relevance was greatly affected by interactivity, responsiveness and transparency. Though, none of the independent variables were effective on their own. The results showed that interactivity, responsiveness, and transparency had an effect on relevance only when they worked in conjunction with one another. The ANOVA tests also showed that high and low conditions were both effective and sometimes reversed. At times, high conditions were effective, but, then in other cases, low conditions were more effective or vice versa. One dramatic example is shown on figure 1. The plot shows that when interactivity was low and transparency was high, low responsiveness had a more significant effect on relevance than high responsiveness. The same pattern was also seen

on figure 2. Here, when interactivity and transparency were low, high responsiveness becomes more effective than low responsiveness.

Why did this occur? Since the study of social media is relatively new, it is hard to explain what really happened and why there was a three-way interaction. This is also the first time that interactivity, responsiveness, and transparency were tested together as independent variables. So, there could have been many reasons why the three-way interaction occurred. However, according to the researcher's interpretation, the fan page layout, the crisis message design, and presentation could have played a role in the results' outcome. For example, fan pages communicated a carefully tailored crisis message quickly and efficiently-following the highest Facebook and relationship management standards. Those Fan pages were purposely designed to also contain high-tech interactive tools such as Live Chat boxes, a video, and photos.

Ledingham & Bruning (1998), who developed the five dimensions of relationships between organizations and the public, suggested that product characteristics, perceptions of quality, service, price, levels of technology, demographics, and predispositions could impact the public's behavior toward a message or a brand. "The numeric value of each of these factors may vary, but there can be no doubt as to the significant contribution of public relations to this mix.[...] particularly when grounded in the organization-public relationship dimensions of trust, involvement, commitment, and openness" (pg.63). So, these factors could have played a major role in the results seen in ANOVA tests.

### *Importance*

A three-way interaction of all independent variables (interactivity, responsiveness, and transparency) also occurred in importance. In these ANOVA tests, the independent variables were only effective together. The results revealed that interactivity, responsiveness, and transparency had a significant effect on importance only when they were united. As in the case of relevance, the ANOVA tests showed that high and low conditions were both effective and reversed in importance. High and low conditions appeared to have an equal effect on importance. The variables also balanced one another. For example, high or low interactivity was not effective without high or low responsiveness and high or low transparency conditions, and vice-versa. Figure 3 and 4 clearly show those patterns. For instance, figure 3 showed that when interactivity was low and transparency was high, low responsiveness was more effective than high responsiveness. Figure 4, on the other hand, showed that when interactivity was high and transparency was low, high responsiveness was much more effective.

How did this happen? As the researcher mentioned above, this study only scratches the surface of the rapidly growing social media field and its tool capabilities. However, there is a possibility that the participants' demographics and the complexity of the crisis message presented on those Facebook conditions provided a surprising three-way interaction. In addition, the Facebook Fan pages could have been too high-tech in both high and low conditions, and users were not able to see a difference. In all high and low conditions, the researcher presented the Airline Company as an organization that was active on Facebook, and which allowed the users to freely comment and converse on their Fan page. Ledingham & Bruning (1998) study suggested that an organization-public

relationship concentrated around the five dimensions of relationships including involvement, investment, commitment, and openness highly impact the stay-leave decision of the public toward an organization. And that's what may have happened in these results. Despite the conditions' low or high status, the company was still active, involved, and open with the users.

### *Appeal*

The ANOVA results did not show a significant effect or a three-way interaction of interactivity, responsiveness, and transparency on appeal. One of the reasons why there wasn't seen an interaction in this dependent variable is because the researcher presented custom-built Facebook Fan pages. There is a possibility that participants were surprised to not see the usual Facebook timeline-even though the pages were simple and easy to navigate through. Perhaps respondents were not sure how to respond to the appeal questions in the questionnaire because they were not familiar with the design.

How would organizations benefit from these findings? These results indicate that organizations could benefit from a Facebook page that contains interactivity, responsiveness, and transparency. In order for companies to create relationships and increase the fan's trust and commitment, they need to design pages that are equally interactive, responsive, and transparent tailored to fit the user's wants and needs. Sallence et al. (2007) study suggests that designing messages relevant to a specific audience increases trust. Also "sites that provided these social identification cues were appreciated, as was the inclusion of familiar sounding language and highly relevant or personalized content" (pg. 1858). In addition, organizations can amplify Facebook pages by presenting their messages strategically to allow users to communicate dialogically as well as express



their opinions and concerns. McAllister's (2012) study found that users commit to brands when organizations present a message that allows them to engage and interact. "Internet features that provide generated return visits—such as admissions applications and downloadable forms, and image-forming features such as photos, streaming video, and virtual tours—were perceived as most important" (pg. 227).

