Online Crisis Communication
– Fall Like Domino’s –

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Please note

- All references are based on the American Psychological Association’s format (APA style), thereby, referred to in brackets e.g. (Lynch, 2006, pp. 10 - 12). Should the author be mentioned before a quote or statement, page-number(s) at the end of the text, section, or paragraph indicate(s) the more precise source of reference e.g. Lynch (2006) claims… … … (pp. 12 – 13).

- Webpage references will be referred to in brackets starting with capital letters e.g. (Business Week), whereas personal sources are given appendix numbers e.g. (App. 1).

- The full length of this report is equal to: 149.072 characters without spaces ~ 68 normal pages
ABSTRACT

Based on theoretical analyses of and discussions on globalization, social media and crisis communication it will be determined what foundation is needed to create an online crisis communication model. The foundation will be presented through the different aspects of the three mentioned theoretical areas. Different theories within each field will be brought up for discussion and evaluation in order to create a strong foundation for an online crisis communication model. This will be followed by an online crisis communication model that will be constructed based on the results and finding from the previous chapters. This online crisis communication model will then be applied to the Domino's business case and afterwards a critical analysis of Domino's online crisis communication efforts will be presented and tied in with recommendations. The thesis will close with a sum of the findings throughout the thesis and include final remarks on the online crisis communication model and its use.

In order to provide the reader with a structured overview, the thesis has been divided into seven chapters. Each chapter represents a new section, yet, all parts must be considered as belonging to the same synergetic hybrid, and should therefore be interpreted as a holistic whole. A short presentation of the seven chapters shall now be formulated to prepare the reader for what to expect, when reading through the different sections:

**Chapter 1 – Introductive Part:** The introductive part is constituted by an assortment of diverse, yet interconnected, pre-phase elements and sections, which carry the purpose of guiding the reader into the main thoughts of the thesis. Also, the report structure, the case of Domino’s, the problem statement, delimitation, and the motivation of choice shall be presented here.

**Chapter 2 – Scientific Fundament & Methodological Approach:** The purpose of this chapter is to justify the reasons for choosing the given scientific fundament, philosophical hermeneutics, while linking it to the methodological approach. The chapter shall be used as a constant reference throughout the thesis, as much of the fundament finds its resonance here.

**Chapter 3 - Theoretical Framework & Conceptualization:** This section presents the theoretical fields behind the theoretical approach to online crisis communication. Main focus shall be given to the academic dimensions within globalization, social media, and crisis communication. The purpose is to prove how the fields are interrelated and have strong theoretical correlations leading toward the conceptualization of a viable model within online crisis communication c.f. Chapter 4.

**Chapter 4 – Theoretical Analysis: Crisis Communication in the New Media Landscape:** Chapter 4 unites globalization, social media and crisis communication into an integrated platform of synergetic use. The chapters is based on the seven sections: Detection and Recognition, Prioritize, Mobilize, Analyze, Engagement, Walking the Talk and Talking the Walk, and Crisis Evaluation. Furthermore two surrounding dimensions named Context Consciousness and Kaizen are added to emphasize the importance of continuously improvement. The chapter applies the before mentioned sections onto a business context in terms of crisis communication. The different sections stress the problems, solutions and pitfalls when dealing with a corporate crisis.
Chapter 5 – Practical Analysis: The Business Case of Domino’s: This chapter now incorporates the theoretical analysis from the previous chapter with the business case of Domino’s introduced in chapter 1. The seven sections and two dimensions established in chapter 4 will have their theoretical approach applied to a practical analysis. Domino’s choices and omissions will be presented and discussed in terms of correspondence with the presented theoretical findings.

Chapter 6 – Recommendations: This chapter will present the recommendations for Domino’s online crisis communication efforts in the light of the theoretical and practical background established in chapter four and five. The chapter will look into recommendations both in regards to what Domino’s should have differently in the case timeline and how they overall should have handled the crisis. The recommendations will be divided into the same seven sections and two dimensions that are utilized in the two previous chapters.

Chapter 7 – Conclusive Remarks: Finally, the conclusive remarks shall round off the dissertation, and the different chapters will be brought together to form an overview over the different results and findings. The focus in this chapter will be mainly on end results for Domino’s and how using the model would influence the crisis outcome in the present case and in the future. In this manner, and by considering the sub-questions connected to the problem statement, the author shall seek answers to how a theoretical model and approach may be applied in the new world of online crisis communication.
I would like to send a mark of respect to the partners involved in this thesis. Without the cooperative commitments from these persons, this project could never have started or finished.

*Therefore, I would like to thank:*

All the professors and my fellow students who have given me valuable knowledge and experiences of academic, professional and social character throughout my years of studying. Due to their friendship, fellowship and guidance, it has become possible to be in the position of which I am today. For that, I send a great “thank you” to everybody having passed my road the past five years.

My family for having supported me throughout the entire process and continuously pushing me towards the end goal.

Peter Kastberg for being my supervisor and helping me through the process. I would like to especially thank Mr. Kastberg for getting me on the right academic track when having doubts or second-thoughts on how to move on with the thesis.

And last but certainly not least, my former supervisor who played a major role in forming the first steps of the thesis. I thank him for his valuable comments, broad knowledge, and great insight of the possibilities within the subject. I would also like to thank him for helping me walking the extra mile in structuring the thesis, limiting the various fields and sharpening my overall academic skills. Therefore, I send a special “thank you” to Mr. Woodward as well.
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CHAPTER 1
Introductive Part

The introductive part is constituted by an assortment of diverse, yet interconnected, pre-phase elements and sections carrying the purpose of guiding the reader into the main thoughts of the thesis.

The central composition is to be imagined as an hourglass, in which the structure initiates a broad scope of attention at first, and then narrows down the central pieces into concentrated sections. Subsequently, the subjects of globalization, social media, and crisis communication as well as the business case of Domino’s shall open the thesis before being contracted into one problem statement. In determining which specific issues and challenges being relevant to the given case, delimitative elements and dimensions will be considered accordingly. Also motivational factors for subjective decision making shall be justified, before turning to the academics of scientific method and theoretical framing.

The overall thesis structure, however, shall be presented on the first page to provide the reader with an overview of how the combined chapters function as a holistic hybrid. Thus, the raison d’être is based on an intended rationale of securing procedural understanding and guidance through illustrative comprehension.
# Thesis Structure

## CHAPTER 1 - INTRODUCTIVE PART

**Key Sections:** Thesis Structure, An Online Global Landscape of Social Communication and Interaction, Business Case: Fall like Domino’s, Problem Statement, Delimitation, and Motivation of Choice.

**Purpose:** Guiding the reader into the structure, the main thoughts, and the ideas behind the thesis in order to focus the understandings of how the holistic frame is set up.

## CHAPTER 2 - SCIENTIFIC FUNDAMENT AND METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

**Key Sections:** Scientific Fundament and Methodological Approach.

**Purpose:** Justifying and specifying the reasons for choosing scientific fundament and methodological approach, while explaining how the choices interact and intertwine.

## CHAPTER 3 - THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK & CONCEPTUALIZATION

**Key Sections:** Globalization, Social Media, Crisis Communication and Online Crisis Communication.

**Purpose:** Presenting and framing the theoretical field and thoughts regarding the situational analysis and recommendations.

## CHAPTER 4 – THEORETICAL ANALYSIS: CRISIS COMMUNICATION IN THE NEW MEDIA LANDSCAPE

**Key Sections:** The Online Crisis Communication model, including subsections

**Purpose:** Explore the potential in the interplay between the theoretical sections both in terms of problems as well as positive effects/opportunities

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**Purpose:** Creating a situational analysis of the business case and the company involved to uncover how practical application of the theory affects the present and future situation of the involved parties.

## CHAPTER 6 - RECOMMENDATIONS

**Key Section:** The highs and lows of the case and its result, the perspective of the lessons learned.

**Purpose:** Based on the case, creating recommendations in regards to the present case to improve future response strategies and tactics.

## CHAPTER 7 - CONCLUSIVE REMARKS

**Key Sections:** Contextualization, Conclusion, Bibliography, and Appendices c.f. Phase III.

**Purpose:** Rounding off the thesis by putting the findings into perspective, discussing the importance of implementing and monitoring and presenting a conclusive overview of the findings and results.
1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Motivation of Choice

In this first section, the author will make use of “I-form” due to the personal choices. Throughout, the rest of the thesis, however, I will refer to myself as “the author”.

Throughout my years as a student, both on the bachelor and the master level, I have always held a great interest in areas pertaining to the online world and the communication and dialog driving it. In my academic life, I have thus continuously sought to apply the acquired theoretical and practical tools on the digital landscape. Moreover, I have constantly been exploring new areas where offline academic theory and online digital culture would clash or fuse, hence, bringing new possibilities, problems or energies to both fields.

In addition, to the educational perspective, my interest in the online world has been derived from other aspects of my life including personal and professional settings. Growing up in a digitalizing age, the new technology, the possibilities, and the innovative aspects brought along spawned an interest in me from a very early age. As my curiosity about communication surfaced, the natural choice was to combine them into the area of social media and web 2.0.

More professionally this has brought me to utilize my personal interest and academically honed skills in work positions for the university, broadcasting corporations, and event management companies. This further developed the interest in merging the world of practical application and theoretical discussion in the effort to strengthen them both.

As the time to plan and write my master thesis neared, I never had any doubt that it would revolve around the digital media landscape and the communication that resided therein. I have previously dwelled into the world of crisis communication and the dynamic, interchangeable aspects of the fields regarding the online world, and especially, social media. Having a chance to combine these was therefore a great motivational factor in itself, yet, I also saw a great opportunity for taking my knowledge one step further.

As mentioned, my interest has always been to look into completely or partly uncharted waters and exploring the possibilities. Using this as the vantage point for the thesis, it was a natural choice to investigate the area of social media in connection with crisis communication, and attempt to create a model for dealing with these in a combined manner. For me it brought the possibility to lengthily dive into these worlds and methodically approach their similarities and differences in an effort to map some of the uncharted waters, I have been fascinated with for so long.

Consequently, when assessing my academic, professional and personal interests and skills, online crisis communication was therefore not only the right choice, but indeed a motivational factor in itself.
1.2. An Online Global Landscape of Social Communication and Interaction

A common saying is that the world has become a smaller place indicating that the geographic dimensions of our planet have changed – physically and mentally. How far along we are in the process of shrinking the known fosters a common ground for ongoing debates in which aforementioned physical distances and mental understandings rank highly on the agenda. However, no matter the attitudes and opinions toward the issue of globalization and proximity inclination, one thing cannot be ignored: We are living in a globalizing world with technologies making it possible to surpass general ideas of common time/space continuums. In other words, the dynamics of the global world impacts our daily lives more than ever (Scholte, 2000, pp. 1-3).

Following the iterative processes in an emergent manner thus seems to be the only way of grappling onto the narrow edge of our imaginary predictions concentrated on what the future might bring. We are no longer moving because the world is spinning around, but are breaking daily rhythms and surpassing geographic distances as needed - and at speeds never experienced before. Our conventional understandings of time, speed, and space are challenged on a daily basis to which the global context, in its online and offline form, is facilitating the developmental patterns of our social interactions. Subsequently, through enhanced networks of transnational collectivism, the individual experiences new degrees of empowerment and self-governed authority. This individual collectivism flowing in, especially, the online world fosters a growing demand for improving our global understanding, which grows progressively with the rise of new technologies. We live in a world of social bonding and networking, but are no longer restricted to our nearby peers by proximity or time frames. Likeminded parties join together and gather in strong communities fighting off or against common causes. Conversations, dialogues, and knowledge sharing are the crux of the new imagined world, and the power of the pen has never been stronger. It is to be noted, however, that the ownership of the power rests not only with the writer, but to a large degree the receiver. Therefore, the power is democratic in nature and follows an egalitarian process in the search for gaining explicit momentum. As a result, the online and the “offline” world slowly, but surely, merge into a holistic hybrid of social engagement in which the new playing field offers a new paradigm of collaborative commitment (Scott, 2009, p. 26).

With this, the rapidity of communication is racing along at an incredible speed and significantly increasing the turmoil of dealing with, as well as fostering, new issues within the field of crisis communication. Images and reputations are constantly at risk and even the best may falter within a very short amount of time due to the increased speed on the online highways. News, discussions, and rumors are embraced in real-life time by the “listening world”, which greatly impacts small, medium and large businesses dealings in different markets. As a result, companies and organization are being scrutinized, discussed and assessed from every possible angle which deems the necessity for taking a proactive stand toward their stakeholders. Several crises over the last years have proven that virtual voices are not to be taken lightly and are not something that will “just go away”. The online opinion is a force to be reckoned and must be addressed and dealt with in a serious manner.

Basically, the approach is no different than the classic crises setup, however, the way and means to deal with the newborn type of crisis are. The users, consumers, and customers have changed their ways in how they gain information and knowledge and, more importantly, how they form their opinions. Thus, risk management may enter a new phase in which the importance of open dialogue and engagement has become even more evident. As a consequence, organizations are required to change their crisis communications approach as things may go from bad to worse with the blink of an eye. Crises can make or break any organization that is
not prepared to defend, explain or communicate in time, and social media 2.0 has become the common tool in this online tug of war. To perform successful and adequate crisis communication, one needs to meet the stakeholders at the new home ground: The social online media platform (Solis, 2008, p. 6).

We shall now look into the business case of Domino’s to get an understanding of how the power of online social media plays a vital role on the impact of today’s business world.

1.3. Business Case: Fall like Domino’s

*The Chinese use two brush strokes to write the word ‘crisis’: One brush stroke stands for danger; the other for opportunity. In a crisis, be aware of the danger - but recognize the opportunity*”


Domino’s Pizza Inc. is an international pizza company founded in 1960 by Tom Monaghan and his brother James and is based out of Ann Arbor in the United States. The business expanded rapidly throughout the following decades leaving Domino’s with 8,500 stores and 145,000 employees spread across 55 different countries in 2007. The majority of the stores are placed in the United States, numbering around 5,000, with the remaining 3,500 spread out on all inhabitable continents. As of 2007, Domino's pizza had revenue of $1,462 billion which was expected to continually grow (Domino's Homepage). While everything seemed to lead the company towards even more success, global expansion and increased revenues, the table was about to turn.

In early 2009, five videos were posted on YouTube showing two employees from Domino’s Pizza in Conover, North Carolina, preparing fast-food in an extremely repulsive manner before passing it on to the customers. The video was removed shortly after coming to the attention of Domino’s, but by that time the damage had been done. Over a million viewers on YouTube had watched and commented on the videos and the real power of social media severely kicked in. The videos soon surfaced on most of the top ten search results on Google and Twitter, and the microblogging network (Clifford, 2009) quickly picked up the story only to spread it with the speed of lightning. Domino’s was kneed, at least in the eye of the public, but chose not to react to what was interpreted as a “minor and isolated incident” with no impact on the rest of the business. The company’s analysis, if any, of the situation seemed surprisingly flawed and it soon became apparent that they were not prepared for or geared towards dealing with this type of crisis. By negating the importance and ignoring the problem, they took on a naive and pacifistic approach toward the case, hoping that the “crisis” would eventually die away without causing harm to the company brand. They were, however, wrong. The virtual world was looking for answers/reactions from Domino’s, and their dissatisfaction with the lack of response soon spread to a wider audience scope.

Domino’s finally realized that they had to engage with their stakeholders to enforce general damage control and to seize the opportunity of making valuable learning experiences from the incident. Yet, based on their lack of preparedness and vague intentions of sincere engagement, they used the right tools wrongly by
sending out a formal, one-way press release through the social media of YouTube. The repercussions of Domino’s’ way of handling the case - based on vague understandings, analysis, and crisis communication tactics - led to a revenue loss worth millions of dollars, a falling stock value, and a heavily damaged brand equity (Jackson, 2010).

The learning points from Domino's are many, but some of the key factors can be said to include:

1. Domino’s did not recognize and prioritize the crisis at hand before it was too late.
2. They had not prepared for any such case and were incapable of mobilizing a strong crisis communications team to deal with the stakeholders immediately.
3. They did not carry out a thorough analysis of the case or the repercussions leading to bad management decisions on how to handle the crisis.
4. They did not engage with their stakeholders in an orderly manner and used the right tools in the wrong way.
5. They took in the valuable learning pieces and responded to them, but did not progressively and proactively deal with the issues in a continuous manner.

