THE USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN CRISIS COMMUNICATION – A VIETNAM – U.S. COMPARISON

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ABSTRACT

In Vietnam, social media has become an emerging and popular communication platform. Despite the powerful effect of social media in conditioning a crisis, and the trend to integrate social media into crisis management strategies in many countries, Vietnamese companies have often ignored or underutilized these channels. Therefore, this study seeks to fill the gap, to understand how Vietnamese companies perceive the importance and use of social media in crisis communication. The focus of this study is to compare the perceptions of Vietnamese and American public relations practitioners. As America has always been considered a role model and primary influencer for Vietnam's public relations practice, this study compares the perception of social media in Vietnam to that in the U.S. This study aims to understand the underlying factors contributed to that perception and to evaluate the perceived importance of social media in Vietnam's crisis communication.

Keywords: social media, crisis communication, crisis response, Vietnam, U.S.

ABSTRAK

Di Vietnam, media sosial telah menjadi platform komunikasi yang berkembang dan populer. Terlepas dari pengaruh kuat media sosial dalam mengkondisikan krisis, dan tren untuk mengintegrasikan media sosial ke dalam strategi manajemen krisis di banyak negara, perusahaan Vietnam sering mengabaikan atau kurang memanfaatkan saluran ini. Oleh karena itu, studi ini betujuan untuk mencari tahu perihal permasalahan tersebut, untuk memahami bagaimana perusahaan Vietnam memandang pentingnya dan penggunaan media sosial dalam komunikasi krisis. Fokus studi ini adalah membandingkan persepsi praktis dari public relations di Vietnam dan Amerika. Karena Amerika selalu dianggap sebagai panutan dan pemberi pengaruh utama untuk praktik PR di Vietnam, penelitian ini membandingkan persepsi media sosial di Vietnam dengan di AS. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk memahami faktor-faktor mendasar yang berkontribusi terhadap persepsi tersebut dan untuk mengevaluasi pentingnya persepsi media sosial dalam komunikasi krisis Vietnam.

Kata Kunci: media sosial, krisis komunikasi, respon krisis, Vietnam, U.S.

1. Introduction

Many communications research presented that social media is a prominent platform and Vietnamese organizations pay much attention to reputation management. Nonetheless, little research has explored social media use in crisis communication in this country. This research aims to explore this overlooked topic by studying (1) how Vietnamese organizations perceive the use of social media in crisis communication and (2) by comparing to crisis communication practice in the U.S., how Vietnamese organizations may practice crisis communication in the near future. The findings of this study can contribute to the current public relations practice in Vietnam, and to help public relations practitioners understand their stakeholders better. This study is also expected to add to the literature by proposing other applications and examining the shortcomings of the reviewed theories.

2. Literature Review
2.1. Social media in crisis communication.

Social media has the unique capability to disseminate information quickly and directly to individual audience members. The effect of social media in crisis communication is a two-way process. Social media provides an organization with an additional channel to communicate directly and quickly with stakeholders. At the same time, social media empowers stakeholders, allows them to move closer to an organization, and allows them to have their needs attended to more effectively and promptly than ever before (Kelly *et al.,* 2010).

2.2. Current situation of crisis communication in Vietnam.

Vietnam is considered one of the fastest digital-growth countries. Participation in social media has become essential for Vietnamese people, and Vietnamese public relations practitioners are tapping into these channels to communicate with their stakeholders, mostly for marketing purposes (Van, 2013). With the emergence of social media, Vietnamese, public relations practitioners have tapped into this platform to communicate with their stakeholders.

During crises in Vietnam, the stakeholders expect organizations to be more responsive on social media (Ly-Le, 2019a). A crisis response on social media can lead to better evaluation and perception of an organization (Ly-Le, 2020). However, Vietnamese organizations think that social media is less useful than traditional media in crisis response (Ly-Le, 2019b). The author conducted a preliminary analysis of Vietnamese companies' crisis correspondence to media agencies during 2010-2015, and noticed that none of the analyzed companies considered social media to be a prioritized communication channel. The companies focused their crisis response through traditional media outlets (i.e., press releases or press conferences). They paid little to no attention to social media outlets, even if the crisis had started on social media channels.

2.3. Public relations industry in Vietnam.

One of a very limited number of studies on Vietnam's public relations industry is Van's (2013) research on contemporary public relations in Vietnam. She conducted in-depth interviews with 29 public relations practitioners in Vietnam, including international consultants, Vietnamese consultants and in-house public relations practitioners. She indicated that there is a severe lack of competent public relations practitioners in Vietnam, as domestic public relations programs lack practical applications. To

overcome this weakness of the industry, some organizations send staff abroad to improve public relations knowledge, and Vietnamese students who study abroad also help bring the Western practice to local public relations firms (Van, 2013).