## CHAPTER 8: CONCLUSION

The focus of the research study was to determine how interactivity, responsiveness, and transparency on the Airline Company's Facebook page affect its Fan page's relevance, importance, and appeal. The results revealed a dramatic three-way interaction effect of interactivity, responsiveness, and transparency on relevance and importance.

### *Limitations*

While this study contributes to the literature and the industry, future research on Facebook and its tools' capabilities is also needed to overcome the limitations of the present study. Past researchers have also attempted to study Facebook, but still haven't figured out how public relations practitioners should/could handle relationships with users. However, this research starts the conversation, and raises new questions about the field of social media and its relationship tools.

First, this research was limited to one population, USF students. While we found a strong effect of interactivity, responsiveness, and transparency on relevance and importance, it is possible that the perception of Facebook's communication strategies would be different in another area or among an older population. Further research using a population with a larger demographic including age, occupation, and education level could show better results.

In addition, this research only focused on specific messages using Facebook pages. Therefore, future research should examine other persuasive Facebook communication strategies that may influence users. Future research should also examine other popular social media sites such as Twitter, YouTube, and blogs, and how organizations are using those sites' tools to communicate and connect with users.

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## **APPENDICES**

**Appendix A: Extra Tables**

Table A1: Descriptive Analysis-Age

**Age**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid 18-27	196	98.0	98.0	98.0
28-37	4	2.0	2.0	100.0
Total	200	100.0	100.0	

Table A2: Descriptive Analysis-Gender

**Gender**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Male	48	24.0	24.0	24.0
Female	152	76.0	76.0	100.0
Total	200	100.0	100.0	



**Appendix A: Extra Tables (Continued)**

Table A3: Facebook Usage & Activity Results on Relevance

**Tests of Between-Subjects Effects**

Dependent Variable: Relevance

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected Model	30.981 <sup>a</sup>	9	3.442	2.396	.014	.102
Intercept	16.493	1	16.493	11.481	.001	.057
Facebookactivity	3.050	1	3.050	2.123	.147	.011
Facebookusage	1.197	1	1.197	.833	.363	.004
Interactivity	6.791	1	6.791	4.728	.031	.024
Responsiveness	.001	1	.001	.000	.983	.000
Transparency	.860	1	.860	.599	.440	.003
Interactivity * Responsiveness	1.324	1	1.324	.921	.338	.005
Interactivity * Transparency	.020	1	.020	.014	.907	.000
Responsiveness * Transparency	2.991	1	2.991	2.082	.151	.011
Interactivity * Responsiveness * Transparency	6.445	1	6.445	4.487	.035	.023
Error	272.939	190	1.437			
Total	1088.000	200				
Corrected Total	303.920	199				

a. R Squared = .102 (Adjusted R Squared = .059)

**Appendix A: Extra Tables (Continued)**

Table A4: Facebook Usage & Activity Results on Importance

**Tests of Between-Subjects Effects**

Dependent Variable: Importance

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected Model	39.446 <sup>a</sup>	9	4.383	3.750	.000	.151
Intercept	5.425	1	5.425	4.642	.032	.024
Facebookactivity	12.640	1	12.640	10.814	.001	.054
Facebookusage	.418	1	.418	.358	.550	.002
Interactivity	.245	1	.245	.210	.647	.001
Responsiveness	.009	1	.009	.008	.930	.000
Transparency	2.392	1	2.392	2.047	.154	.011
Interactivity * Responsiveness	.839	1	.839	.718	.398	.004
Interactivity * Transparency	.148	1	.148	.127	.722	.001
Responsiveness * Transparency	.026	1	.026	.022	.882	.000
Interactivity * Responsiveness * Transparency	5.220	1	5.220	4.466	.036	.023
Error	222.074	190	1.169			
Total	826.000	200				
Corrected Total	261.520	199				

a. R Squared = .151 (Adjusted R Squared = .111)

**Appendix A: Extra Tables (Continued)**

Table A5: Facebook Usage & Activity Results on Appeal

**Tests of Between-Subjects Effects**

Dependent Variable: Appeal

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected Model	32.607 <sup>a</sup>	9	3.623	2.522	.009	.107
Intercept	9.439	1	9.439	6.570	.011	.033
Facebookactivity	10.000	1	10.000	6.960	.009	.035
Facebookusage	.127	1	.127	.088	.767	.000
Interactivity	.259	1	.259	.180	.672	.001
Responsiveness	.317	1	.317	.220	.639	.001
Transparency	2.217	1	2.217	1.543	.216	.008
Interactivity * Responsiveness	1.959	1	1.959	1.363	.244	.007
Interactivity * Transparency	.004	1	.004	.003	.956	.000
Responsiveness * Transparency	3.084	1	3.084	2.146	.145	.011
Interactivity * Responsiveness * Transparency	2.390	1	2.390	1.663	.199	.009
Error	272.988	190	1.437			
Total	887.000	200				
Corrected Total	305.595	199				

a. R Squared = .107 (Adjusted R Squared = .064)