(Clifford, 2009; Shankleman, 2009)

As a result, Domino’s failed at many levels and on several occasions which forced them even deeper into the crisis. Before turning to the problem statement, a quote by Clifford (2009) shall be presented to emphasize the core issue in Domino’s’ business case:

"In social media, if you think it's not going to spread, that's when it gets bigger"

This reminds us that stakeholder engagement and dialogue are key words in an online global landscape of social communication and interaction when dealing with a crisis. As to this, if we build our online crisis communication as Domino’s, we shall fall like dominos.

1.4. Problem Statement

The case studies of Domino's cultivate a deeper understanding for and interesting insight to, how social media affects the flow of an online crisis. Studying and analyzing the case thus provides a good vantage point for digging into how social and communicative paradigms have changed in the global-online world, in which minor issues may turn into major crises within a few hours. In order to deal with the business case, the theoretical fields of globalization, social media, and crisis communication shall be taken into consideration in the search for a holistic approach/model based on synergetic connectors.
What dimensions within globalization, social media, and crisis communication must be considered when creating a theoretical foundation for dealing with online crisis communication in a social media context, and how does this correspond to the business case of Domino’s in a present and future perspective?

Sub-questions to answer the overall problem statement are divided into chapters beneath:

**Chapter 2: Scientific Fundament and Methodological Approach**

What scientific fundament within Positivism, Critical Rationalism, Social Constructivism, and Hermeneutics, including the following methodological approach, offers the best conditions for developing the thesis, and thereby, the theoretical foundation for dealing with crises in a social media setting?

**Chapter 3: Theoretical Framework & Conceptualization**

Which theoretical fields within “Corporate Communications” must be encountered when developing the theoretical foundation, and how may these be incorporated?

**Chapter 4: Theoretical Analysis**

How can the theoretical elements from the findings of Chapter 3 be fused into combined strategic model/approach in order to deal with online crisis communication?

**Chapter 5: Business Case Analysis**

How may the findings of the theoretical analysis be transferred to the business case of Domino’s in order to find potential strengths and weaknesses in their way of handling the crisis?

**Chapter 6: Recommendations**

What could Domino’s have done differently in handling the crisis, and how can they as an organization apply a theoretical foundation as a practical tool in the future?

While the key areas in the specific chapters cover the issues of the problem statement, a few others have been left out to sharpen the overall structure and understanding. As a result, before turning to Chapter 2, we shall briefly touch upon the delimitations of the thesis.

1.5. Delimitation

The scope of the thesis has been limited to the chosen theoretical paradigms and fields of globalization, crisis communication and social media to confine and focus the report span. As a result, concrete selection processes of delimitating the number of dimensions and aspects have been utilized to secure a clear-cut frame of centered attention, thereby, leaving out direct theories within e.g. change management, corporate branding, rhetoric and linguistics, and human resource management.
Accordingly, the theoretical frame of the thesis could have carried an even wider scope of conceptual objectivity by adding more supplementary views and theories. However, this was not recommendable as it would have resulted in comprehensive theoretical discussions, and thus neglected the desired focal point: Combining theory and the organizational crisis dealings into one strong tool of academic business use. The key is therefore to prove that the gaps between theoretical idealism and practical realism can be bridged and integrated through synergetic efforts.

In terms of globalization, the theoretical area is extremely complex and includes many factors which shall not be taken into account including political, economic, cultural and further social factors (Appadurai, 1990, pp. 26-27). Hence, the purpose of the globalization section is to present an overview of the societal community changes that are happening for the individual and the different groupings in an online crisis context only. Viewing the issue in an isolated manner may not present the entire truth, yet, taking all globalization factors into account would not necessarily offer a deeper understanding or stronger argumentation.

As the time aspect of social media follows an emergent process running endlessly through the global networks, it must be noted that a fixed status quo is by no means sought (Levine, Locke, Searls & Weinberger 2009, p. 198). Therefore, the social media section should be viewed as a snapshot of a given point in time and does not represent a continually understanding of the real life picture. As a consequence, the thesis characterizes a broad and flexible theoretical frame for dealing with online crisis communication, it does not seek to manifest a universal truth based on prescriptive planning and rigid manifestation.

Crisis communication is used as the separate section derived from the much larger crisis management term. The scope of the thesis is to present the communicative areas of crisis management and although risk assessment, issue management, and reputation management will be included when appropriate, the focus remains on the communicative aspects of crisis communication (Coombs, 2007, p. 138).

Online social media in itself covers a wide umbrella of technological aspects and issues that could have been described into detail (Li, Bernoff, 2008, p. 18). However, an attempt to fully cover all social media and the technologies behind would have resulted in a technical report which would not have delivered on the promises of a business thesis. Consequently, the technological discussions and implications have been left out, but would carry a certain amount of importance should the angle have been different.

Finally, it must be noted that different organizations have different needs. Subsequently, the aim is to provide the reader with an overall framework for dealing with online crisis communication, which most likely would need some sort of fine-tuning and altering in terms of strategic and tactical planning within the different organizations.
CHAPTER 2
Scientific Fundament and Methodological Approach

Scientific methodology is a way of conducting, understanding and developing knowledge through different tools of analytical, observational, psychological, and theoretical use.

The purpose of this chapter is to justify the reasons for choosing the scientific fundament of philosophical hermeneutics over positivism, critical rationalism, and social constructivism, before linking it to the methodological approach.
2. SCIENTIFIC METHOD

“Science is a method of making understanding, whereas method is a way of understanding science. Scientific method thus allows playing the field and fields the play”

-Terry Pence, Professor in Philosophy at NKU, 1948 - present

2.1. Scientific Fundament

In writing an academic report, it is of extreme importance to contemplate upon the scientific traditions at hand in the intellectual world to structure the production of knowledge creation. Within science, knowledge is often claimed to be individually dependent and therefore related to the eyes that see, the brain that interprets, and the heart that feels. The idea behind this statement is thus connected to a idea of trusting in personal understanding, while accepting the process of unique selectiveness in interpreting, developing and gaining knowledge. Consequently, dissimilar assumptions give rise to different beliefs, and thus a whole range of various scientific fundaments as well as methodological choices - which should preferably be connected. Knowledge is, thereby, often conditioned by two types of assumptions held by the observer:

A. Ontological assumptions: Referring to the belief of gaining knowledge on the basis of how the world/context is - based on facts, figures, and generalizations.

B. Epistemological assumptions: Referring to the belief of gaining knowledge on the basis of how the world/context is understood – based on interpretation, analysis, and subjectivity.

(Nel & Com, 2007; Thompson, 2001)

Even though both approaches can be utilized or combined in creating varied results, in different contexts, and for different persons, one is often dominating. This opens up a wide range of varied assumptions, in which diverse methods of reaching scientific targets can be substantiated. The central point is, however, that what you see, and how you make sense, is often based on what your assumptions. In order to validate the choices made for this thesis, four scientific alternatives shall be discussed in order to find the best approach.

2.1.1. Positivism

Positivism was an early effort of combining rationalism, empiricism, and nonbiased data compilation into one scientific method of assumerism. Auguste Comte is often claimed to be the founding father of the positivistic approach (1798 – 1857), he wrote “Cours de Philosopie Positive” between 1830 and 1842. Due to the contextual time, the period of Enlightenment, paired with Comte’s own beliefs, his work became based on seeing the world as it is – thus supporting an ontological way of thinking. Consequently, Comte claimed that humans could gain true knowledge only from what was positively and presently true, and that all results needed to be based on scientific proofs and quantifiable facts. With his support for an inductive approach, in which one common law could be derived from scientific notes, he did not leave much room for epistemological
interpretation. The raison d’être behind Comte’s few epistemological beliefs also seemed a bit immature, and was based on the idea of trusting the scientist to be a “Tabula Rasa” = a blank sheet, thus being 100% objective and unprejudiced (Stanford EOP). By combining these beliefs into a scientific method, the positivistic aim was to systematize, explain, predict or discover common laws within general frames of scientific evidence.

The Austrian Philosopher Karl Popper (1902 – 1994) countered these claims and adduced two points of criticism: 1. The accusation of quantitative generalization, which stated that no one is entitled to make a few observations, make a proposal, and claim it to be a logical and general conclusion. 2. The naivety of Tabula Rasa, which suggested that everyone and everything are in some way biased or prejudiced. While Popper also claimed that deduction, where you seek to invalidate a hypothesis, will never result in a definite truth, he believed that it was much more viable than using an inductive approach of generalization (Popper, 1975). To Popper, in other words, it made more sense to search for black swans to prove an “all swans are white” hypothesis wrong, rather than observing 700 swans and state that all are white. Although, Popper agreed with much of the positivistic way of thinking, he developed the approach and turned the paradigm into a sphere of critical rationalism centered on falsification and deduction (Popper, 1975).

2.1.2. Critical Rationalism
As with positivism, Popper believed that the world existed of measurable facts constituting a fundament for true knowledge creation. Yet, although the ontological assumptions of critical rationalism might be comparable to the ones of positivism, the epistemological elements are not. Popper thus claimed that observations were still an excellent way of gathering data, however, the observer could never do it in an 100% nonbiased and objective way. As he believed that neither deduction nor induction could result in finding irrefutable truths, his goal was to verify genuine laws until proven wrong. When or if that happened, new solutions were sought. Consequently, Popper’s ideal for making scientific progress was based on proving that hypotheses could stand as the best result available until falsified, and thus grow along a straightforward time/knowledge line of uncomplicated progression c.f. figure 3 (Stanford EOP, Popper).

Not all critics, however, agreed with Popper. Imre Lakatos (1922 – 1974), Philosopher of Mathematics and Science, claimed that no scientists would ever seek to falsify his/her own hypotheses. Rather he/she would seek to find new evidence supporting the “falsified” objects or theories to discard the contradicting proofs.
Lakatos’ statement seemed to gain broad support and was in line with the work of Thomas Kuhn (1922 – 1996), American Philosopher and Scientific Intellectual, who claimed that good scientists did not leave their work and beliefs behind just because they were challenged. Besides, Kuhn claimed that scientific progress did not occur the way Popper suggested. Instead, he proposed that the history of science was not a history of progress, but a revolution of paradigms in which existing ones were merely used, analyzed, applied and combined in new ways. Therefore, no real progress took place - only reformation and modification c.f. figure 4 (Kuhn, 1996).

2.1.3. Social Constructivism

Many psychologists and sociologists claim that the roots of social constructivism cannot be traced back to one single source (Burr, 2001). However, Lev Vygotsky (1896 – 1934), Russian Psychologist and Cognitivist, was a significant player placing a clear footprint on the field. What was noticeable about Vygotsky was that he rejected the assumption, made by other leading scientists in his field, that it was possible to separate learning from its social context. Instead he suggested that all learning efforts were process-oriented, and that contextual factors and social interactions played a vital role in creating new knowledge and understandings (Simply Psychology).

Social constructivism’s epistemological assumptions thus became centered on interaction research. This meant that the individual researcher was considered as being an important and active part of the knowledge-construction process itself. The ontological assumptions added to this by suggesting that general meanings and emotions were produced via social relations and mutual interaction. Therefore, the social world became assembled through integrative efforts provided by individuals in a collective manner. The diverse players thus contributed to meaning creation in different ways, yet, while seeking to foster a common ground of mutual understanding (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

Although, social constructivism makes sense in many ways, it focuses heavily on social interaction, which might not be the only factor in constructing knowledge. The greatest weakness of the approach is that it abandons the belief of individual reality-making, in which the truth is justified and understood subjectively. Social constructivists thus seek to create meaning within a relational frame of social interactions unfolded in a holistic umbrella of shared understanding. This collective way of thinking, however, may only make sense to some extent, to some people, and in some situations. By claiming that the “truth” is a result of negotiated and socially constructed pieces of knowledge, it negates or reduces the existence of relativism. In other words, it
excludes the idea or possibility that the agreed “truth” might be false in other societies or social formations. As to this point, it looks at a part of the whole and regards it as being the entire truth, which makes social constructivism true and false. In this case, critics have referred to the axiom of logics stating that: if something is true and not-true, it is false. Other critics claim that social interactions between persons with different social backgrounds may never lead to actual agreements – even if they think they have (Stam, 2001; Wilson, 2002). The short explanation is that although they seem to be of the same mind, the different premises for understanding will never offer true and deep comprehensions. Finally, while social constructivists have often claimed that constructivism is liberating, as it allows the individuals to understand a subjective world in a collective way, critics claim that this “flexibility” is a result of mere indeterminism (Stam, 2001; Wilson, 2002).

2.1.4. Hermeneutics

In its broadest sense, hermeneutics refer to interpretation theory and reception analysis, in which the researcher seeks to understand the complicated world picture in a subjective and objective manner. Although, there are some bonds with the other scientific fields, hermeneutics differ within its general assumptions. While the ontological assumptions state that the social world is centered on ongoing processes of nonspecific meaning-creation, the epistemological dimensions add that people construct these “meanings” via individual interpretations. In this way, hermeneutics defy the views of positivism and critical rationalism seeking to explain a world based on measureable “facts”, as much as social constructivism which argues that understanding occurs through collective processes and social interactions only (Stanford EOP, Hermeneutics).

Hermeneutics has a long, diversified and complex history, but finds its oldest roots and traditions within the Greek Mythology. Early meanings of ancient hermeneutics were directly related to the Greek word “hermeneutikos” = “to interpret”, which was later converted into today’s idiom “hermeneutics” = “the science of interpreting in order to reach understanding”. The Greek Mythology claimed that the messenger of Gods, Hermes, tailored messages from above to humans via dreams, which were to be individually interpreted. The process followed a simple route of expressing a dream/message, seeking to explain it, and translating it into something meaningful for the individual. Therefore, interpretation did not necessarily relate to social interaction (Stanford EOP, Hermeneutics).

In more modern times, Friederich Schleiermacher (1768 - 1834), German Philosopher and Theologian, worked with methodological hermeneutics to establish a general technique for deciphering and interpreting written documents. He stressed the importance of being able to relate to different texts in varied ways, but to an even larger degree to the author behind. As a result, Schleiermacher mainly worked within two dimensions termed: 1. The grammatical dimension, including grammar, language, choice of genre, structure etc., and 2. The psychological dimension, seeking to understand the author’s biological, historical and cultural background. (Sheratt, 2005, chapter 1, 2, 3). He thus claimed that the scientific ideal of decoding understandings, was best found by encountering textual elements and the author as belonging to an interconnected whole (Palmer, 1969, chapter 7). Wilhelm Dlithy (1833 – 1911), German Historian, Psychologist and Sociologist, later supported his view by introducing the extended text concept suggesting that the researcher and the context were crucial parts of the entire analysis as much as the results. In this manner, he gave way to the thought of including every part, person, and process when seeking holistic understanding (Palmer, 1969, chapter 8).
While Schleiermacher and Dilthey most certainly had made some interesting points, Hans-Georg Gadamer (1900 – 2002), German Philosopher, developed and expanded the hermeneutic field even more. In his book of 1960 “Wahrheit und Methode” = “Truth and Method”, he started his work on philosophical hermeneutics. Much of his argumentation and hermeneutic perception were based on Dilthey’s extended text concept, but included a core point stating: Interpretation is not just a method of understanding, but a premise for existing (Gadamer, 2004, p. 299). Therefore, the researcher played a significant role in creating subjective meaning while seeking objective justification. Whereas Schleiermacher and Dilthey presupposed that there was one true meaning in every text, and that the researcher had to suspend his/her own preconceptions to understand the overall message, Gadamer claimed that meaning was constructed individually when combining one’s own and the author’s paradigms (Skinner, 1986). Thus, self-interpretive tools and subjective horizons were by Gadamer (2004) not considered to be an obstacle, but rather a condition for fostering understanding. In short, he concluded that no texts or research objects hold one true meaning, but all had the potential of making individual sense. Hence, it is the active interpreter’s task to do so, and understand the pieces as much as the whole (pp. 384 – 390). This can be illustrated via the hermeneutic circle and the horizons of preconcept in figure 5:

As a result, philosophical hermeneutics can be concluded to work within a subjective and objective field of interpretive understandings. Self-insight is thus of uttermost importance in order to map the preconceptions and develop subjective objectivity. The reason is that what we see depends on what we assume, which in turn affects our way of creating meaning.