According to Van (2013), who is a public relations practitioner with eight years of experience in the Vietnam market, people in this profession are mainly from three educational backgrounds: in-country public relations programs, overseas (mostly American) public relations programs, and journalism programs. These programs have helped to build the public relations guidelines and approaches taken in most Vietnamese agencies. Within Vietnam, very few universities offer a public relations program. Even though the increasing need for public relations experts has caught the attention of local universities, and schools have begun to provide public relations coursework, the choice remains limited. As a result, as Van (2013) observed, about half of the public relations practitioners in Vietnam go overseas to study and are thus influenced by Western practice, especially American practice. Therefore, by examining how American practitioners perceive the use of social media in crisis communication, the author looked to predict how Vietnamese practitioners would use social media in crisis communication in the near future.

In the Hofstede Centre report, Vietnam scores relatively low on the uncertainty avoidance index at 30 points, and the U.S. scores 46 points (Hofstede Insights, 2020). The indices mean that these two countries behave similarly when it comes to innovations. They welcome new ideas and are willing to try something new, which is social media in crisis communication in this case. More specifically on social media use in crisis communication, it is usually used more by stakeholders than organizations.

Vietnamese organizations are slow in response and prefer using traditional media during crises (Van, 2013). However, the level of public confidence in traditional media is low. Heymer (2008) concluded in his book on Vietnamese consumers and culture that in Vietnam, people have realized that articles are agenda-set, news is paid for, and opinions are bought, and people have little trust in the media. On the other hand, while the worldwide average per country is 37%, the social media penetration rate in Vietnam is at 48%, with 46 million users and a three-hour average daily use of social media (Kemp, 2017). As a result, stakeholders and journalists turn to social media for information.

2.4. Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology.

The theory applied in this study is the unified theory of acceptance and use of technology (UTAUT). UTAUT is a theory that examines critical factors related to behavioral intention to accept and use new technology in an organizational context (Venkatesh *et al.,* 2012). UTAUT can provide a thorough examination of different influences on behavioral intentions and is useful in examining how technologies are accepted within business contexts. Therefore, in this current research, the author applies UTAUT to understand why social media is adopted (or fails to be adopted) for crisis communication within an organization.

In the current study, the examined new technology in an organization is the social media use in crisis communication. Four key constructs influence behavioral intentions to use technology, which are performance expectancy, effort expectancy, social influence and facilitating conditions, as described by Venkatesh *et al.,* 2003; Venkatesh *et al.,* 2012. Performance expectancy is defined as the degree to which an individual

expects that using technology will help improve job performance. Effort expectancy is the extent to which a person feels at ease when using new technology. It is the perception that using technology would be free of effort, and the interaction would be easily understood. Social influence is the degree to which people perceive that their important others (e.g., family, friends, peers) think they should employ the technology. Lastly, facilitating conditions are the extent to which an individual believes that organizational and technical guidance, instructions and resources are in place for support if he or she is to adopt the new technology. Of these, the author chose performance expectancy and social influence to analyze how each construct is reflected in crisis communication.

3. Research Design

This study consists of two sets of semi-structured, in-depth interviews with Vietnamese public relations practitioners and American public relations practitioners. The profiles of the participants are presented in the appendix. The interviews were analyzed using a thematic analysis approach. The sampling approach is purposive sampling. Since there is no formal public relations association or statistics of current public relations practitioners in Vietnam, it is not possible to identify the target population. It is also hard to determine practitioners with crisis communication expertise. Therefore, I relied on the purposive sampling technique to locate the potential participants that fit the objectives of this study. For group two, as I work in Vietnam and can only access this target population remotely, through my external professional networks, I also relied on the purposive sampling technique to find the potential American participants that fit the objectives of this study.

These interviews were conducted with two groups of participants. Each group has its own sets of questions. This research design aims to examine the perception and intention to use social media in crisis communication strategies among organizations. The study process is labeled as follows:

- In-depth interviews with Vietnamese public relations practitioners – interview (1).
- In-depth interviews with American public relations practitioners – interview (2).

The selection criteria are as follows. There is no preference over sex.

- Practices in a public relations /marketing agency or a public relations/marketing department within an organization
- Holds position of public relations /marketing supervisor and above
- Has at least two years of experience in public relations practice and at least two years of working experience in Vietnam or America, respectively
- And understands and has knowledge about social media, crisis communication and crisis response.