## Appendix B: Experiment Conditions

### Experiment Condition 1

The screenshot shows a Facebook page for 'Airline-1'. The page header includes the Facebook logo, a search bar, and the user's name 'Vjollca Hysenlika'. Below the header, there are navigation options for 'Airline-1' and 'My Site', and a 'Liked' button. The main content area is divided into several sections:

- The Airline Company:** A header with the company name and a 'Call Us 1800-AIR LINE' link. Below this is a 'LIVECHAT' section with the text 'Comments or Concerns?' and 'If you have any questions or comments regarding our latest crisis, please chat with one of our representatives LIVE right here on Facebook 24/7.' An 'ENTER CHAT' button is visible.
- Latest Video:** A video player showing a scene with a person and the text 'Will Recover We Will Make It Right'.
- Recent Photos:** A photo of a person sitting at a desk with a sign that says 'SUPPORT 24/7'.
- Latest Update:** A text box containing the following text:

Hello Friends, The Airline Company has been aware of what has transpired in the last 24 hours. For those who don't know, Jerry Smith, 80, from Clearwater, Fla., who is a veteran dying of esophageal cancer, has tried several times in the last few days to receive a \$137 refund due to his illness, but our company has refused to give him the money back. Our representatives have told Smith that the Airline Company's tickets are non-refundable, no exceptions.

That is our policy. A very important part of keeping our airfares reasonably priced is our refund policy. However, after revisiting our previous statements and also personally speaking to Mr. Smith, we understand his situation and frustration with our airline. Our company failed to demonstrate the respect or the compassion that we should have, given his medical condition and his service to our country. As President and CEO of Airline Company, I personally apologize to Mr. Smith, and I have decided to personally refund Mr. Smith and the Airline Company will make a \$7,500 donation to the charity of his choice.

We have worked hard to build a great company that makes air travel affordable while making our employees proud and customers satisfied. All of us at Airline Company extend our prayers and best wishes to Mr. Smith. If anyone has any questions or comments about this incident—now resolved, please write them in the comment box below and we will answer each and every one of them. Thank you for being our friends, and, as always, we appreciate your business.

Always Check our Fan Page for the latest, **up to the minute**, updates!

Below the main content area, there is a '10 comments' section with an 'Add a comment' button. Two comments are visible:

- Airline-1:** Airline: We have been notified. Everyone is entitled to his or her opinion and we can't stop them. Our priority right now is to make our customers satisfied and our employees proud. We want our customers to believe in us again. Reply · Like · Follow Post · September 17 at 10:59pm
- Airline-1:** Customer: Now, this is how you respond to a crisis. Great job! I saw this page through a friend and read what happened. After I saw how you handled the situation, I immediately liked the page and followed your posts. Reply · Like · Follow Post · September 17 at 10:58pm

[http://www.facebook.com/pages/Airline1/380110272023551?sk=app\\_12998258037855](http://www.facebook.com/pages/Airline1/380110272023551?sk=app_12998258037855)

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## Appendix B: Experiment Conditions (Continued)

### Experiment Condition 2

The screenshot shows a Facebook page for 'The Airline Company'. The page header includes navigation links for YouTube, Apple, Google Maps, Wikipedia, News (269), and Popular. The Facebook search bar is visible, along with the user's name 'Vjollca Hysenlika' and options for Voice and Home. The page content includes a 'LIVECHAT' section with the text 'Comments or Concerns?' and an 'ENTER CHAT' button. Below this is a 'Latest Video' player showing a video with the text 'I Will Recover We Will Make It Right'. To the right is a 'Latest Update' section with a text post. The text post reads: 'Hello Friends. The Airline Company has been aware of what has transpired in the last 24 hours. For those who don't know, Jerry Smith, 80, from Clearwater, Fla., who is a veteran dying of esophageal cancer, has tried several times in the last few days to receive a \$197 refund due to his illness, but our company has refused to give him the money back. Our representatives have told Smith that the Airline Company's tickets are non-refundable, no exceptions. That is our policy. A very important part of keeping our airfares reasonably priced is our refund policy. However, after revisiting our previous statements and also personally speaking to Mr. Smith, we understand his situation and frustration with our airline. Our company failed to demonstrate the respect or the compassion that we should have, given his medical condition and his service to our country. As President and CEO of Airline Company, I personally apologize to Mr. Smith, and I have decided to personally refund Mr. Smith and the Airline Company will make a \$7,000 donation to the charity of his choice. We have worked hard to build a great company that makes air travel affordable while making our employees proud and our customers satisfied. All of us at Airline Company extend our prayers and best wishes to Mr. Smith. If anyone has any questions or comments about this incident now resolved, please write questions below. You can also call our 1-800-air-line number or visit our website to submit any inquiries. We will try to answer your questions as soon as we can. Thank you for being our friends, and, as always, we appreciate your business.' Below the text post is a 'Recent Photos' section showing a photo of a man sitting at a desk. At the bottom, there is a comment section with '10 comments' and an 'Add a comment' button. A comment from 'Airline-2' is visible, reading: 'Customer: I feel the same way sir. They're being disrespectful to the fans. If you want us to stay here don't ignore us. Other companies dealing with a similar crisis take fans' comments and questions very serious. They personally answer to every comment and question. Reply · Like · Follow Post · September 17 at 11:04pm'. The footer of the page reads 'opening the page. For more information, choose Window > Activity.'