“Cogito, ergo sum – I think, therefore, I am”

- René Descartes, French Philosopher and Mathematician, 1596 – 1650

Accordingly, the aim of this thesis is to seek individual understandings and construct a collective whole of adequate pieces, in which philosophic hermeneutics shall frame the scientific field and methodology.
2.2. Methodological Approach

Although Gadamer’s work carries a strong scientific fundament, and frames the thesis as much as the author’s way of working and thinking, philosophical hermeneutics share no direct links with operational methodology. Without specific tools for securing viable analysis and solutions, the processes of working within this field becomes quite challenging. Therefore, it is necessary to define a certain number of methodological principles to progress the process. For this purpose, Hanne Fredslund’s clarification of Gadamer’s philosophical hermeneutics shall be applied, in which three concrete principles for scientific research are presented (Koch & Valgårda, 2003, pp. 99 - 107):

1. To acknowledge and secure awareness of personal preconceptions of understanding, as it is recognized that preconceptions play a vital role in scientific research processes and the construction of results: The first principle is closely related to the idea of the philosophical hermeneutic circle, in which the researcher becomes an integrated part of the interpretive processes and results. Therefore, as stated, he/she must seek to understand his/her own preconceptions to obtain stronger results of non-biased and objective quality (Fredslund, 2001, p. 14; Koch, 2003, pp. 99 - 100).

2. To challenge and develop the preconceptions in order to move forward the developmental processes in a progressive manner: The key in challenging and broadening the preconceptions and horizons of understanding, is often found in the degree of openness and readiness to obtain, and not sustain, new focuses. It is thus very important to question oneself and accept, and respect, that understandings are fluent and should never be kept at a negative status quo (Koch et al., 2003, p. 100).

3. To move across one’s own horizon of understanding, and preconceptions, in order to place one’s self in the situations and horizons of the research object e.g. an author: The core point is that the research object is a subject in itself and brings new preconceptions of implicit or explicit meanings into the scientific processes. Gadamer states that true understanding surfaces when horizons melt and merge, thereby, creating new developmental constructions between the researcher and the research object. Subsequently, the researcher must consider what historical background and present situation the objects or people are speaking from (Koch et al., 2003, p. 100; Fuglsang & Olsen, 2004).

These three principles shall thus be considered when working with methodological processes including research, analysis, presentation and recommendation. Scientific fundaments and methodological approaches can thus be interconnected and bridged within a scientific method of integrated philosophical hermeneutics based on the keywords of: Understanding, interpretation as well as preconception.

Having specified and argued for the choices behind the scientific fundament and the methodological approach as well as their interconnectedness through philosophical hermeneutics, we now turn to chapter 3 - Theoretical Framework & Conceptualization.
CHAPTER 3
Theoretical Framework and Conceptualization

This chapter presents the theoretic field, dimensions, and thoughts of the overall framework. A brief introduction shall guide the reader into the importance of understanding the meaning and interplay between prescriptive planning and emergent acting, before digging deeper into the theories and models of globalization, social media, and crisis communication.

Throughout the analysis it shall be proven how the fields are interrelated and have strong theoretic correlations. By specifying the overall fits and/or misfits between the paradigms, this effort will lead towards the conceptualization of a theoretical model and approach of how to deal with online crisis communication in Chapter 4.
3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND CONCEPTUALIZATION

“There is nothing as terrible as activity without insight”

- Johan Wolfgang von Goethe, German Poet, Novelist and Dramatist, 1749 - 1832

3.1. Prescriptive Planning with an Emergent Nature

Coming back to the quote from the very beginning by Richard M. Nixon, some people might interpret change or crisis as being equal to risk and danger, whereas others might consider it as bringing new, exciting opportunities along its way. The former group often finds trust in prescriptive planning and strict stick-to-the-core decision making, while the latter believes in more emergent strategies of dynamic, innovative and developmental thinking. However, the two do not exclude each other and should rather be seen as two intertwined opposites in a continuum. In this manner, strategic planning, processing, and implementation might pair prescriptive forecasting with emergent strategies in its nature and use, and base results on intuition as well as analytical calculation. The key in dealing with prescriptive planning in an emergent manner is thus found in developing a structured plan or model, which shall be revised and modified continuously to secure harmonic alignment between internal missions and contextual dynamics. While this stresses the importance of planning to avoid failure, it also emphasizes the significance of being able to adopt a flexible approach (Lynch, 2006, pp. 16 - 19). This is what business academics would refer to as: Converting theory into practice (Cornelissen, 2005, pp. 9 -11).

We shall now identify the theoretical fields behind the overall online crisis communication approach to manifest the academic spheres on which the model will be built. In the interest of clarification, these will be encountered separately before fusing them into one coherent model. The key areas to be covered are: Globalization, Social Media, and Crisis Communication.

3.2. Globalization

Globalization is highly debated today with wide a range of theorists presenting different opinions, perceptions and assumptions on the subject. To further understand and frame the complex term as a concept, we shall look into the discussion by assessing the notions presented by Anthony Giddens, British Sociologist, Arjun Appadurai, Indian Anthropologist, and Benedict Anderson, British Professor of Political Science.

3.2.1 Anthony Giddens

In order to explore and reflect on today’s global networks, processes, and their impact on the social sphere/society, Anthony Giddens’ book “Runaway World: How Globalization is Reshaping Our Lives” (1999) has been applied. The theoretical picture by Giddens mainly frames the two invaluable time and space constrictions, which he uses for specifying clarification on how to understand the correlations between social media, societal changes, and the internet.
Giddens has in his works described and commented on the development of our society including the global impacts on the contemporary frame, social order as well as the individual relations. He is known for taking a holistic view on modern society and argues that the decisive factor in setting apart our postmodern society from the modern society, is based on the dynamics tearing apart status quo in a split second (Giddens, 1999, p. 27). According to Giddens, one of the ground pillars, on which the postmodern society is built, is rooted in the notion of how we are disembedding ourselves from time and space (Giddens, 1999, p. 27). Based on the possibilities made available by the flourishing information technologies, the individual can now access and acquire information outside the normal boundaries and control the flows and distances independently. Simultaneously, however, it is recognized that the social community is the fundamental key in setting the scene. As a result, the collectivistic individual has been given the possibility of communicating and interacting with the entire world despite a separation in time and space. In a business context, the spillover effect quickly becomes apparent, and every organization must perform at an optimal level to assess and coordinate the large number of people’s actions and opinions 24/7.

This means that knowledge may surface from the social bonds, relations and interactions, but will be shaped and formed by the individual. It is of uttermost importance that organizations understand how they may utilize internal and external knowledge sharing for the benefit of themselves. Giddens rounds of the theoretical discussion by stating that in the era of postmodernism, the usage of information technology will lead to a global “Knowledge-society” of interactive dynamics in which information are shared, discussed and used by a multiparty of interdependent/independent individuals (Giddens, 1999, p. 57).

3.2.2. Arjun Appadurai
Adding to Giddens’ assumptions, Arjun Appadurai discusses in his article “Differences in the Global Cultural Economy” (Appadurai, 2005) the forces governing the global dynamics termed flows. He coins five different terms for the flows of an individual’s mindset, each of them suffixed with the word –scape, to justify how individual flows and scapes represent a common frame which may change or mean different things for different persons at different times (Appadurai, 2005, p. 297). To specify, we shall briefly look at the five dimensions/scapes of cultural flows to gain a deeper understanding.

3.2.2.1. The five dimensions of cultural flows
Appadurai’s five scapes refer to five different dimensions of cultural flows influencing and framing the global society. The basic notion of his assumption is centered on the belief that all scapes are available to everybody at any given time. Hence, time and space restrictions do no longer apply as any individual can take part in any and/or all scapes through deliberately making conscious or unconscious choices about their own interception of the dimensions. It is important to note that the existence of the scapes is *not* tied up to a “human-driven motivation factor” for joining or partaking in certain groups or cultures, but rather the idea that all individuals, through their selective determinations, flow in and out of the cultural scapes unhindered. The five scapes are described as follows:
Ethnoscapes refer to the moving of people from one society to another. An example could be immigrants moving to a different country or, less permanent, people visiting a different society as tourists. It is important to understand that the term is referring to the moving of people rather than ethnicity.

Mediascapes are reflecting the media and the images they present of the world. In their representation of different societies, they can blur the line between fiction and reality and create a desire with the individual to partake/or reject the images represented.

Technoscapes deal with all forms of technology. This also includes the more technical and mechanical side e.g. how telephones and lap tops can be used to generate information exchange between people.

Financescapes deal with the flow of the economy between individuals, organizations and nations across time and space.

Ideoscapes revolve around political issues and are often connected to ideologies of a given state. It must be noted, however, that individual ideoscapes are often connected to personal interpretation of the political landscape rather than a specific ideology (Appadurai, 2005, pp. 296 - 300).

3.2.3. Benedict Anderson
When dealing with the ever-changing nature of the culture an individual partakes in, Appadurai finds support within the "Imagined Communities" framework of Benedict Anderson (Anderson, 1991, p. 4). The communities must in this sense be seen as the building blocks in Appadurai’s postulate on the emergence of a global culture, although, Anderson does not argue that any such exists.

3.2.3.1. Imagined communities
Anderson laid claim to the idea that imagined communities are the thought of a person feeling part of a given culture, regardless of he/she knowing or keeping hold of other members of the same entity. He thus argues, as an extension of the argument that a community exists solely on the basis of members feeling they are part of it (Appadurai, 2005, pp. 296 – 297), that all communities, larger than very small ones with a close physical proximity\(^1\), are imagined. They feel a kinship and connectedness solely based on the fact that they share a common interest or mindset in a given area (Anderson, 1991, p. 192).

In other words, when an individual gain new information or develop already existing information, he/she becomes part of one of the scapes. When this implicit or explicit transformation takes place, he/she imagines himself/herself as part of a larger community in terms of what is holding merit to him/her. Consequently, in all aspects of culture, individuals are members of different scapes in which they create imagined communities to make individual and collective sense.

\[^1\] According to Anderson, very small communities are not imagined as everybody and everything is exposed to each other constantly and continuously, thus, revealing the whole and hiding nothing (Anderson, 1991, 192).
Therefore, when summarizing the findings on modern society and globalization, it becomes apparent that we live in an intertwined net of complex knowledge interception and interactive relationship building. Individuals shape their own identity and thus their own culture to a beforehand unseen degree. Culture as a concept has become an extremely fluid term which primarily exists only in short glimpses. The classical frameworks of pushing and placing cultures into restricted boxes of stereotyping and generalization limited to nations or states, no longer represents a true and fulfilling understanding of what culture is.

In short, the theoretical assumptions on globalization, presented in the abovementioned discussion, underline that everybody lives in different imagined communities depending on the current scapes in which they are involved. Ultimately, culture is merely build on the information available at a certain point in time in close relation to the individual interpretation of the collective pieces. Subsequently, the communities existing today might be different or gone tomorrow depending on what information is available and how it is processed.

3.3. Social Media

Social Media is flowing from the general term of social interaction, yet, founded on a new platform: the media. The basics of the concept may rest with the key words of “conversation” and “dialogue” leading to a new way of utilizing knowledge sharing in the global society of postmodernism (Scoble, Israel, 2006, p. 27). To get a stronger hold of social media, the discussion will present a wide variety of authors and books to shape a well-defined overview of the complex whole.

3.3.1. “The Cluetrain Manifesto”

For the section on Social Media several authors have been brought into the discussion to shed light on the complex nature of social media and the online world. "The Cluetrain Manifesto" by Rick Levine, Christopher Locke, Doc Searls and David Levine has been used to form the fundamental understandings of the theoretical frame for a common ground. The book presents a broad overview of the online landscape and facilitates a basis for pointing out important sections and parts that can be brought forward to a discussion on social media, crisis communication, and the evolution of these. A thematically term running throughout the book, claiming the essence of becoming a theoretical backbone regarding observations, discussions and critiques, is the “conversations”. The ability to listen creates the starting point for all online interaction and vastly increases the success rate of any given type of communication. As the individual or organization fulfill the requirement of listening, mutual engagement, recognition and value creation become the next step in terms of shaping the social media framework. Thus, the conversational character of all implicated communication is paramount, leading to the grave importance of fostering dialog through the usage of social media. In other words, it becomes the driving force for partaking in the social media sphere (Levine, Locke, Searls & Weinberger, 2009, pp. 80 - 81).
3.3.2. “Groundswell”
To further substantiate and broaden the perspective on social media and the internet, the book "Groundswell" by Charlene Li and Josh Bernoff has been used. Their take on social technologies in the modern world will help differentiate the discussion and the overview of the online world. Although, “The Cluetrain Manifesto” is of recent date and has been edited and updated over the past years, much of the content is more general in its nature than what is the case for "Groundswell". More specifically, “Groundswell” has introduced some of the new technologies and further brought case studies to the table, which has manifested itself into a new context opening up for more recent and specific discussion, learning points, and angles on the subject (Li, Bernoff, 2008, p. xi-xiii).

3.3.3. “Naked Conversations”
In terms of specific technologies of the online world, particularly, but not exclusively, blogging, "Naked Conversations" by Robert Scoble and Shel Israel have been used. The book dig, in great detail, into blogging and the nature of the technology behind which is important as it is seen as the originator for the remaining and emerging technologies existing today. Their take on the social media world also differs slightly from the one presented in "The Cluetrain Manifesto", as they have a large focus on the utilization of social media in an organizational context. However, although their approach focuses more on the utility of the social media technologies and cultural ramification, the theoretical background for the pragmatic approach convey strong keywords for the underlying incentives. As hinted in the title, a theme that traverses in the various sections of the groundwork is the significance of interaction with interested parties. With a main theme on conversations, the applied science of blogging and social media is elucidated by fleshing out the underlying rationale for each practical step. As a result, the conversational sub-points elaborate on the theoretical aspects which in turn govern the conversations. The key points in “Naked Conversations” are thus comprised of a possibility of direct access to target groups; the importance of collaborative features; authenticity; and the composition of the target audience (Scoble, Israel, 2006, pp. 1 - 5).

3.3.4. “Wikinomics”
Adding further to the complex area of social media theory, Don Tapscott and Anthony D. Williams book on "Wikinomics" is also included. Their main focus finds its resonance in the multifaceted mindset behind the new technology seeking to understand how it is changing and directly affecting the approach to knowledge and information exchange. "Wikinomics" generally takes a theoretical approach to social media through case studies and analytical discussions, leading to case-embedded outcomes in dealing with possibilities and conflicts. Key words and sentences important to understand, act, and engage within the social media sphere include: 1. The significance of information and knowledge sharing in the workplace as well as on the broad-spectred observation platform of the world today. To this, it must be added that the flows of information and knowledge turn into intangibles flooding the means, reasons, interpretations and manifestations of old knowledge bases resting with individuals and groups (Tapscott, Williams, 2007, pp10-12) 2. The social media platform working as a conveyor belt for the evolution of new knowledge and the expansion of existing knowledge. As an extension of the knowledge-based key, collaborative efforts create a possibility to further
enhance and deepen the speed and amount of knowledge available at a given time. (Tapscott, Williams, 2007, pp. 56-58)

As a result, networking becomes the unifying factor for the theoretical background on the social media entry point in “Wikinomics”. By merging the two key points to create an area that covers both the knowledge flows and the collaborative engagements running through the social media platforms, a strong and unified approach shall be applied as a holistic hybrid embracing the pieces under one common umbrella.

3.4. Crisis Communication

Within the theoretical field of crisis communication, two distinct areas surface when assessing the theoretical implications and approaches in how to solve and deal with different crises and their interrelated phases. As a consequence, different strategies for moving toward resolutions of the crises imply that contingency plans typically follow a completely different set of stages.