[http://www.facebook.com/pages/Airline2/343404849040080?sk=app\\_129982580378550](http://www.facebook.com/pages/Airline2/343404849040080?sk=app_129982580378550)

## Appendix B: Experiment Conditions (Continued)

### Experiment Condition 3

The screenshot shows a Facebook page for 'The Airline Company'. At the top, the Facebook logo and search bar are visible. The page header includes the name 'The Airline Company' and a phone number 'Call Us 1800-AIR-LINE'. A 'LIVECHAT' section is prominently displayed with the text 'Comments or Concerns?' and an 'ENTER CHAT' button. Below this, there are sections for 'Latest Video' (a video player with a play button and the text 'We Will Recover We Will Make It Right') and 'Recent Photos' (a photo of a man sitting at a desk with a sign that says 'SMILE YOU'VE GOT IT RIGHT'). A 'Latest Update' section contains a long text post from the President and CEO of the Airline Company, apologizing for a recent incident and offering a refund. The post reads: 'Hello Friends. The Airline Company has been aware of what has transpired in the last 24 hours. For those who don't know, Jerry Smith, 80, from Clearwater, Fla., who is a veteran dying of esophageal cancer, has tried several times in the last few days to receive a \$197 refund due to his illness, but our company has refused to give him the money back. Our representatives have told Mr. Smith that the Airline Company's tickets are non-refundable, no exceptions. We understand all of our Facebook fans' frustration and concern to know what actions our company is taking to resolve this misunderstanding with Mr. Smith. However, after careful consideration among all of us here at the Airline Company, we have decided to keep this matter private, and keep it ONLY between Mr. Smith and the airline. As President and CEO of Airline Company, I personally apologize for your inconvenience, but we believe this is right decision for our employees and our great company. We have worked hard to build a great company that makes air travel affordable while making our employees proud and our customers happy. All of us at Airline Company extend our prayers and best wishes to Mr. Smith. If anyone has any questions or comments about this incident-now resolved, please write them in the comment box below, Facebook inbox, call our 1-800-air-line number or visit our website to submit any inquiries. Send your personal information, and we will try to answer your questions as soon as possible, mostly privately. Thank you for giving us privacy, and, as always, we appreciate your business.'

Below the post, there are 10 comments. The first comment is from 'Airline-3' and reads: 'Customer: We're only asking for basic information. I think it's pretty normal. We're your customers. There's no need to be so secretive. Reply · Like · Follow Post · September 17 at 11:12pm'. The second comment is also from 'Airline-3' and reads: 'Customer: Great. That doesn't really tell me much. Thanks for NOT sharing. Why aren't you

[http://www.facebook.com/pages/Airline3/242167439214731?sk=app\\_12998258037855](http://www.facebook.com/pages/Airline3/242167439214731?sk=app_12998258037855)

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## Appendix B: Experiment Conditions (Continued)

### Experiment Condition 4

The screenshot shows the Facebook page for 'Airline-4'. At the top, the user is logged in as 'Vjollca Hysenlika'. The page header includes the Facebook logo, a search bar, and the text 'You are posting, commenting, and liking as Airline-4 — Change to Vjollca Hysenlika'. The main content area features a cover photo of an airplane, a 'LIVECHAT' section with an 'ENTER CHAT' button, a 'Latest Video' player showing a video titled 'Will Recover We Will Make It Right', and a 'Recent Photos' section with a photo of a customer at a desk. A 'Latest Update' section contains a text post from the airline company. Below this, a comment from a customer is visible, followed by a response from the airline company. The comment from the customer reads: 'Customer: Thank you for keeping us informed through Facebook with videos, photos, and chat box, but you have not been honest or engaging with us on here, your fans. Disappointing.' The airline company's response reads: 'We understand all of our Facebook fans' frustration and concern to know what actions our company is taking to resolve this misunderstanding with Mr. Smith. However, after careful consideration between everyone here at the Airline Company, we have decided to keep this matter private, and keep it ONLY between Mr. Smith and the airline. As President and CEO of Airline Company, I personally apologize for your inconvenience, but we believe this is a right decision for our employees and our great company. We have worked hard to build a great company that makes air travel affordable while making our employees proud and our customers happy. All of us at Airline Company extend our prayers and best wishes to Mr. Smith. If anyone has any questions or comments about this incident now resolved, please post comments below, call our 1-800-air-line number or visit our website, to submit any inquiries. We will try to answer your questions as soon as we can, privately. Thank you for giving us privacy, and, as always, we appreciate your business. Always Check our Fan Page for the latest, up to the minute, updates!'