3.4.1. A. “Image Restoration Theory”

The one side in the crisis communication theory is related to the book of William L. Benoit (1997) “Image Restoration Theory”. His theory relies heavily on a reactive procedure to which he places a very strong rhetorical vein. Benoit states that when confronted with a crisis, the appropriate response is to review your message options and possibilities, to minimize or restore the damage of the corporate image. The different message options involve both the possibility of:

1. Readily acknowledging that the organization is at fault, to
2. Avoiding the responsibility of the crisis.

*Please note, that the two must be seen as contradictive poles represented in a continuum.*

Accepting responsibility can provide an applicable solution depending on the context and the target audience, however, by doing so, a potential increase in the risk of a continued escalation in terms of liability issues may surface simultaneously (Benoit, 1997, p. 46).

In opposition to the apologetic, yet more responsible, solutions, the evasive countermeasures exist. This course provides a possibility to completely avoid or considerably minimize the damage that had dented the organizational image. While taking this course of action, the ramifications must be considered carefully as the chance of a severe backfire is a prominent risk (Benoit, 1997 p. 52).

Therefore, when preparing for a crisis, the Image Restoration Theory relies on organizations’ abilities to, or deliberate choices of, building crisis scenarios and through them organize and arrange for the crisis at hand. The scenario building combined with the predefined set of message options thus create a general base for
utilization in the event of a crisis. As a result, the collective efforts of the two sections provide a technique to minimize the damage caused to the image and prevent other risks from escalating.

3.4.2. B. “Situational Crisis Communication”
Timothy W. Coombs represents the other side of the crisis communication world with his book “Ongoing Crisis Communication – planning, managing, and responding” (2007). His take on the theory relies on a situational approach emphasizing the importance of understanding and acting according to the presented context. He creates certain vantage points that will help the theoretical way into creating adequate situational crisis communication including: Definition of a crisis, Stakeholders, and Crisis management.

3.4.2.1. Definition of a crisis
In a situational context, a paramount bullet point is the ability to identify a crisis. Coombs defines a crisis as an event that will influence an organization’s performance and generate negative outcomes for the company in question (Coombs, 2007, pp. 2 - 3). He continues by pointing out that although a crisis is unpredictable, it should never be unexpected. Therefore, every organization must be aware of the fact that a crisis will be hitting them sooner or later. As a positive outcome though, the bare minimum of recognizing and anticipating the rise of a crisis should lead to a voluntary attempt of preparing for such an event (Coombs, 2007, p. 3). Prediction, however, is very hard in a world of fast-flowing dynamics and even if one may identify a potential crisis on the rise, there is no guarantee that the assessment will offer the right picture of the magnitude - or even type - of the crisis at hand. Consequently, the task of the organization is to define a crisis in broad terms and take an emergent approach toward prescriptive planning.

3.4.2.2. Stakeholders
The importance of the stakeholders should never be underestimated as the success of the organization rest with them. Therefore, in order for this success to happen, every organization needs to build a good reputation with their stakeholders. Furthermore, the stakeholders of any organization are often the ones determining whether or not a crisis has befallen on an organization. In other words, the truth lies in the eyes of the beholder and for an organization; these eyes belong to the stakeholders. A crisis is thus a reality if the stakeholders deem the situation is so, no matter what the organization thinks (Coombs, 2007, p. 110).

In order to deal with this subject, Coombs sets up a number of parameters for carrying out sound and responsible reputation management, including, but is not limited to:

- Organizations should be aware of and understand the expectations set forth by their stakeholders.
- The organization should facilitate regular two-way communication with their stakeholders.
- Stakeholders should feel that the organization is meeting their expectations.
- The stakeholders must feel that the organization is showing a genuine interest in them.
Mutual trust and respect between the organization and its stakeholders must be priority.

(Coombs, 2007, pp. 58 – 60)

3.4.2.3. Crisis Management

When being involved in actual crisis management, Coombs sets forth a general frame consisting of three categories: Pre-crisis, Actual crisis, and Post-crisis. Within the different categories, various phases are represented, including: Crisis preparation, -recognition, -response and –evaluation (Coombs, 2007, pp. 17 - 20).

Category A: Pre-crisis

- Crisis preparation: The first phase is centered on the various tasks that will help an organization to handle an eventual crisis. Important points in this phase involve training personnel, preparing a way to communicate to the public, looking into different types of crises that might involve the organization, assessing the degree of vulnerability to different types of crisis as well as developing a crisis management plan/a detailed manual on how to respond to a crisis (Coombs, 2007, p. 63 + 89).

- Crisis Recognition: The second phase assists the organization in recognizing and understanding the crisis. This is very important in order for the organization to take the appropriate measures necessary when dealing with the various challenges and issues floating in and around the organization (Coombs, 2007, pp. 103 - 104)

Category B: Actual Crisis

- Crisis Response: The third phase deals with the actual events of the crisis and thereby leads the strategic plan into the operational phase. According to Coombs, two key points must be emphasized in this phase:

1. Contain and control the crisis
2. Limit the time frame of the crisis (Coombs, 2007, p. 127). Furthermore, Coombs sets up certain criteria for conducting successful crisis management. These are divided into four main sections. Where the first three can be seen as managerial recommendations, the last one deals with the rhetoric of crisis communication. As these are important for the overall crisis outcome, we shall briefly go through them:

  ➢ **Responding quickly** is the first of the criteria and states that a fast response time can significantly lower or minimize the severity of a crisis (Coombs, 2007, pp. 128 - 129).

  ➢ **Speaking with one voice** covers the next criteria and is centered on conducting consistent, coherent and accurate messages. The purpose is to produce a continuous flow of credible responses to the public as well as ease the process of managing the pieces of information communicated to the stakeholders (Coombs, 2007, p. 131).
Openness is the third and last of the management criteria. This criterion boils down to the organizations willingness to provide honest and accurate information to the stakeholders and doing so at the stakeholders’ discretion. Even when no answer is readily available, it is preferred to communicate this rather than stonewalling the stakeholders. Should the organization follow the latter tactic, it will often have negative repercussions (Coombs, 2007, pp. 132 - 133).

Instructing Information is connected to the rhetoric criterion and can be divided into three different stages: 1. The first includes providing the stakeholders with the why’s, when’s and how’s i.e. the basic information pieces of the crisis (Coombs, 2007, pp. 133 - 135). 2. Secondly, the organization must provide the stakeholders with information about how to “avoid” or deal with the crisis from their side i.e. do not eat the contaminated food, do not take that train because of a train wreck etc. (Coombs, 2007, pp 135 - 136). 3. The last stage focuses on what the organization is actually doing to get the situation under control.

Looking at the crisis response phase, it becomes obvious that Coombs stresses the importance of organization’s achieving efficient and timely crisis communication with their stakeholders. Often, when handling a large and deep crisis well through efficient and well-structured crisis communication, the chances of brand damage is smaller than if handling an insignificant crisis bad by taking on a “no comments” approach.

Category C. Post-crisis

- Crisis evaluation: The fourth phase is focusing on the post-crisis environment and how the organization can deal with the aftermath of a crisis. The bedrock of this phase is therefore centered on the evaluation of the crisis which has befallen the organization. Conducting a meticulous analysis of the events, including the organization’s responses, is pivotal for creating better and enhanced crisis communication preparedness (Coombs, 2007, pp. 151 - 152). The purpose of the analyses is thus to provide a learning base for the organization and consequently create a “memory bank” which can be utilized in the future for educational and pragmatic uses (Coombs, 2007, pp. 160 - 161). In addition, the post crisis environment also demands continuous monitoring to secure that the crisis has indeed been fully concluded. Finally, the learnings and experiences must be review and analyzed to secure further development of the applied crisis management tools. In recapitulation, the post-crisis phase puts a strong emphasis on a continued focus on the preceding crisis for analyzing and evaluating purposes (Coombs, 2007, p. 163).

Summing up, Coombs points to the fact that organizations need to be well prepared when a crisis hits as well as being able to recognize the danger and correctly identify a crisis when faced with one. Additionally, he adds that the crisis response through strategic management tools and rhetorical tactics are vital in dealing with crisis and the stakeholders. Finally, he deems it necessary to analyze the post-crisis to secure it is over and use the experiences to further enhance the crisis communicative skills and management tools. Thus, building a strong relationship with the stakeholders is one of the most important tasks of an organization. The better the relationship the less likely are the chance that the stakeholders will feel that the organizations is in a crisis. (Coombs, 2007, pp. 25 - 26).
### 3.4.2.4. Managing the risks

Emergency Risk Management by Alan Hodges (2000) utilizes a flow chart for dealing with the risks an organization might face at any given time. This is illustrated below:

![Emergency Risk Management flow chart](image)

Figure 4: Emergency Risk Management by Alan Hodges

When seeking to manage a crisis, knowing and dealing with the risks are paramount. Hodges uses his flow chart as a tool for organizations to continuously monitor their risk situations in order to meet, prevent or minimize the dangers. The model is a good way of assessing and answering Wh-questions in terms of a crisis e.g. Where are we? What are the risks? What can happen? What are we going to do?

One of the options that are clearly a viable choice is to simply accept the risks. That part of crisis communication is to simply do nothing about a potential crisis and pick your battles (Hodges, 2000, p. 10).

Another important factor from Hodges’ flow chart is the continued need for communication, monitoring, reviewing, and consulting. There is a heavy emphasis on the need for two-way communication, no matter where we are in the risk process and regardless of the type of stakeholder included (Hodges, 2000, p. 11). This notion is based on the fact that during risk assessments, two-way communication with stakeholders has
proven to be a strong tool in preparing and mitigating risks. The reason is that it significantly reduces reaction time and ultimately lessens the impact of the risk turning into a crisis (Hodges, 2000, p. 12).

3.5. Online Crisis Communication

In order to sum up on the abovementioned theories shaping the theoretical framework, and before jumping into the Theoretical Analysis, we shall take a more holistic look at the subjects via: Online Crisis Communication – to which the global aspect lies implicitly. For this purpose, Brian Solis shall be used.

Solis introduced a new way to look at the combination of crisis communication and social media which led to his 2008 publication “Reinventing Crisis Communication” (2008). He proposed that a significant amount of crises can be avoided by proactively listening and engaging with the stakeholders in the social media context, and specified that the interrelated areas must be considered as a holistic whole. According to Solis, the key factors for success were to be found in the categories of “wanting to adapt and learn” and “the willingness to integrate these factors into your organization”. Delivering community-driven communication thus helps facilitating a better relationship with the stakeholders and, through that, lessens the risk of facing unforeseen or large scale crises. Consequently, he stated that community-driven communication relied on a customer-centric approach from the organizational side (Solis, 2008, pp. 6 - 8). Creating an organization from these parameters would then create a strengthened online crisis communication tool which could be applied by several, if not all, departments in the organization.
CHAPTER 4

Theoretical Analysis: Crisis Communication in the New Media Landscape

Chapter 4 shall consolidate the theoretical framework and turn the aforementioned paradigms, models, and dimensions into one model dealing with online crisis communication. The general umbrella shall cover seven phases termed: Detection and Recognition, Prioritize, Mobilize, Analyze, Engagement, Walking the Talk and Talking the Walk, and Crisis Evaluation. To this, two surrounding dimensions will be added to emphasize the importance of continuously monitoring the environment and seeking to continuously improve the crisis response. These are termed: Context Consciousness and Kaizen.

The purpose of the model is to deliver a generic model that is flexible by its nature since no two organizations or their surroundings will be identical. Thus, the main objective is to introduce an approach within the world of prescriptive planning and emergent processing, to which the various phases and dimensions can be fitted to the local as well as global contexts.
4. THEORETICAL ANALYSIS: ONLINE CRISIS COMMUNICATION MODEL

“By failing to prepare, you are preparing to fail”

- Benjamin Franklin, American Statesman, Scientist, Philosopher and Inventor, 1706 – 1790

4.1. The Online Crisis Communication Model
The following section shall seek to specify how an online crisis communications model may look like in theory. By combining the theoretical fields from Chapter 3, the purpose is to develop a holistic approach to globalization, social media, and crisis communication. In the interest of clarification, this will be illustrated via a model to secure general overview for the reader:

Figure 5: The Online Crisis Communication Model
It must be noted that whereas theoretical assumptions, statements, and hypothesis presented in the former chapter will be explicitly integrated in a coherent manner, the global sphere will implicitly run through the model at all times. The reason behind this notion is that online media by its nature anticipates: Once you go online, you go global. Subsequently, all global processes and dynamics are to be considered as carrying the potential of directly or indirectly impacting the crisis at hand, wherefore, the large-scale context will be encountered when seeking to assess and managing the risks.

The model is divided into seven main sections surrounded by two umbrella dimensions; Context Consciousness and Kaizen. As mentioned, the theoretical fields and paradigms from Chapter 3 will manifest itself throughout the model, as the different theoretical pieces shape the backbone of the key carriers throughout the analysis. These will, however, be integrated in different ways and fused with new elements to satisfy an all-embracing whole. The purpose is simultaneously to sharpen the theoretical model and approach by separating the less useful or outdated pieces, still manifesting itself in the various fields today, from the aforementioned backbone. As a result, the Theoretical Framework can be utilized as intended by enhancing the elements and replacing the rest throughout the theoretical analysis.

Consequently, the finished online crisis communications model does not represent a mirror of the theoretical framework, but combines present dimensions in new ways to fit a postmodern context. In addition, it is of uttermost importance to remember that no model should be seen as a fixed universal tool to which everyone must adhere – neither shall this model. Rather, it is set to be interpreted as a theoretical guideline for how organizations may deal with online crisis communication depending on their context. To this, and in reference to the point presented in Chapter 3, section 3.1., the model will be linked to the idea of conducting prescriptive planning in an emergent manner to secure planned flexibility.

We shall now go through each stage of the model as well as the umbrella dimensions to clarify how the individual sections contribute to the general whole.

4.2. Context Consciousness

The first umbrella dimension is a vital factor in dealing with online crisis communication. This is where it all starts – and yet, this is where most organizations forget to turn their attention. “Context Consciousness” as a concept refers to the idea of being aware of what is on the move in the nearby and/or distant environment. Often, many issues can be dealt with before turning into problems/larger crisis, if only organizations had conducted sound surveillance of the environment in which they operate (Coombs, 2007, p. 50). Although, it may take a few resources to do so, there is no doubt that it can be much more costly to ignore it. Therefore, it is paramount for any company to get a clear picture of their surroundings whether discussing the media landscape, stakeholders, trends or business conducts. We shall no go through each of the three to specify why these dimensions are important.
4.2.1. The Media Landscape

In the online world, it is essential for organizations to understand the surrounding media landscape to get a grasp of what is on the move (Scoble, Israel, 2006, p. 112). As a result, they need to dig into the virtual reality and see what media has a strong impact on their business as well as the general world. Getting a clear picture of the media landscape is often a challenging task because of the interflowing and ever-changing dynamics. On the other hand, the task may be easily accessible as most organizations will be able to restrict their media exposure to a few general channels. The more technical side of how organizations could assess the environment will, as stated in Delimitation, be left out. However, there is no doubt that technical solutions would often be the tools used for fulfilling this exercise. As a final point, it must be added that when looking into the media landscape, it is often required to also understand the communicative messages flowing in the networks. These are often strong indicators for not only what media are “in” but also how they are used, by whom, and with what purpose (Scoble, Israel, 2006, pp.142 - 143).

In short, organizations need to map their media landscape so they know in which environment they operate, where dangers and possibilities may arise, and what channels are the most “hot”/popular ones.

Please note: It should be specified that “Media” in broad terms cover online and offline channels, however, main focus, in this thesis, shall be restricted to the former.

4.2.2. Stakeholders

Shortly said, stakeholders are key essentials for the overall success and survival rates of organizations. Therefore, there is no doubt that ongoing engagement, dialogue, and conversations are the lifeblood in securing close relationship-building with the stakeholders to secure that they are not only part of the network – but are the network (Coombs, 2007, pp. 42 - 43).

All organizations are thus required to map their internal, external, primary, secondary and tertiary stakeholders in a diagram or charter to specify what each segment look like. However, whereas segments were formerly restricted to a few groups, today, the picture represents a much greater hybrid. None the less, it is worth the effort getting to know your stakeholders by mapping the demographics and asking each group about their expectations and needs. Furthermore, organizations should identify peer leaders, new groups on the rise, future trends etc (Coombs, 2007, p. 38).

4.2.3. Trends (Past, Present, Future)

As the heading states, this part of the Context Consciousness section focuses on locating trends in the global environment. Although this may seem like an easy exercise, it is one of the toughest as it is related to predicting future happenings in a dynamic chaos of flows and changes. To ease the process, however, organizations may look at past and present trends to locate future ones. The key point is to remember that many trends do not surface from something totally new, but rather from existing ones being revised, recaptured and/or reintroduced – c.f. the development of blogging. Thus, it should be recognized that innovation and invention are two different things with the latter requiring many more resources and much more development than the former (Scoble, Israel, 2006, pp.150 - 151). Looking to the future and spotting the “new
hot thing” to obtain a first-mover advantage would obviously be beneficial. Yet, looking at the ideal state with realistic glasses is often the best way for organizations to gain insight and knowledge of where they ought to place themselves. Loosing track and self-awareness of the organizational identity and capabilities is often equal to direct failure. (Li, Bernoff, 2008, pp. 216 - 217).

In short, organizations must ensure to locate future trends by looking to the past, looking at the present and seizing opportunities based or innovation – or perhaps even invention.

4.2.4. Business Conduct

The last section on business conduct lends focus to an internal center of attention of how the organization is running its business. Being aware of one’s own business ethics, morals, and conducts are crucial in knowing where they are doing good, where they are doing bad, and where they can do better (Levine, Locke, Searls & Weinberger, 2009, pp. 187 - 189). The business conduct section is thus focused on organizations trying to seize self-insight and develop their dealings for the benefit of themselves and their business – which should have a positive spill-over effect to their stakeholders.

Subsequently, company policies, business ethics, employee behaviors, core values, and time applications should be assessed to identify minor or major cases for corrective actions. As a final note, it may in some cases be an idea looking to other companies or even industries, when seeking to raise the bar of conducting a sound business based on best practice.

4.3. Detection and Recognition

Having turned on the context consciousness radar, the next step is to detect and recognize the crisis prospects floating in the nearby or distant environment. The detection phase is centered on the information floating from the wide pool of data obtained through the context consciousness exercise. When the alarm starts to blink, one must locate: The type of crisis; the place of origin; the past, present and future trail; the potential spread and severity; and the impact on the business dealings.

Gathering the data is closely related to conducting a basic risk assessment with the purpose of assisting the business in determining whether the crisis should be recognized as a crisis or not. If detecting a potential crisis without any chances of impacting the business, the case should be closed and focus should turn back to other issues/areas. On the other hand, if the risk assessment conveys that there is an actual possibility for the latent issue turning into a severe crisis, they must recognize its potential and move on to the next phase of “prioritization” (Coombs, 2007, pp. 23 - 24).

Please note, as stated in the theoretical framework, detection and recognition may be considered as two separate dimensions. However, due to the speed factor in the online media world, it is recommendable to consider the two simultaneously or at least closely together. Action- and response time are often vital elements in satisfying the expectations of the stakeholders, wherefore, organizations are required to go through these levels as fast as possible.
4.4. Prioritize

When the potential crisis has been recognized through a basic risk assessment, the organization needs to dig a little deeper into the case for more information. The risk assessment tool should thus be applied once again, however, only this time with much more focus and profundity to determine the overall severity level and its potential impact on the business. It should be noted, that although companies might not see a direct business threat, they need to assess what the stakeholders think about the case at hand (Coombs, 2007, p. 111). The reason is that they, as mentioned in the theoretical framework, often are the ones deciding whether a crisis is on the rise or not.

Although, it might be time consuming to carry out the in-depth risk assessment, it is of utmost importance in order to get the priorities right. If a company is presented with four potential crises, it makes no sense dealing with number one, two and three if it is the last one that counts. Neither does it make sense to deal with all of them as every organization has limited resources to take on the task of solving “potential” crises (Hodges, 2000, p. 43). Therefore, one must make the right prioritizations based on the information readily available from the former phases in order to select the essential cases. A focused effort dealing with one issue is often better than an unfocused hit-and-miss approach dealing with the many.

Having detected, recognized and prioritized the crises, the organization needs to estimate and carry out resource allocation. This part is important as it determines how the organization wants to actually deal with the crisis as much as it clearly signals their direct interception of the severity – a thing that will be eventually be noticed by the stakeholders.

4.5. Mobilize

The next step is to mobilize an online crisis communication team. The size of the team and the selection of the team members are often chosen based on experience, the type of crisis, the amount of resources allocated in the former section and the like. Should the organization be unprepared, it needs to immediately form a team structure with name-given team members, to which specific tasks and responsibilities are assigned.

In general, all organizations should have a “Emergency Response Plan” in place stating what procedures they should follow, who the right contact persons for various types of crisis are, how former crisis handling have taken place, templates for filling in essential information, an “Emergency Response Team” composition including their tasks etc. Should the organization lack an Emergency Response Plan and/or Team, it is recommendable to develop these right away and eventually back it up with a crisis communication manual i.e. a training manual preparing the team for how to deal with different stakeholders through online crisis communication (Coombs, 2007, p. 76).

With the team, and preferably also the plan, at hand, the next step is to engage them into an analyze phase to get a strong hold of the entire situation.
4.6. Analyze

The main task of the analytical phase is to dig deeper into the raw data from former stages and start converting these into specific pieces of valid and reliable information. It is of uttermost importance for the crisis team to establish what the “root cause” of the problem might be rather than scratching the surface and putting out sporadic fires (Coombs, 2007, pp. 63-64). Digging down to the root cause is not as easy at it seems, however, in order to focus the efforts while avoiding wasting unnecessary resources, the team cannot be satisfied with only knowing what event took place – they need to realize what led to it. An example could be looking into a financial report in which the numbers tell the story of where the issue is e.g. increased costs or decreased revenue compared to past years. Yet, what is interesting is not the results – it is the story behind the numbers. So is it with an online crisis, wherefore, the team must identify the story, deal with it in accordance with their analysis, reshape the angle, and tell it in new, positive way to their stakeholders.

Thus, an analysis, as a minimum, seeks to clarify what went wrong and why it is so. The analysis, if done correctly, does not necessarily offer any solutions - but all the answers. It is important to separate between internal and external analyses, as they may differ significantly when looking into the results. An internal analysis may not only cover the major issues rising from within, but also has the potential of mapping out what capabilities the organization has at hand to deal with the situation. Moreover, an internal focus is often deemed necessary as many problems, although fired up by external happenings, have their root cause here (Coombs, 2007, p. 120). Another crucial part of the analysis is that it delivers on the purpose of identifying what the organization can handle internally – a luxury which is often not a given in the global world of integrated networks and fast-moving flows. On the other hand, the external analysis must be conducted as it takes into account the key of solving the crisis: The external key stakeholders i.e. the customers/users. As this group represents a significant part of the crisis parameter, there is no doubt that their interceptions and interpretations must be clearly understood to develop a crisis communication response fulfilling their expectations (Coombs, 2007, pp. 120). The analysis phase thus prepares the crisis team for dealing with the crisis and the stakeholders by giving them the answers to what and why it went wrong, what is expected for them to resolve the issue and how can they match resources and needs.

Please note, an analysis may lead to a revision of the former phases if additional information is needed, another team structure will fit the purpose better, or more resources should be invested.

4.7. Engagement

Some might say that this is where the former phases pay off, whereas others might feel that they are now entering a battle field of definite defeat. Consequently, the engagement phase is where you either take control of the situation or escalate the organizational crisis further.

It must be noticed that this is the phase where direct crisis communication is utilized and turned into a valuable tool of two-way interaction. The engagement part, in this manner, focuses on communicating and entering into an open dialogue with the stakeholders showing that the organization is willing to deal with the crisis in a proactive manner - although, the crisis pattern is most often reaction-based. Jumping well-prepared into the engagement phase, however, only fills half the cup. The rest should be handled by the organization through
well-prepared communication packages, specific tactics, short response time etc (Coombs, 2007, pp. 91-94). Although, many of these effects will be dealt with in the analysis phase, the operation of them, often leading to minor or major changes due to the dynamics and the unpredictable crisis development, take place during the engagement process.

Therefore, the team will often decide what communication channels, structures and tactics they want to combine in constructing the most useful crisis package. To specify, tactics may often cover choice of communicative tone, persuasive approaches, linguistics, semantics etc., whereas channels may include TV, radio, the internet or more specifically YouTube, Facebook, Twitter or the likes. Creating the communication content and key messages is part of structuring the package and will carry a significant weight of how the stakeholders will interpret, react, and respond to the organizational reply (Coombs, 2007, p.155). Once again, it must be emphasized that the choices made should be closely related to what the various stakeholders want, need and expect. Ignoring their wishes will often lead to an automatic escalation in the level of the crisis going from bad to worse. Although, the former phases of the model might seem time consuming, they should not be skipped as the key factor of success is often related to the quality of the response. With a crisis communication team and plan already in place, the response time will be reduced significantly without compromising the quality. Furthermore, the timeline, depending on the depth and width of the crisis, need not to span over several days but may be restricted to a few hours if done effectively, efficiently, and correctly.

One last, but very important, point is that engagement may take place “online” as well as “offline”. Due to the delimitative nature and focus area of this thesis, however, the model is focused on online crisis communication only. There is no doubt that many of the elements can be used within both categories, but should be assessed differently as the offline and online world are two separate, yet, interconnected realities.

4.8. Walking the Talk and Talking the Walk

Having gone through the central phase of engaging with the stakeholders to the benefit of all parts involved, it is time to deliver on the promises and practice what you preached. When organizations engage with their stakeholders and assure that they will act upon their words, but choose not to, hell breaks loose (Coombs, 2007, pp. 144-145). As a consequence, it is as simple as the heading states: Walk the talk! Do not make any empty promises to gain time in the short run – it will only damage your integrity, brand equity, degree of trustworthiness, and reputational image in the long (Coombs, 2007, p. 147).

Talking the walk is the next important step and is closely related to how you walked the talk. Successful engagement paired with pragmatic handling of the crisis must be used a powerful and valuable tool to which the organization can benefit. But in order to reap the benefits of this, they need to communicate on how they handled the crisis in a bad or successful manner – only to do it better the next time (Coombs, 2007, pp. 156-157). And there will be a next. Organizations thus need to tell about what they did good, what they did bad, and what they can do better to show the world how they handled the crisis.
4.9. Crisis Evaluation

Having surpassed the crisis, an evaluation of the trigger effects, happenings, responses, and results must be conducted. There is no doubt that valuable learning points can be derived from this exercise. Should organizations choose to leave this phase out, because it is finally over, they will not be able to harvest all the positive and negative experiences from which they can obtain valuable pieces of knowledge (Coombs, 2007, p. 160).

To turn the knowledge into wisdom, they must collect the pieces in a “Memory Bank” which should be stored and shared internally. The memory bank will act as the backbone for future and/or further crises that may arise in the environment, thus, fostering a fast and qualitative response to upcoming dangers ahead. The memory bank can be turned into different, prescriptive scenarios based on emergent contingency planning (Coombs, 2007, p.160-161). By clarifying what types of scenarios that may arise, what trigger points might stir up dangers, how former actions and preparations led to good or bad results etc., the organization will face a new reality in which they will have a better idea of how to deal with future crises. Although, it mainly will be the online crisis communication team handling the cases, the learning points from the memory database should be turned into small business cases in order to educate the personnel in giving the right responses when faced with a crisis. Education, in this manner, thus becomes a powerful tool preparing the entire organization to, not only dealing with a crisis, but working in a dynamic and global environment of continuous interaction (Coombs, 2007, p.160-161).

4.10. Kaizen

But it does not stop by a crisis evaluation. In short, Kaizen is the exercise of continuous improvement (Karkoszka, Honorowicz, 2009, pp. 197-198). The concept has been used in many business contexts and mainly deals with business process optimization. As a result, it can be transferred directly to everything in which processes flow – which includes the lot. The concept, however, is not limited to working with processes only as the philosophy behind the approach is centered on the notion of not doing everything good, but doing everything better. Therefore, whether you have been doing something good or bad, you must do it better the next time. This puts an immense pressure on every organization to heighten their performance constantly, which may seem hard, but none the less will make them beat competition in the end. Through Kaizen, it might not even be necessary to deal with 95% of the crises if you are already doing better than expected and are still striving for doing more (Karkoszka, Honorowicz, 2009, pp. 199).

In short, Kaizen will allow the organization to become a role model and the good example of how to act and react in an online world moving fast and furious 24/7.
CHAPTER 5
Practical Analysis: The Business Case of Domino’s

Chapter 5 will bring the findings in the previous chapter forward and apply them in a practical manner to the business case of Domino’s.

The sections and dimensions from the online crisis communication model will thus provide the background for exploring the negative and positive outputs of the crisis communication efforts put forth by Domino’s during the YouTube crisis. With this, the main goal is to create a situational analysis in which the business case of Domino’s will be applied to the online communications model, thereby, demonstrating how theory and pragmatics may be incorporated.
5. THE BUSINESS CASE OF DOMINO’S

“There are no secrets to success. It is the result of preparation, hard work, and learning from failure”

- Colin Powell, Former Secretary of State, USA (2001 – 2005), 1937 – present

5.1. Business Case: Fall like Domino’s

Having developed the theoretical fundament, it must be demonstrated how theory can be converted into practice. For this purpose, the business case of Domino’s will be brought into play as case of inspiration seeking to exemplify how the crisis could have been handled in a more constructive manner.

According to Daymon & Holloway (2004) a case is: “… a single entity which is bounded by time and place... The “case” may be an organization, a set of people such as a social work group, a community, an event, a process, an issue or a campaign” (p. 105). Please note, however, that a case study is typically interpreted as a unique unit and rarely dictates any universal truths c.f. philosophical hermeneutics.

5.2. Learning From Failure

The road to success often goes through failure. Hence, in case of failure, one needs to identify the individual pieces causing harm to the collective collapse and turn them into valuable experiences. In defining what went wrong for Domino’s, the negative happenings can be summarized as:

1. Domino’s did not recognize and prioritize the crisis at hand before it was too late.

2. They had not prepared for any such case and were incapable of mobilizing a strong crisis communications team to deal with the stakeholders immediately.

3. They did not carry out a thorough analysis of the case or the repercussions leading to bad management decisions on how to handle the crisis.

4. They did not engage with their stakeholders in an orderly manner and used the right tools in the wrong way.

5. They took in the valuable learning pieces and responded to them, but did not progressively and proactively deal with the issues in a continuous manner.

With a lack of understanding, engagement and communicative skills, Domino’s left themselves in a fragile position incapable of handling the online crisis constructively. Although, learning from failure might not be a direct part of online crisis communication, it may be the trigger that fosters an explicit need for it. Having gone through a period of disappointment, one often realizes that planning, preparation, analyzing and prioritizing are just as important, and just as tough, as implementation itself. It thus becomes obvious that Domino’s, accordingly, needs to learn from its past failures while seeking to exploit these in a beneficial manner. Consequently, on the basis of the theoretical analysis and the Online Crisis Communication Model, we shall go through each stage of the practical analysis using Domino’s as the business case example to clarify what
went wrong. The following chapter “Recommendations” shall make suggestions to how they could/should have done better.

5.3. Context Consciousness
When the incident at Domino’s Pizza in Conover, North Carolina, occurred – including the following post on YouTube - nobody in Domino's corporation was aware of what had happened or took notice of the seriousness of the incident when they finally did (Solis, 2009). In a narrow perspective, Domino’s already conducted their first mistake by not surveying the social media and the digital world for clues or trends relating to their business. But ignoring it when it became apparent was even worse.