[http://www.facebook.com/pages/Airline4/190082114442940?sk=app\\_12998258037855](http://www.facebook.com/pages/Airline4/190082114442940?sk=app_12998258037855)

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## Appendix B: Experiment Conditions (Continued)

### Experiment Condition 5

The screenshot shows the Facebook interface for a page named "Airline-5". The user is logged in as "Vjollca Hysenlika". The page header includes the Facebook logo, a search bar, and the user's name. Below the header, there are navigation options for "Airline-5" and "My Site", and a "Liked" button. The main content area features a post from "Airline-5" with the title "The Airline Company" and a call to action "Call Us 1-800-AIR-LINE". The post includes a "QUESTIONS BOX" for comments or concerns, a video player titled "Latest Video-It's Not Working at the Moment", and a "Latest Update" section containing a detailed statement from the company. The statement addresses a customer's complaint about a refund and a donation. Below the post, there are 10 comments, with two visible from "Airline-5" asking for more information and help with questions.

facebook Search for people, places and things Vjollca Hysenlika Voice

You are posting, commenting, and liking as Airline-5 — Change to Vjollca Hysenlika

Airline-5 My Site Liked

Here's what they'll see

The Airline Company Call Us 1-800-AIR-LINE

**QUESTIONS BOX**  
Comments or Concerns?  
If you have any questions or comments regarding our latest crisis, please ENTER your questions in the box below and we'll answer them as soon as we can.  
**ENTER Question**

**Latest Video-It's Not Working at the Moment**

**Latest Update**

Hello Friends. The Airline Company has been aware of what has transpired in the last 24 hours. For those who don't know, Jerry Smith, 80, from Clearwater, Fla., who is a veteran dying of esophageal cancer, has tried several times in the last few days to receive a \$197 refund due to his illness, but our company has refused to give him the money back. Our representatives have told Smith that the Airline Company's tickets are non-refundable, no exceptions.

That is our policy. A very important part of keeping our airfares reasonably priced is our refund policy. However, after revisiting our previous statements and also personally speaking to Mr. Smith, we understand his situation and frustration with our airline. Our company failed to demonstrate the respect or the compassion that we should have, given his medical condition and his service to our country. As President and CEO of Airline Company, I personally apologize to Mr. Smith, and I have decided to personally refund Mr. Smith and the Airline Company will make a \$7,500 donation to the charity of his choice.

We have worked hard to build a great company that makes air travel affordable while making our employees proud and our customers satisfied. All of us at Airline Company extend our prayers and best wishes to Mr. Smith. If anyone has any questions, comments or inquiries, about this incident-now resolved, post them up in the question box, reply to our comment/status update, call our 1-800-air-line number or visit our website. We will try to answer your questions as soon as we can. Thank you for being our friends, and, as always, we appreciate your business.

Always Check out our WEBSITE for the latest updates!

**We'll Post New Photos ASAP**

10 comments Add a comment

**Airline-5**  
Customer: Hello? Anyone here? And why can't we see any photos, links, or other helpful ways to better stay informed during this incident. Thanks for telling us what happened, but your not really keeping us informed.  
Reply · Like · Follow Post · September 17 at 11:20pm

**Airline-5**  
Customer: Can someone help answer our questions on Facebook? Why don't you answer our questions directly and openly on this page?  
Reply · Like · Follow Post · September 17 at 11:30pm

[http://www.facebook.com/pages/Airline5/147962971997421?sk=app\\_12998258037855](http://www.facebook.com/pages/Airline5/147962971997421?sk=app_12998258037855)

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## Appendix B: Experiment Conditions (Continued)

### Experiment Condition 6

You are posting, commenting, and liking as Airline-6 — Change to Vjolica Hysenlika

Airline-6 My Site Liked

## The Airline Company

Call Us: 1-800-AIR-LINE



**WELCOME!**  
Thank you for visiting our Facebook Page!



**Latest Video (Not Working at the Moment)**



No Photos - We'll Add ASAP



**Latest Update**

Hello Friends. The Airline Company has been aware of what has transpired in the last 24 hours. For those who don't know, Jerry Smith, 80, from Clearwater, Fla., who is a veteran dying of esophageal cancer, has tried several times in the last few days to receive a \$197 refund due to his illness, but our company has refused to give him the money back. Our representatives have told Mr. Smith that the Airline Company's tickets are non-refundable, no exceptions.