This, their awakening to the crisis at hand was when a blogging website addressed the company directly and enquired about the video that was circulation the digital highways. Although the videos at the time had been viewed approximately a million times on YouTube and thus enjoying immense infamy - no red flags were raised at Domino's(Solis, 2009). In the Domino's context it is not only a matter of searching and monitoring the online media the perspective runs even deeper. Domino's context conscious stopped even before realizing that there was a new media platform that might need consideration in terms of monitoring and tracking. Domino's had no clear picture of the imagined community that they had unknowingly become a part of. The following sections break down the sub points of the context consciousness.

5.3.1. The Media Landscape
As stressed earlier it is paramount for any organization to understand the media landscape that they are part of regardless of them wanting to part of it or not. Domino's did not dive into the ever changing world of social media and by that their own control in regard to the media channels was lost (Solis, 2009). An observation that underlines Domino's relationship to the online media is the fact that the awareness was raised through an online contact. This indicates that Domino's do in fact have some online presence, such as their website. The nature of their presence is however not in sync with the flowing and shifting media landscape. By only having a fixed and static online media presence Domino’s are relinquishing their part in the interflowing and variable media landscape. Further problematic is it that Domino’s by having a very marginal online presence and no media monitoring are unable to appreciate and understand the communicative aspects of the digital world.

5.3.2. Stakeholders
As already stated Domino’s lack of context consciousness also affects the way that they can deal and interact with their stakeholders. The stakeholder issue can be seen as a continuation of the media landscape and the flux of communication from the above section. When these before mentioned issues are in force it is impossible to creating any form of mapping of demographics (Shankleman, 2009). With a total lack of demographic overview from the side of Domino’s, they are left without any way to identify any of their stakeholder groups and much less any peer leaders. Because of their lack of stakeholder involvement they
missed the interdependence between their internal stakeholders i.e. their employees and the digital
stakeholders of the internet.

5.3.3. Trends (Past, Present, Future)
As a result of previous sub points that clearly show that Domino's did not have a focus on their stakeholders
nor the media landscape, they were also unable to spot any trends. If Domino's had been attentive towards
trends that might influence them, a media such as YouTube and the stakeholder power that it posses would
have been an obvious one trendwise. Although YouTube is a trend which is at an all time high today, its
development and through that trendiness have been long in the making. Domino's lack of focus on the time
line and development of trends shine through in their ignorance of YouTube and usersubmitted content.

All sub points and omissions in regards to Domino's all have one parent category that encapsulates the
context consciousness issue they are faced with. Domino's have chosen to remain completely oblivious to the
trends, dealings and conversations that are happening every day. Therefore they do not have any data or
learning points to base their communication or management on (Clifford, 2009).

5.3.4. Business Conduct
Although apparently an isolated incident the occurrence of employees being unsanitary with the food and
afterwards uploading it to a public forum clearly shows that Domino's might not have been proactive about
engaging their employees in terms of ethics and behavioral guide-lines. Furthermore their contextual
awareness in terms of business conduct should also have meant that spotting trends and a change in
stakeholders would influence it. A drift in media outlets and stakeholder participation might mean that new or
updated guidelines would have been beneficiary.

5.4. Detection and Recognition
In the case of Domino's the detection and recognition happened simultaneously. A blogger from a prominent
website altered the company to the videos that were readily available on YouTube and from there had spread
to a multitude of online platforms. By the time that Domino's got involved in the case the crisis was already full
blown and had grown to a significant size (Clifford, 2009). At this time all talk about recognizing and detection
a crisis would be obsolete as the magnitude of the crisis would be obvious to anybody. Much of the crisis
detection criterions were provided by the blogging informant. YouTube was the original spawn point of the
crisis and from there it quickly spread throughout the internet platforms.

In terms of the potential spread of the crisis the facts clearly showed that the crisis had already dispersed
quickly from the spawn point and as such showed great potential for further spread (Clifford 2009). Domino's
recognition phase is as presented in the case divided into more than on section. At first they had detected the
crisis but deemed to be a risk that they were willing to live with and chose not to escalate their crisis
management teams into full alert (Clifford, 2009).
At a later point they had to reevaluate their original assessment and stepped the crisis potential up a notch and chose to move on in terms of the present crisis model. Eventually the severity of the crisis was reevaluated again and this time they recognized the crisis as one that held a much larger damage potential. Domino's seemed unable to corporate the two dimensions and meet the speed requirement set forth in the model. Changing the recognition of a crisis several times shows that they were not able to detect the severity and potential of the crisis fast enough or simultaneously in order to center in on a prudent recognition.

Their faltering detection and recognition phase can easily provide a problem in the latter phases. As stressed in the theoretical analysis, the ability to know to detect and recognize a crisis potential is paramount. Missing out on important details or underestimating a crisis can be fatal for any organization.

5.5. Prioritize

When Domino's prioritized the viral video crisis they did it from the standpoint of what they had gathered and learned in the previous phase. However, although the structure of their crisis preparedness was correct they again seemed unable to fix their aim on a correct prioritization. In a sense Domino's was faced with one overall crisis: videos being passed around on the internet. However, several sub-crises existed in the sense that the crisis was now not just happening on YouTube but had reached outside the video sharing network. As stated in the previous section originally Domino’s did not recognize the event as a crisis and therefore did not continue on in the model structure.

At first there was nothing to prioritize as the company did not feel that a crisis were at hand. Subsequently as the reevaluated their crisis recognition YouTube (where the crisis had originated) were pointed out as the priority in terms of crisis management. As their recognition developed further so did their recognition and they moved their efforts to a different platform and created a more focused effort there. Domino's prioritized the crisis with the information that had been available to them and processed through the model. The shift in detection, recognition and priority shows that the information that they had changed repeatedly (Solis, 2009).

The next phase for Domino's would to allocate the resources needed for the crisis at hand. Their widely different approach to prioritizing the crisis might indicate a problem in the mobilization phase. A clear cut prioritization makes it not only easier but also much more effectual to mobilize the right resources.

5.6. Mobilize

As with the previous sections it is evident in their mobilization phase that they had three different approaches depending on the results in the previous parts of the model. It remains unclear whether or not Domino’s had a response plan or team but a likely estimate would be that at the very best they had a vaguely defined one. Their development of their crisis communication from no-response to engagement might suggest that they while detecting and recognizing might have developed their crisis response team and plan. When the organization was unprepared for a type of crisis such as the YouTube event an obvious result must be that the crisis communication team was likewise unprepared.
As Domino's was faced with either no or a lacking response team and plan they were faced with a difficult task in terms of moving on the next phase in the online crisis communication model. Their grasp on the structure of the crisis and exactly how to deal with a crisis, was not nearly tight enough. This left them with insufficient or inaccurate information when it comes to analyzing the crisis (Solis, 2009).

As previously mentioned the fact that they did not have a strong and focused effort throughout the model has proved a problem and will likewise prove a problem in the analytic phase. The very focused and well-informed team that should carry out the analysis of the crisis simply does not exist.

5.7. Analyze
Domino's analytic efforts were fairly limited in regards to both the analyzing and the engaging. It is fairly evident that at least at first Domino's made no attempt to analyze their own or their stakeholders. As an organization you do not need a report to completely ignore the hues and cries from the online stakeholder and obvious problems in connection with internal stakeholders. It remains unclear how much of a report they gathered on their internal and external stakeholders and their capabilities in regards to them in the two following developments. However, all indications point to that there was, as in the former model sections, advancement in their analytic section. Their efforts in connection with analyzing the crisis where greatly changed (Clifford, 2009).

First of all they became more and more aware of their own capabilities when it came to relieving the crisis. The way they changed their approach to the response indicates that they received better information on their internal and external stakeholders. Their actions became increasingly more stakeholders focused. Domino's went from not responding at all to directly and constantly engaging their stakeholders on their terms (Shankleman, 2009).

Although it is clear that Domino's did not truly uncover the root cause of the crisis the first time around, they did seem to look both internally and externally for possible causes and solutions. Initially of cause they refrained from dealing with the problem all together and thus ignoring both possible sides of the crisis. However, as they were forced to deal with the crisis they gradually took a more and more diverse approach, this diverse approach is closely linked to how they also gradually uncovered the true root cause. As Domino's efforts in terms of the videoblogging crisis changed radically throughout the span of the crisis, it is clear that they have also gone back through the crisis model and revised their efforts. As mentioned earlier new information and knowledge gained in the latter stages of the model will often require you to step back in the model and take advantage of this newly gained knowledge to optimize the different crisis response stages.

This also shows that the changed their resource allocation through the different responses. The fact that they changed it proves that Domino's had by far enough resource to actively reduce the crisis and that their silence was self-imposed.
5.8. Engagement

The actual crisis communication that Domino's engaged in can be found in this section. As previously mentioned Domino's initial reaction of not responding to the outcry of the public meant that they did not recognize or prioritize the crisis. This however also speaks of their assessment of the communication channels and the tactics & expectations that they hold. We already know that Domino's were fully aware of that the crisis had spawned on the viral video site YouTube and had from there spread throughout the digital landscape (Clifford, 2009).

The first response was assumedly based on a negligent view on the media at hand and the second one although different proved the point. Responding with a clearly staged video of the CEO of Domino's that evidently had no training or maybe even interest in reaching out to the stakeholders. The CEO was very reluctant to even look into the camera and establish some sort of connection with viewers, furthermore his eyes were constantly fixed on something slightly off camera, prompting people to believe that he was in fact reading from a teleprompter (Shankleman, 2009). When comparing their YouTube efforts with the assessment of communication channels it becomes clear that something is amiss. The main type of communication that are being utilized on YouTube is not a very staged press release nor is the general tone of YouTube a very formal one. Secondly the response time is an issue as well when it comes to using YouTube as a channel. Users of YouTube are used to a very fast response time and being late to the debate often means that you are not taken seriously enough. All in all this proves that what Domino's expectations to the content of YouTube were vastly different from what the stakeholders expected.

As previously mentioned their crisis management went through different phases and stretched itself over a significant amount of time. Time is a great factor when it comes to handling a crisis; not acting in a timely manner will worsen the crisis (Levine, Locke, Searls & Weinberger, 2009, 198). The amount of time that passed before action was taken together with the time gaps that appear in between their crisis communication efforts makes one thing very evident: They had not been properly prepared for the task at hand and Domino's were in no way ready for the engagement phase.

5.9. Walking the Talk and Talking the Walk

The case of Domino's is, as stated in the case description, divided into several separate sections, when it comes to the dealings and actions that Domino's employed during the videoblogging incident. At first they were neither talking nor walking and thus leaving the stakeholders completely unengaged. As the theoretical analysis stated not walking the talk or vice versa spells more trouble for an organization and in Domino's case not doing either only meant even graver problems. For Domino's pizza it meant that the crisis escalated so severely that they had to rethink their crisis strategy (Clifford 2009).

Second time around they did step up their game and launched the YouTube video featuring the CEO. The aftermath of this quickly proved that Domino's were in fact not walking to talk, they had no intentions of moving on from the video press release. The video was used primarily as a disclaimer about it being an isolated incident and that actions were being taken to rectify the situation. Although this presented a chance for Domino's to rethink their approach and fulfill the requirement in terms of walking the talk, they only managed
half of it. They left it at the talking and more precisely they left it at a monologue. The combined efforts of walking the talk and talking the walk mean engaging your stakeholders continuously and not only using your crisis communication efforts as one shot media for reactive press releases (Scoble, Israel, 2006, p. 195). For Domino's crisis communication efforts this was clearly a step up from the original stonewalling but nevertheless it still proved to be insufficient in the eyes of their stakeholders and thus the crisis carried forth.

The third time around Domino's chose to use the microblogging network of Twitter to engage their stakeholders and here the first positive responses sprung up (Clifford, 2009). In this new media they were actively engaging their stakeholders and creating a dialog with the concerned parties. They were now walking the talk of listening, informing and changing the elements surrounding the video crisis. Furthermore they were talking the walk as well as admitting fault, discussing alternatives, debating future perspectives. In the third attempt Domino's was trying to do both; talking the walk and walking the talk. However one crucial point remains when evaluating Domino's practical approach to walking the talk and talking the walk. Although they arrived at the fairly decent strategy in the end, the timeline and the events that took them there was problematic. As stated in the theoretical analysis there is a high demand on starting a dialogue from the stakeholders and making good on what you say (Scoble, Israel, 2006, pp. 56-57). The fact that it took so long for Domino's to reach this final destination of dialogue means that the problems had reached an entirely different scale then they initially had. An important factor to stress yet again is the need to fulfill the speed requirements that the online media world sets forth. Reaching a satisfying solution is only half the goal for Domino's, the velocity that propelled the organization there is equally important.

5.10. Crisis Evaluation

Domino's had a very rough introduction to the world of online social media and the crises that can spring from there. It is difficult to determine whether or not Domino's did an actual crisis evaluation when the waves from the crisis died out. One point to bring forth is that they on their way through the online crisis landscape must have had an extensive evaluation of the events and their own efforts. The knowledge gained from the process would be invaluable for Domino's and hopefully the process have been noted in some manner and will be brought forward in the online crisis communication efforts.

It is hard to determine if Domino's has come out of this as an organization that uses the acquired knowledge to educate their different teams and employees. The crisis that Domino's had gone through would potentially be very useful in terms of creating a "memory bank" within the organization. If Domino's would do a full evaluation of the crisis, the events that created it and their own actions during the crisis, a fair amount of do's and don'ts should present themselves (Coombs, 2007, pp. 152-154). An indication that they have moved some knowledge gained forward in the organization, is that they have continued to update their Twitter feed and in the same continuously been focused on dialog with the stakeholders through this outlet. Domino's seemed to have learned the effect that the multipurpose tool Twitter have on the continuous interaction that an organization should have with their stakeholders.
5.11. Kaizen

When dealing solely with the crisis it is naturally impossible to see whether or not Domino’s would employ Kaizen or continuous improvement in some way. To truly see if Domino's is applying a continuous improvement to their crisis communication efforts the time span needs to be longer and a greater insight into the organization is needed. However as mentioned in the above section their continuous efforts when it comes to their Twitter feed do indicate that it is something that they have chosen to work on in a prolonged manner.

Derived from this it is possible to see some part of Kaizen being utilized within the organization of Domino's. The idea of not just doing everything good but always striving to do better might be shown through their continuous efforts in regards to Twitter. Having been faced with a major crisis Domino's natural response would be to take steps to prevent a similar crisis arisen again. Optimizing their efforts when it comes to dealing with a crisis would do just that. Not only is their Twitter feed an indication of that, also their discontinuation of their staged video press releases might show that they have learned something as an organization and are actively working towards improving their communication during and outside a crisis.

However the only real way to see if their organization is truly improving and becoming a learning entity is if they are faced with or defuse a similar crisis. As an added hint that they have come away from the crisis as a smarter organization is that they now also employ another social media in their ongoing online communication; namely Facebook. Assumedly their efforts on this new social media are derived from their initial entry into social media in the video crisis.

It is again important to stress that only time will tell if they have in fact improved but strong indications tell that Domino’s to some extent have embraced the need to improve on a regular basis.
CHAPTER 6

Recommendations

This chapter will further dwell into the problems and success from the Domino’s case and provide recommendations on how to create a successful online crisis communication. The recommendations will be divided into subsections according the structure of the online crisis communication model to maintain the thread of the case findings. The recommendations will be provided both in terms of the subsections individually as well as weaving the model structure together by creating overall recommendations. The chapter will provide a perspective on the learning points of the case and utilize these as recommendations for future online crisis communication efforts.
6. RECOMMENDATIONS

"You have to learn the rules of the game. And then you have to play better than anyone else"

- Albert Einstein, German-born American Physicist, 1879 – 1955

6.1. Recommending and Comprehending

The following section is based on the theoretical and practical analysis of the online crisis communication model. All recommendations aim at being both specific as well as generic i.e. that although the overall recommendation will apply to the case at hand, the crux of it will be of a general nature and applicable on a larger scale. Furthermore, all recommendations are tied up to the online crisis communication model and will follow and adhere to the theoretical process flows. It is important to stress that individual recommendations will either make use of previous steps and/or carry information forward. In this sense, some recommendations might seem out of place or inappropriate on its own, but play an important factor contributing to the overall understanding and comprehension of the collective pieces. Please note, that no recommendation should be seen as an exclusive advice to a certain specific problem, yet, rather be interpreted as a part of the solution to the greater problem.

6.2. Context Consciousness

When incidents with a potential danger for harming the company occur, one needs to have some sort of mechanism raising the red flags to the attention of the “alarm system”. There is no doubt that all potential risks need to be evaluated in order to either accept or discard them. Context consciousness thus embraces continuously monitoring and evaluation, which Domino’s never really realized.

The ways to gain insight of the social media world are manifold, and there are no “best practice” answers dictating how to do it. Yet, to begin with, Domino’s would have been recommended to raising their general awareness degree of their nearby and distant surroundings – online and offline – by building a simple threshold. For this purpose, a consultancy team could have been hired, carrying out general analyses of their customer base and their communication (platforms). Another alternative would have been to utilize their marketing intelligence department in keeping track of general trends flowing in the environment, including what is on the move within the innovative or trendy playing fields. Or they could have invited a broad variety of stakeholders into different Customer Panels or simple interviews for building a bridge to the holistic intake of mixed understandings.

In order to have a fulfilling monitoring and understanding of the pre-phases of a crisis, Domino’s thus needed to have a complete and undistorted image report of the digital landscape, perhaps on a monthly basis. Ranging from individuals' usage of open source software to paying communications consultancies for developing costly software, it covers a broad spectrum of opportunities as well as challenges. Domino’s could have chosen to buy software solutions for keeping an eye on the virtual world as much as they are expected to keeping track of other general media agendas. “Alarm systems” for informing the organization on when the company name was mentioned in combination with repulsive and/or positive words, could have been a cheap
and easy investment for keeping traction. The basic software can be bought online or even utilized for free, which would leave a limited cost only for man hours in getting the system up running and maintained. Missing out on new and emerging technology often means losing insight, hence, losing power and communicative measure controls. In addition to the points above, it seems that Domino’s actually had a fair chance of getting up to speed fairly quickly, cheaply, and easily by using one or some of the solutions – separately or combined.

In addition to the understanding of the general social media frame and how trends appear, it is equally important to know the inhabitants of Domino’s online world. This tie in with the need to map the information highways that are perforating the digital world clarifying where did the information originate, where did it go from there, and why? Unfortunately, in the case of Domino’s, most social media user mapping were not of a permanent size making it impossible to create prescriptive understandings of the online roads and its drivers. Therefore, it would be recommendable to consider keeping track of the general stakeholder base in the overall context, as the power between different groups and segments shifts rather fast. Even the “smallest guy” not even related to Domino’s or buying their products, could have a damaging effect should he have a powerful network – or just a good story to tell. As a result, context consciousness for Domino’s, and for many other companies, also covers the necessity of monitoring stakeholders e.g. by the means of the aforementioned recommendations.

Finally, as Domino’s are dealing with an imagined community, in which transformation and speed follows dynamic and continuous process development, it is also recommendable to enhance the company’s attitude toward the importance of online media. Training and education courses, with the assistance of personal instructors and virtual LMS, Learning Management Systems, would be strong tools in enabling the organization to changing behavior. Having educated people within the field should, preferably, generate a workforce being context consciousness per intuition. This both covers a wide spectrum of understandings including general trends, challenges, and opportunities; issue frameworks and their scope; the users or stakeholders within etc. Generally, the main idea is to let the employees understand that Domino’s is not a closed bunker or entity prevented from influence from outside sources. Thus, the emphasis and understanding/interpretation of the surrounding context sphere, becomes very important in managing the raising of red flags and combining these correctly with internal tools at hand.

In short, Domino’s became quite vulnerable when being exposed through a media unknown to them. Their lack of context consciousness also demonstrates that the company is in the very beginning of their entry into the social media world. Their understanding of the inner workings of the digital landscape now need to be build from “scratch”, so Domino’s can develop a strong foundation for their social media efforts to come. This foundation may hence be based on the tools of online software solutions, internal intelligence data, outside consultancy reports, education and training of employees, and stakeholder mapping.

6.3. The Media Landscape

Engagement in the media landscape in the case of Domino’s has proven to be completely lacking. Although Domino’s had a website in the time of the crisis, it is clear that they only did so as a part of the bare minimum required by any organization today. For Domino’s to fully embrace the media landscape, it is recommended to create a presence being much more engaging and conversational. As a first means to this purpose, the
organization would need dwelling into the different outlets that are present in today's media landscape. Creating a crude map would an important first step in order to heighten their own consciousness of the digital world in which their stakeholders are present. Looking at the specific YouTube incident, it is clear that Domino’s would had been more aware of the significance and potential of the outlet, if they had been able to foresee the crisis at a much earlier stage. In getting to know the media landscape, many of the same recommendations in the precious section are to be utilized, which emphasizes the importance of getting a good start in the context consciousness phase.

6.3.1. Stakeholders
The video incident proved that several stakeholder issues were at hand, internally and externally. With a heightened context consciousness, Domino’s would have been able to map their most important stakeholders on both fronts and through that become aware of where to channel their communication efforts most effectively. With the knowledge of the context and the media landscape, Domino's can create crisis communication strategies that are both timely and efficient.

Furthermore, with a broad perspective on their stakeholder map, Domino’s would become able to adequately monitor the interrelations between their employees and their customers, thus, coming full circle and holistic oriented in the, yet, separate stakeholder efforts. Being focused on stakeholders also creates the possibility to uncover and identify new segments or peer leaders that are forming. Much of the video incident at Domino's could thus have been prevented or contained if Domino's had a head start with an outset in their stakeholders.

6.3.2. Trends (Past, Present, Future)
With greater insight into the trend perspective, Domino’s could have, with the right preparations at least, spotted the emerging trends and problems surfacing. Spotting trends are closely connected to the stakeholders as they are often the ones creating and spreading them. As mentioned in the theoretical aspects of trends, Domino’s are not expected to be able to foretell the future. However, they are expected to pay attention to the context that they and their stakeholders are operating in. In Domino’s case, doing so would have clearly shown that not only YouTube but social media in general has become a major player in forming opinions and spreading information. The way for Domino's to keep up with current and emerging trends would therefore be to follow the conversations that are constantly occurring in the online forums. Yet, mere monitoring would still leave them slightly short of the full information readily available. As a consequence, it is recommendable not only spotting trends, but also working actively with them. For this purpose, knowledge sharing teams or cross-functional meetings would be required to keep everyone up to date and speed on what is on the move. More proactively, this could also cover having “trend workshops” in which outside companies and partners would be invited for interactive debate sessions.

Adding to this perspective, as well as stated in the previous section on social media and its impact on the online world, what it all boil down to is the importance of dialogue, interaction, knowledge-sharing, and two-way communication. Not only would a large trend spotting capability have enabled Domino’s to prepare better for the YouTube and online consumer crisis, insight into how information spreads online would also have
assisted them to contain and track it. In other words, spotting and understanding the past, present, and future
trends of the online world and how they are interconnected with the corporate aspects, can help contain and
prevent crises of all types and sizes.

Lending a bit more emphasis to the latter recommendation, the present and the past are often the key to
understanding the future. As stated earlier, much - if not all - of the social media concept and online
technology are more closely categorized as “innovation” rather than “invention”. Admittedly, the technology
might be setting a few “inventive” landmarks, but the communicative capabilities are often a further
development and tweaking of something existent c.f. Thomas Kuhn’s Understanding of Knowledge-creation.

For Domino’s, as an organization new to the online world, the above recommendations would clearly assist
them in better understanding how to collect and deal with the data and information on surrounding trends. As
an international corporation, Domino’s should hence focus on global and local trends by investing in short,
medium, and long term trend spotting. The reason for this is not only to deal with crises – but to avoid them
and even gain a competitive advantage.

6.3.3. Business Conduct
An obvious flaw in the case of Domino’s is the integration, or perhaps lack, of a trusted and believed business
conduct. As an organization, they could have benefited greatly had they managed to deeply incorporate a
clear-cut part focusing on company values and employee behavior. A reasonable assumption is that the video
incident at Domino’s and the subsequent crisis are not the first sign of employee mischief that Domino’s have
experienced. It is, however, the first one that got that much out of hand. Had Domino’s, before the incident,
focused on employee behavior, chances are that they would have been able to prevent the full extent of the
crisis. Although, having a business conduct is a very important step, the next, and perhaps even more
important, it to implement it successfully. Changing behaviors and beliefs are often quite hard since these are
deeply imbedded in most people. For this reason, it is therefore fair to say that having a business conduct and
living it do not necessarily go hand-in-hand. Although many approaches can be applied when seeking to
bridge the two, it is hard to say which one is the most effective. Domino’s could choose either a “stick” or a
“carrot” approach, in which they would directly punish or reward their employees for negating or honoring the
conduct. Typically, this could entail reprimands, sanctions, job termination, financial responsibilities or the like.
Since the most common approach for large corporations seems to be a mix of the two, it would also be
recommendable for Domino’s to employ the same strategy.

Regarding Domino’s core values and their general conduct as a business, one of the main problems seemed
to be that viewers held the entire corporation responsible for the incident - and not only the one in Conover.
This clearly boosted the damage to the overall image and reputation, which might not seem surprising.
However, had Domino’s from early on been adamant about their values and morals, they would have created
an image that viewers might have hard time connecting with what transpired in that video. This would to a
large extent provide Domino’s with the benefit of the doubt, whereas in the present case Domino’s carried no
such goodwill. It is therefore recommendable sustaining a strong external positioning and value proposition in
the market, to always earn a flexible frame of “green cards”. In order to do so, Domino’s would have to
communicate more openly and interactive to many stakeholders through a variety of channels, and seize the opportunity in turning the crisis around to their advantage.

In the theoretical section, it is mentioned that when trying to conduct a business based on best practice, it is often beneficial to look at other companies or industries for inspiration and learning points. Tying this section together with the context consciousness part, it is recommendable for Domino’s to have focused on other companies’ efforts in developing a strong conduct, implementing it internally, and communicating it externally. Not only would an attempt to gain best business conduct practice mean that Domino’s could have emerged less battered from the crisis, it probably also would have meant that the crisis would never have grown into the same dimensions. This again mandates for emphasizing the importance of contextual awareness and how it is infused into every element that Domino’s were faced with.

6.4. Detection and Recognition

As stated in the practical analysis, Domino’s recognition and detection happened simultaneously and not by their own accord. In order for them to handle the crisis situation at a satisfactorily level, it was paramount that they were able to discover and assess the crisis before it escalated and became impossible to contain or prevent. Since they missed out on this opportunity, going forward, it is recommendable that Domino’s gain a complete understanding of the context that they are in, in order to later detect and recognize potential crises.

When understanding the context and actively engaging in conversation with the stakeholders that inhabit this sphere, Domino's would be able to foresee developments and gain insight into the informational highways that create knowledge and information. In the present case, Domino’s were alerted by a blogger who had posted the video on their website. Optimally, red detection flags should have gone up the minute the video hit YouTube, with Domino’s simultaneously and quickly recognizing the risks. A huge problem for Domino’s was their inactiveness and their lack of understanding for the context they were positioned in. Rather, they should have gathered a team of experts and quickly assessed the data at hand to develop a thorough understanding of the incident.

However, Domino’s made two important decisions right - but unfortunately on too little information. First of all, when they detected the potential crisis - after the enquiry from the blogger - the gap in time between their recognition phase and detection phase were quite short, thus, fulfilling the need-for-speed when dealing with online media. Their handling of the detection and recognition as two different, yet interconnected, phases through urgency of time was thus a good move.

Secondly, as the crisis unfolded and got progressively worse, Domino’s reevaluated the risks and went back to the detection and recognition phase to refocus their efforts. As previously stated, the model stresses the importance of continuous improvement and how circling back when faced with new information is important. Domino’s did just that when they changed the crisis communication efforts several times through the crisis. Unfortunately, their efforts were in vain and they were not able to fully meet the requirements set forth. The reason for this was simply the lack of qualitative and quantitative knowledge and data which should have been collected in the previous phases of the model. It is therefore recommendable for Domino’s to remember that skipping phases may at best give you a weak approach and at worst work against you – as the CEO
statement did. Had they been armed with a greater knowledge of the context and their stakeholders, the timely efforts would have been much more efficient and their detection and recognition would have been much stronger.

6.5. Prioritize
Technically, Domino’s used the prioritize phase correctly by basing their responses on the information collected from the previous phases. Their biggest mistake, however, was obviously not to recognize and thus prioritize the crisis at hand. Had Domino’s used the recommendations provided in the previous sections, they would have arrived at the conclusion that the video incident was indeed a crisis needing highest priority. This would most likely have altered their continued efforts within the model significantly. As Domino’s were faced with new information, they did reprioritize the crisis at hand, yet, without fully understanding the severity of it. Optimally, Domino’s should have been more focused in the previous phases, and also considered conducting a categorizing and prioritizing manual, in cooperation with a consultancy company, to place the type of incident in a severity matrix. This could contain a simple build up with interconnected explanations in which direct numbering related to a few categories, e.g. potential spread and potential damage, could have illustrated and explained the type of crisis on the rise. The purpose would thus be to give a fast and professional recommendation on which crises to attend to, which ones to keep traction of, and which ones to ignore.

Prioritization is not only about locating whether there is a crisis or not, but also about detecting the key points in the one identified. Content, such as a video posted on YouTube, will inevitably spread online through the massive amount of channels available to all users. Hence, the knowing of channels and how they operate should likewise have been a priority for Domino’s to limit the damage. Furthermore, what is interesting when talking about Domino’s prioritization of the video incident is that the starting point was the blogger that posted the video on the website. However, the real source of the crisis is the employees – or perhaps, as mentioned earlier, the lack of developing and implementing a strong business conduct. Had Domino’s conducted more thorough research in the earlier phases, it is likely that they would have identified the root cause in advance, hence, leaving them with the opportunity to focus their efforts better. As a consequence, depending on which phase one is in, always seek to prevent rather than cure – and if too late, locate the core of the issue rather than working with various symptoms in a random manner.

6.6. Mobilize
In recommending what Domino’s should/could have done, the flaws in the crisis communication efforts become more and more apparent since their omissions through the previous sections are having a greater and great impact on the latter phases. When it comes to mobilizing, the most serious flaw is the lack of an “Emergency Response Plan” and an “Emergency Response Team” - leaving Domino’s with no prefabricated guidelines and pointers when it comes to dealing with an online crisis. Their haphazard efforts when finally directing their attention to the crisis clearly signifies a lack of a competent team and a worked-through crisis plan.
When faced with a crisis of this magnitude, Domino's should thus have had a team of communication specialists, who can be assembled within a few minutes at best – and a few hours at worst. A well-educated and informed team knowing the context that they are dealing with, and understand how an online crisis can develop and spread. Domino's had to assemble a team on the fly when the crisis became evident, and their efforts were flawed, unstructured, and unprofessional. In other words, their actions clearly lacked a well thought out plan and staff that were able to guide, educate and engage the internal and external stakeholders groups influenced or interested in the video.

6.7. Analyze

This is the phase where Domino's online crisis communication efforts really came to a halt. In order to properly analyze any crisis, one needs all, or at least as much possible, relevant information available regarding the crisis. As shown in the earlier sections of this chapter, Domino's had not gathered the information needed to understand and interact within the online context. Having to analyze a crisis without the proper information will inevitably lead to wrong root causes, wrong conclusions, or most likely both. Their attempt to turn the tide using a YouTube video of the CEO, clearly showed that they did not fully understand what the expectations of their stakeholders were.

In this phase, Domino's should have conducted research and gathered information regarding as many aspects as possible on the internal and external stakeholders, the crisis itself as well as the new, at least to them, social media platform. If Domino's had an accurate analysis of the aforementioned aspects, they would, hypothetically, have been able to focus their attention where it was most needed. Furthermore, they would know exactly how to communicate within the different focus areas, and through that create a much more incisive communication plan.

Domino's did, however, again cycle back through the model and because of this they reevaluated their analysis. While this is the correct way of working with online crisis communication, they still lacked the sufficient amount of information which invalidated the choices taken. In short, Domino's should have made greater efforts in gathering information to conduct a stronger analysis and initially a better response.