That is our policy. A very important part of keeping our airfares reasonably priced is our refund policy. However, after revisiting our previous statements and also personally speaking to Mr. Smith, we understand his situation and frustration with our airline. Our company failed to demonstrate the respect or the compassion that we should have, given his medical condition and his service to our country. As President and CEO of Airline Company, I personally apologize to Mr. Smith, and I have decided to personally refund Mr. Smith. The Airline Company will also make a \$7,000 donation to the charity of his choice.

We have worked hard to build a great company that makes air travel affordable while making our employees proud and our customers satisfied. All of us at Airline Company extend our prayers and best wishes to Mr. Smith. If anyone has any questions or comments about this incident-now resolved, please call our 1-800-air-line number or visit our website to submit any inquiries. We will try to answer your questions as soon as we can. Thank you for being our friends, and, as always, we appreciate your business.

Always Check our WEBSITE for the latest updates!

10 comments ▾ [Add a comment](#)

**Airline-6**  
Customer: Why can't you show us photos or a video to express your remorse or update us with what's going on with Mr. Smith? It's really easy to post links, videos or photos on here. It takes 5 seconds people! And it takes 5 seconds to respond to our requests/questions!  
Reply · Like · Follow Post · July 29 at 11:54pm

**Airline-6**  
Customer: Hello? Anyone here? And why can't we see any photos, links, or other helpful ways to better stay informed about this incident? I appreciate your honesty, but you're not using these interactive tools to help us stay informed.  
Reply · Like · Follow Post · July 29 at 11:55pm

[http://www.facebook.com/pages/Airline6/204403976339282?sk=app\\_12998258037855](http://www.facebook.com/pages/Airline6/204403976339282?sk=app_12998258037855)

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## Appendix B: Experiment Conditions (Continued)

### Experiment Condition 7

The screenshot shows the Facebook page for 'Airline-7'. At the top, the Facebook navigation bar is visible with the search bar and the user's name 'Vjollca Hysenlika'. Below the navigation bar, the page header for 'The Airline Company' includes the name and a 'Call Us 1800-AIR-LINE' link. A 'QUESTION BOX' section is prominently displayed, titled 'Comments or Concerns?' and containing an 'ENTER Question' button. Below this, a video player is shown with the caption 'Latest Video-Not Working at the Moment'. To the right, the 'Latest Update' section contains a text-based apology from the company, stating that they are aware of the issues and are working to resolve them. Below the update, there is a section for '10 comments' with an 'Add a comment' button. Three comments are visible, all from users named 'Airline-7', expressing frustration and asking for more information.

facebook Search for people, places and things Vjollca Hysenlika You are posting, commenting, and liking as Airline-7 — Change to Vjollca Hysenlika

## The Airline Company

Call Us 1800-AIR-LINE

### QUESTION BOX

Comments or Concerns?

If you have any questions or comments regarding our latest crisis, please ENTER your question in the box below and we'll answer them as soon as we can.

ENTER Question

### Latest Video-Not Working at the Moment

Latest Update

Hello Friends. The Airline Company has been aware of what has transpired in the last 24 hours. For those who don't know, Jerry Smith, 80, from Clearwater, Fla., who is a veteran dying of esophageal cancer, has tried several times in the last few days to receive a \$197 refund due to his illness, but our company has refused to give him the money back. Our representatives have told Mr. Smith that the Airline Company's tickets are non-refundable, no exceptions.

We understand all of our Facebook fans' frustration and concern to know what actions our company is taking to resolve this misunderstanding with Mr. Smith. However, after careful consideration between everyone here at the Airline Company, we have decided to keep this matter private, and keep it ONLY between Mr. Smith and the airline. As President and CEO of Airline Company, I personally apologize for your inconvenience, but we believe this is right decision for our employees and our great company.

We have worked hard to build a great company that makes air travel affordable while making our employees proud and our customers happy. All of us at Airline Company extend our prayers and best wishes to Mr. Smith. If anyone has any questions or comments about this incident-now resolved, post comments below, call our 1-800-air-line number or visit our website to submit any inquiries. We will try to answer your questions as soon as we can, privately. Thank you for giving us privacy, and, as always, we appreciate your business.

Always Check out our WEBSITE for the latest updates!