6.8. Engagement

In this phase, all the choices on how to engage the stakeholders are manifested and should ideally be based on the information collected previously. Obviously, Domino’s were at a total loss in this phase as gathering information and understanding the environment are alpha and omega when it comes to online crisis communication. Once again, this emphasizes the importance of carrying out thorough context consciousness to lay the fundament for the following phases.

However, had Domino's had all the pieces of information needed, they should have immediately engaged both the employees, internal stakeholders, and the YouTube audience, external stakeholders. Opening a dialogue is an important first step when dealing with a sphere that is all about conversations. The idea of having a CEO reading from a manifest does not fit into the expectations of YouTube viewers. Instead combining a more
casual video approach with some of the merits they eventually got on Twitter, would be a much more efficient way and stronger approach to engaging the stakeholders.

In the longer run, a broader and more diverse social media presence would be an effective way to lessen the crisis, appease the stakeholders, and help detect and recognize crises in the future. Picking social media for Domino’s to start their online conversations may seem pretty straightforward, but mindlessly jumping into the biggest ones without any preparation or game plan, will results in a massive backlash. This emphasizes the need for carefully planning what outlets Domino’s want and what information they need to communicate. Equally important is keeping up with social media. YouTube and Twitter might be the way to go for Domino’s right now, as they can provide them with the communication base needed. However, as always with social media, speed is massive factor changing the paradigm and structures continuously. Domino’s should hence be ready to migrate to other technologies if their current ones are not sufficient anymore or if the conversations about their pizza parlor are moving elsewhere.

6.9. Walking the Talk and Talking the Walk

The different attempts from Domino’s to the crisis pose a significant problem when entering this phase. As stated, Domino’s ended up with a decent result, but they were not really communication any of this as they were going along. Dialogue was lacking and the online conversations that should have been brought up and carried through were absent.

Naturally, Domino’s would have been in a better position with the right context consciousness and that would have helped formulate the right “talk” and then do the right “walk”. The recommendation for Domino’s is thus rather simple: Walk the talk and talk the walk, yet, the utilization of this is rather complex. It is therefore recommendable to have the right people in the right positions from top management and all the way down to the guy on the floor when seeking to connect the two. In making tactics for the strategies and actually carrying these into real live actions, is an exercise taking an immense amount of discipline, coordination and monitoring. Subsequently, Domino’s must ensure that the different steps are part of the same plan, and directly connects the dots and lines in an aligned manner when moving from internal planning to external execution. This should be followed through by clear communication and dialogue to enhance the benefits of the efforts, by using the positives – and negatives – in a constructive and valuable manner.

It is paramount to get it as right as possible the first time around by combining knowledge with planning and educated staff. Domino’s either went back or did not follow through on their initial crisis communication, leaving the stakeholders with a skeptic and confused idea of what Domino’s real intent was. This obviously would prolong the crisis and weaken the trustworthiness of the key messages. To avoid this, in short, Domino’s will have to practice what they preach, deliver on their promises, and then tell about their efforts to receive stakeholder feedback.
6.10. Crisis Evaluation

Having gone through a process like Domino's with so much confusion, wrongdoings and misplaced communication, looking back at the events having passed and evaluating can be a good way of gathering and gaining incredible insight and valuable experiences. Naturally, this is true for any organization regardless of crisis communicative success, but learning from failure is always an important. If Domino's were to carefully go through the entire process of the crisis and evaluate all choices made and steps taken, they should be able to identify right and wrong choices – and specify why it was so.

The knowledge Domino's would gain from this post-crisis research would not only improve their understanding of the crisis recently passed. It would also be a valuable tool in the crisis communication toolbox for the future. This is where the "memory bank" comes in as a part of the crisis communication efforts that Domino's can utilize if/when new crises would emerge. Please note, that the memory bank will be discussed in further detail in the Contextualization section.

Thus, Domino's last actions that finally started to dissolve the crisis, is a good indication of them having learned something from the incident while stressing the fact that learning points derived from previous communicative efforts, make a strong partner.

6.11. Kaizen

The recommendations in regards to Kaizen are tightly connected to the evaluation of events that were highlighted in the above section. Domino's should first and foremost look into their communicative efforts during the video incident, and analyze how their choices played out when put in front of their stakeholders. The purpose would be to improve the actions conducted – whether they went good or bad.

In the longer run, however, the Kaizen method should be employed to the entire area of Domino's online crisis communication. Every employee and process should thus have their efforts continuously optimized. The big pitfall for Domino's in the aftermath of the video incident would be if they lulled themselves into sleep believing that the mere presence on Twitter would do all well. In other words, online crisis communication should be just like the social media that it is operating within: Ever evolving and optimizing. This is where Kaizen can really make an impact on Domino's future utilization of online crisis communication. If they employ Kaizen into all of the different sections and dimensions continuously, they will be able to be on forefront of any crisis development that can occur within the social media sphere. Please note that a prerequisite for Kaizen to work efficiently in their crisis communication, would be to have a profound understanding about the social media and the online world. However, if Domino's were to follow the online crisis communication model presented in this thesis, they would be able to meet the requirements and reap the full benefits from not only Kaizen but their entire crisis communication model.
CHAPTER 7

Conclusive Remarks

This section will start off with a section where the model and the case of Domino's will be put in a contemporary context. It will provide a brief look into the real world applications and surroundings of online crisis communication.

Finally, the conclusive remarks shall round off the thesis and give a brief sum up on the previous findings and results throughout the thesis.
7. CONCLUSIVE REMARKS

“Thinking is easy, acting is difficult, and to put one’s thoughts into action is the most difficult thing in the world”

- Johan Wolfgang von Goethe, German Poet, Novelist and Dramatist, 1749 - 1832

7.1. Contextualization

First and foremost, one point is important to put out there: Although the merits of social media are many, it is not the "be all end all" of crisis communication. Not yet anyway. Social media is still a fairly young communications platform, and while it is in an explosion-like development at the moment, no technology is worth anything without the users (Scoble, Israel, 2006, p. 229). As covered earlier in the thesis, changes in society on a global scale have proven that the human environment is changing rapidly in the offline world as well. However, the effects of a globalizing world cannot, yet, match the ones of the online in which we are more and more engaged in conversations and gathering of knowledge thought impossible years ago. Adding to this perspective, the world has never been more informed and interconnected across the entire planet as of today - and the center of the world has in this sense never been more places. Consequently, Domino’s, and any other organization needing to deal with online crisis communication, have to keep the duality of online versus offline in view continuously.

The online presence of Domino’s was infinitesimal, and with a chosen strategy of drawing attention to all other media than the online world, their communicative efforts and skills became quite limited. As the thesis has shown, this became a significant problem for Domino’s when the crisis unfolded and their attention was demanded. However, a similar pitfall exists on the other side of the fence, as a similar problem could easily arise if a company chose to solely base their crisis communication on an online platform – thus turning their back to all offline communication. Therefore, organizations need to have a holistic understanding of the online and the offline world and the interconnection in between. The two have become inseparably and intertwined dimensions in which efforts in both worlds are required. The intertwine ment also means that a combined effort will be needed when utilizing the online crisis communication model in a real world setting. As mentioned in a previous chapter, online crisis communication should be combined with the more classical approach on crisis communication and media outlets. As a result, the thesis model can and will work on its own in the online setting, but most organizations will need a complete crisis communication package. For this purpose, online crisis communication should, ideally, be integrated with the regular company approach to crises, thereby, lending emphasize to an integrated approach. Although there might be a few exceptions in which companies need not to engage in either one or even both of the worlds, chances are quite small. The reason for this is simply to be found in that fact that traditional media and the online media cross over and into each other more than ever. News, knowledge, and rumors originating in the online sphere, easily transpire into the traditional media and vice versa – and we have only seen the beginning (Scoble, Israel, 2006, p. 106).

Another point relevant for this section is the mentioning of the need for incorporating the online crisis communication model into the management part of the organization. Initially, as demonstrated in the thesis, the model can be used as a standalone tool for online crisis communicators. However, as the online world is growing in influence and affecting the offline world, there will be an explicit need for utilizing the model as a
Strategic management tool. In other words, the models and strategies presented in the thesis would need to be quantified and converted into direct management tools. An example of this would be exposing employees to direct training courses on online social media and crisis communication. This would help bridge the gap between the organizational strategies and the employees’ understandings and perceptions of these. Hence, spreading the strategic direction of the organization throughout the general structures, creates a homogenous mindset for all personnel beneficial in future times of a crisis (Karkoszka T., Honorowicz J., 2007).

The term "memory bank" has been introduced briefly in the thesis and, when utilized in a real world setting, could become a powerful tool for any organization. The idea builds on the concept of prescriptive planning where scenario building is a common tool (Lynch, 2006, pp. 16 - 19). However, the ever-changing world of social media makes it nigh impossible to create any generic scenarios that would really fit on future crises. This is why the aim of the "memory bank" is slightly different from that of classic scenario building. The point here is not to make any generic strategies in preparedness for anything that the internet can throw at a company. It is thought as a place to gather the collective knowledge of an organization from their experiences with the online world and crises. This would be where the information would be found to create an online crisis manual, educate the online crisis team, and to find learning points from previous online crisis initiatives. Subsequently, the "memory bank" will not provide any ready-to-go scenarios or any definitive solutions to the problems. Rather, it will provide guidelines and learning points from the past, so that an organization at all times can ensure that the same mistakes are not made. The idea is that a well-developed memory bank can provide an organization with plenty of answers, but no solutions. These will need to be molded after the context at hand reflecting the interchangeable nature of social media. In connection with Kaizen and the crisis evaluation, this can also provide an important benchmark tool for previous performances - thus pushing future performers to excel.

The abovementioned points thus lend emphasize to a few important aspects when putting the model and the findings into a real world corporate context. Obviously, as diverse as the world is, as diverse would the points that would yield an influence on the model and the findings be. This, however, does not mean that the model would lose validity when faced with something else than the theoretical application of crisis communication. The reason for this is to be found in the argument that; the bases for operating successfully within the social media and situational crisis communication sphere, are directly bound to the ability of being able to continuously modify and revise the approach to fit the present context. The same premise also holds true for the online crisis communication model presented in this thesis, yet, it would need revision and development as time dictates it. Please note, that the Kaizen approach for continuous improvement is not only relevant for the findings and outcomes of the model, but likewise for the model itself.
7.2. Conclusion

The message is simple: Today is the new tomorrow, and in meeting the future before it meets you, one needs to act, more than react, and turn challenges into opportunities. Companies, like Domino’s, engaging in the social world, thus, need to think strategically, act tactically, and communicate persuasively to plan holistically.

This thesis has been built on the scientific fundament of philosophical hermeneutics, which fosters an open space for objective subjectivity and interpretation for creating valuable results and process-oriented learning. The scientific manifestation is thus paving the road for the academic as well as practical way of thinking, working, and acting, and takes into consideration how preconceptions and cognitive stimuli affect our decoding skills and behavioral patterns. Consequently, the scientific backbone is reflected in the methodological approach as well as in the different chapters throughout the thesis.

While taking notice of the scientific fundament, the theoretical framework of centralized conceptualizations regarding corporate communications, has given main focus to the fields of globalization, social media, and crisis communication. In order to fuse the paradigms into a meaningful whole, the separate pieces have been intertwined into a holistic hybrid formed as; a theoretical model applicable for practical use within online crisis communication at a global scale. This idea still holds it resonance within philosophical hermeneutics, wherefore, the platform is sought to be objectively created with a subjective touch. It must be emphasized that the chosen areas are strong in themselves, but even more in the synergetic combinations between them. As a result, the general model stemming from the theoretical framework is equally reliant on all three fields and their linkages.

The overall combination has thus been added up and gathered into the: Online Crisis Communication model. The model is divided into seven main sections surrounded by two umbrella dimensions; Context Consciousness and Kaizen. As mentioned, the theoretical fields and paradigms, cf. Chapter 3 will manifest itself throughout the model, as the different theoretical pieces shape the backbone of the key carriers. These will, however, be integrated in different ways and fused with new elements to satisfy an all-embracing whole. Consequently, the finished online crisis communications model does not represent a simple mirror of the theoretical framework, but combines present dimensions in new ways to fit a postmodern context. It must be noted, that the model should not be seen as a fixed universal tool to which everyone must adhere. Rather, it is set to be interpreted as a theoretical guideline for how organizations, including Domino’s, may deal with online crisis communication depending on their context. Therefore, there is a direct link to the idea of “conducting prescriptive planning in an emergent” manner to enhance planned flexibility.

According to the business case of Domino’s, it was found that the results from the theoretical model would have generated a helpful tool for the organization in dealing with the crisis. It is beyond any reasonable doubt that Domino’s could have handled the crisis much better. The lack and combination of general understanding, proactive engagement, strategic thinking, and action planning went totally wrong. Among the key points, it should be emphasized that Domino’s:

- Conducted only limited context consciousness when surveying the social media and the digital world for clues or trends relating to their business. This resulted in a lack of awareness which became apparent in their misplaced idea of crisis preparedness and understanding.
• Left their stakeholders in the dark and did not exercise any stakeholder mapping, thus, operating with external needs and wants based on internal assumptions. Nor did they look into the media landscape in which they were presented making them incapable of foreseeing any of the trends flowing within.

• Largely ignored the crisis, even when detected, and explicitly neglected the recognition and prioritization phases of the crisis.

• Internally, lacked a business conduct firmly integrated in the company. And perhaps more importantly, they missed an emergency response plan and team being trained and educated to dealing with offline and online crisis communication.

• Mapped out a few reasons behind the crisis, but misunderstood the information, the media landscape, and thus the need for two-way communication and dialogue. Paired with this, they also missed out on truly uncovering the root cause of the crisis as the analysis exercise seemed hollow and unprofessional.

• Did not really walk the talk, and only talked a bit of the walk. Their half-hearted efforts based in subjective monologues gave no faith to their stakeholders on which they could rely.

• Should have evaluated the crisis to convey how, what and when did it go wrong; how, what and when went good; and why was it so.

In short, the business case of Domino’s clearly encapsulates how more weaknesses than strengths were present when the organization sought dealing with the online crisis communication. As a consequence, Domino’s faced more challenges than opportunities, and they missed out on the potential benefits they could have gained from the low hanging fruits - if only they had followed the online crisis communication model.

More specifically, Domino’s should have dug deep into the first phase of the model: Context Consciousness. The reason is to be found in the chronological way of thinking, since this is where it all begins. In short, Domino’s would be recommended to engage with the nearby and distant environment whether talking about understanding the media landscape, the stakeholders, the past, present and/or future trends etc. For this exercise, internal departments and or cross-functional teams could have been mobilized - and even paired with external consultancy firms. Another step for Domino’s is also to build direct plans for the crisis teams to handle, when dealing with future crisis in a successful manner. Taking this one step further, Domino’s as an organization would also have to realize the potential of incorporating crisis thinking into the corporate culture – not to constantly deal with it, but to red flag potential scenarios when on the rise. As a next step, they would also have to educate and train their people into being good and strong communicators with the purpose for making them exercise; the right form for engagement when having different dialogues, with various stakeholders, through a mix of channels. Lastly, it is also recommendable converting the model and its phases into operational action plans and strategic management tools for making the ideas come to live. Everyone can make a model or a plan, but not everybody can make it work – and this is often where the difference between failure and success lies.

All in all, it may thus be concluded that the theoretical fundament and framework from Chapter 3 and 4 are, when combined into an online crisis communication model, a very strong tool for dealing with the business
case of Domino’s. There is no doubt that the crises made the organization and their efforts fall like dominos, yet, the upside is that there are plenty of learning points left for them to work on. The thesis model thus seems to make a good fit for Domino’s in dealing with present and future crisis – as long as they remember that no universal truths and generic suggestions are found in a simple model. The ever-changing context, the dynamics, the flux in time, the global flows, and the increased online/offline speed are all important factors demanding the necessity for continuous improvement. While nothing is perfect, it is about finding the perfect match. Therefore, prescriptive planning with an emergent approach will dictate a strong approach for Domino’s to fulfill in the future. And then it becomes a given and a must, to only be satisfied with the very best.
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