10 comments ▾ Add a comment

**Airline-7**  
Customer: Your company has been terrible at taking advantage of the tools Facebook has to offer. You seem very old fashioned. C'mon people it's 2012! Be honest and open! It will only help you!  
Reply · Like · Follow Post · September 17 at 11:38pm

**Airline-7**  
Customer: Hello? Anyone here? And why can't we see any photos, links, or other helpful ways to better stay informed about this incident? And you're not really sharing any information.  
Reply · Like · Follow Post · September 17 at 11:36pm

**Airline-7**  
Customer: Okqaaaay, where are the photos, the videos, the Live chat bpx? .

[http://www.facebook.com/pages/Airline7/101185140015785?sk=app\\_12998258037855](http://www.facebook.com/pages/Airline7/101185140015785?sk=app_12998258037855)

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## Appendix B: Experiment Conditions (Continued)

### Experiment Condition 8

The screenshot shows a Facebook page for 'Airline-8'. The page header includes the Facebook logo, a search bar, and the user's name 'Vjollca Hysenlika'. Below the header, there's a navigation bar with 'Airline-8 My Site' and a 'Liked' button. The main content area features a cover photo of an airplane and a 'WELCOME' message. A video player is labeled 'Latest Video- Not Working at the Moment'. The 'Latest Update' section contains a text post from the airline company, dated July 30 at 12:13am, which reads: 'Hello Friends. The Airline Company has been aware of what has transpired in the last 24 hours. For those who don't know, Jerry Smith, 80, from Clearwater, Fla., who is a veteran dying of esophageal cancer, has tried several times in the last few days to receive a \$197 refund due to his illness, but our company has refused to give him the money back. Our representatives have told Mr. Smith that the Airline Company's tickets are non-refundable, no exceptions. We understand all of our Facebook fans' frustration and concern to know what actions our company is taking to resolve this misunderstanding with Mr. Smith. However, after careful consideration between everyone here at the Airline Company, we have decided to keep this matter private—and keep it ONLY between Mr. Smith and the airline. As President and CEO of Airline Company, I personally apologize for your inconvenience, but we believe this is the right decision for our employees and our great company. We have worked hard to build a great company that makes air travel affordable while making our employees proud and our customers happy. All of us at Airline Company extend our prayers and best wishes to Mr. Smith. If anyone has any questions or comments about this incident—now resolved, please call our 1-800-air-line number or visit our website, NOT Facebook, to submit any inquiries. We will try to answer your questions privately. Thank you for giving us privacy, and, as always, we appreciate your business. Always Check out our WEBSITE for the latest updates!'. Below the post, there are 10 comments. Two comments are visible: one from 'Airline-8' (Customer) stating 'I tried calling your 1-800 number. No one responds. You've been terrible at taking advantage of these Facebook tools. They seem old fashioned. C'mon people it's 2012! Can someone answer our questions directly and openly here on Facebook? I hate you!' and another from 'Airline-8' (Customer) stating 'Why can't you show us photos or a video to express your remorse or update us with what's going on with Mr. Smith? It's really easy to post links, videos or photos on here. It takes 5 seconds, and it takes 5 seconds to respond to our requests/questions. You are shady and disgusting!'. The page footer shows the URL: [http://www.facebook.com/pages/Airline8/382116885152320?sk=app\\_12998258037855](http://www.facebook.com/pages/Airline8/382116885152320?sk=app_12998258037855)

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## Appendix C: Experiment Protocol



School of Mass Communications  
MMC 6971: Thesis Master's Research Study  
Vjollca Hysenlika  
IRB Number Pro00009380

October 2, 2012

Dear Respondent,

I am a student from the University of South Florida majoring in Strategic Communication Management, and I am conducting a controlled experiment for my master's thesis course. The purpose of the research study is to determine how organizations communicate on Facebook during a crisis and how their interactivity, responsiveness, and transparency affect the consumer's trust and commitment. I am inviting you to participate in this research study by answering a three-page questionnaire.

If you choose to participate in this research, please look at the custom designed Facebook Page and read the Airline Company's crisis response message after they refused to refund a ticket to an 80-year-old dying veteran. After looking at the message response and communications between the organization and fans, please answer all the questions as honestly as possible and immediately give the researcher the completed questionnaires without sharing your answers with anyone. Your participation is voluntary. You're free to decline participation at any time if you do not wish to view the material.

If you have any questions or concerns about completing the questionnaire or about participating in this study, you may contact me at Ms. Hysenlika (813) 841-7824 or email at [vhysenli@mail.usf.edu](mailto:vhysenli@mail.usf.edu). If you have any questions about your rights as a participant in this study, general questions, or have complaints, concerns or issues you want to discuss with someone outside the research, call the USF IRB at (813) 974-5638.

Thank you in advance,  
Vjollca Hysenlika  
USF Graduate Student  
Major: Strategic Communication Management  
School of Mass Communications  
University of South Florida

## Appendix D: Informed Consent Form



School of Mass Communications  
MMC 6971: Thesis Master's Research Study  
Vjollca Hysenlika  
IRB Number Pro00009380

### Purpose and Background

Ms. Vjollca Hysenlika, graduate student in the School of Mass Communications at the University of South Florida, is conducting a research study on Mass Communications students at USF, located on 4202 E. Fowler Avenue in Tampa, Florida. The purpose of this research study is to determine how organizations communicate on Facebook during a crisis using the relationship management theory. To accomplish that goal, Ms. Hysenlika will conduct an experimental research study to investigate how their interactivity, responsiveness, and transparency affect the consumer's trust and commitment.

Mr/Mrs. \_\_\_\_\_, is being asked to participate in this research to investigate how an organization's interactivity, responsiveness, and transparency on Facebook affect he/she's (the consumer) trust and commitment.

### Procedures

If Mr./Mrs. \_\_\_\_\_ agrees to be a participant in the research, the following will happen:

1. He/she will participate in an experiment with Ms. Hysenlika, and he/she will be asked to read a cover letter containing directions, look at an organization's Facebook page and its response during a crisis, and answer a set of questionnaires (Likert scale).
2. He/she will also be asked about his age, gender, occupation, and educational level.

## Appendix D: Informed Consent Form (Continued)

### Risks/and or Discomforts

1. The experiment information will be used in Ms. Hysenlika's master's thesis. However, that information will be kept confidential, and will only be used for this research study. Their names will remain anonymous, and will never be revealed in the thesis or research results.
2. The process may take up to 15 minutes, and he/she may become tired or bored.

### Compensation/Benefit

The students may be offered extra credit (as a form of compensation) for participating in the research.

### Costs/Financial Considerations

There will be no financial costs for participants as a result of taking part in this research.

### Payment/Reimbursement

Participants will not be paid or reimbursed for participating in this study.

### Questions

Mr./Mrs. \_\_\_\_\_ will talk to Ms. Hysenlika about this study and she will answer all the questions. If there's any additional questions Mr./Mrs. \_\_\_\_\_ can contact Ms. Hysenlika at (813) 841-7824 or email at [vhysenli@mail.usf.edu](mailto:vhysenli@mail.usf.edu). If he/she has any questions about his/her rights as a participant in this study, general questions, or have complaints, concerns or issues he/she wants to discuss with someone outside the research, call the USF IRB at (813) 974-5638.

### Consent

Mr./Mrs. \_\_\_\_\_ will be given a copy of this consent form to keep. Participation in this research study is voluntary. Mr./Mrs. \_\_\_\_\_ can withdraw at any time. Mr./Mrs. \_\_\_\_\_'s signature below indicates that he/she agrees to participate in this research.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Subject's Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date of Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Person Obtaining Consent

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date of Signature

## Appendix E: Experiment Questionnaire

Rate questions on a scale of 1 to 5.	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
	1	2	3	4	5
[The airline was highly interactive, and used tools including Live Chat boxes, videos, photos and other interactive features to communicate with fans.]	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
[The airline was highly responsive on this Facebook page.]	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
[The airline was transparent with fans on its Facebook Page.]	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>After looking at the Airline Company's crisis message on Facebook answer the following questions:</b>	Highly Unlikely	Unlikely	Neutral	Likely	Highly Likely
[After looking at the company's response how likely is it that you would follow it on Facebook?]	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
[After seeing the airline's message strategy, how likely is it that you would regularly click/use its fan page?]	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
[After looking at the airline's overall crisis response, how likely is it that you would fly with it?]	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

## Appendix E: Experiment Questionnaire (Continued)

### Facebook Usage

1. How often do you use Facebook?

Never  Once a month  Once a week  Once a day  A few times a day

2. Are you active on Facebook?

Never Active  Somewhat active  Neutral  Active  Very Active

3. What do you use Facebook for?

Connect with Friends/Family  Read other's posts  Comment on other's post  
 Share videos, photos  Connect with organizations  Communicate with organiz.  
 Other

### Airline Involvement

1. How often do you fly?

Never  Just a few times a year  Maybe 5 to 9 times a year  About 10-19 times a year

At least 20 times a year

2. Which company do you fly with?

Delta  American Airlines  United  AirTran  Other \_\_\_\_\_

3. Which Airline Companies do you Like on Facebook?

American Airlines  United  AirTran  Delta  Other \_\_\_\_\_  None



## Appendix E: Experiment Questionnaire (Continued)

### Airline Involvement Cont'

1. How often in the past year did you express your opinion (interact with, respond to) on an organization's Facebook Page after a crisis occurred?

Never  Sometimes  Neutral  Often  Very Often

2. How interested are you in getting the latest and most up-to-date information on Facebook during and after an organizational crisis?

Not interested  Somewhat Interested  Neutral  Interested  Very interested

3. How important is it to you to stay informed on Facebook during and after an organization's emergency situation?

Not important  Somewhat Important  Neutral  Important  Very important

4. How relevant is it to you an organization's Facebook communication during and after a crisis?

Not relevant  Somewhat relevant  Neutral  Relevant  Very relevant

### Demographics

[Age]

18-27  28-37  38-47  48-57  58 or older

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[Gender]

Male  Female

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[Occupation]

[.....]

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[Highest Level of Education]

High School  Associate Degree  Bachelor's Degree  Master's Degree  
 Doctoral Degree