Regarding the chosen sample size, I relied on Jugenheimer *et al.,* (2014) recommendation that there is no formal, "agreed" sample size for interviews. The ideal sample size is commonly recognized once the answers no longer provide new information. These scholars suggested that one interview is generally equal to four to six focus group respondents, and recommended a sample size from five to 12 people for a single respondent profile.

Interview (1) was conducted with 12 participants: seven male and five female public relations practitioners in Vietnam. The interviewees were a mix of agency (eight participants) and in-house workers (four participants). The interviewees had a wide range of experience: five participants had two to five years of public relations

industry experience, four with six to eight years, and three with nine or more years of experience. Interview (2) was conducted with eight participants: two male and six female public relations practitioners in the U.S. The eight interviewees included three agency practitioners and five in-house practitioners. The interviewees also had a wide range of experience: two participants had two to five years of public relations industry experience, two with six to eight years, and four with nine or more years of experience.

4. Results and Discussion
4.1. Current use of social media in crisis communication.
4.1.1 Vietnam: Several Vietnamese agency practitioners are against the use of social media in crisis communication.

Throughout the interviews, the Vietnamese participants were against social media use for crisis communication. All were agency practitioners. These practitioners doubted the effectiveness of social media in crisis communication and strongly opposed adopting social media. They advised that an organization should pay more attention to the priority of each stakeholder group and stakeholders' actions and reactions to decide how to best communicate in a crisis. Reflecting on their previous projects, they looked beyond the national trend of wanting to be on social media; they were more concerned about the advantages and disadvantages of this platform. They compared social media to traditional media before making their decisions. They suggested sticking to conventional activities, such as press conferences or offline communication tools, for safer, more controllable and proven results:

My point is to never use social media in [solving crises]. I would rather hold a press conference, talk directly with the involved stakeholders or use other offline tools. [Social media] has immense influence and ability to spread information quickly. In the case of a crisis, social media can make it spread uncontrollably; so it's better to use other tools. – Participant 1C, an agency practitioner with 19 years of experience.

These practitioners believed that the disadvantages of social media can outweigh the advantages. Using social media in crisis communication not only leads an organization to the chaos of uncontrollability but also harms organizational reputation:

Information on social media is unreliable, and sometimes cannot be cross-checked. There was one big crisis that I handled that started from a rumor on social media. People believed it and it grew so big that it became uncontrollable and eventually hurt my client's business. My clients and colleagues told me that we should reply on social media to stop this information flow, but I didn't think so… Relying on such an unreliable channel only makes our information unreliable too. I would disregard the information on this channel. Rumors will eventually die down. If they won't, I would always choose traditional media channels for my responses. – Participant 1K, an agency practitioner with eight years of experience.

As a result, these participants usually persuade their clients to use social media in a limited way or to reject this platform in crisis communication completely.

As mentioned, although a lot of people are using social media for news nowadays, they know that such news is mostly unverifiable information. If an organization relies on social media to spread its crisis response, the response can be twisted or misinterpreted or mistrusted. It is our clients' call, but I

would recommend that the clients choose other tools. – Participant 1K, an agency practitioner with eight years of experience.

In conclusion, as the agency practitioners often work for several organizations at any one time, many believe they would have more chance to work on a crisis than their in-house counterparts, and more access to the available communication tools. Having tried social media for crisis communication, half of the agency participants doubt the efficiency of social media in crisis communication and are generally against such use.

4.1.2. U.S.: Using social media in crisis communication is part of the communication trend and makes U.S. practitioners appear more professional.

The American participants were asked about their opinions of the current use of social media in crisis communication in the U.S. All participants showed favor in the adoption of social media in crisis communication. The supporters thought that since stakeholders use social media frequently, especially during crises, organizations must follow suit and adopt social media into their crisis communication efforts:

Social media is a valuable medium for reaching multiple stakeholders quickly and efficiently. Unlike a broadcast appearance or print mention, which could be missed, social media (like a website) enables interested parties to find the information they are looking for anytime. – Participant 2B, an agency practitioner with 20 years of experience.

Social media can be used as a self-media for crisis communication. If you look into social media of the content that you will receive, [the

display of content is] under an algorithm of what you would like or something you liked before. It's not mutual anymore. The community you were in would influence you. – Participant 2E, an in-house practitioner with two years of experience.

All participants stated that social media adoption in crisis communication could help fulfill an organization's objectives, such as to strengthen stakeholder relations or to provide company updates to the public:

[My organization and I] knew for us to continue being relevant in today's marketplace, [social media] was an opportunity. We felt [if we have social media as a tool in our crisis communication plan, we can understand more] how to do listening and visibility, reviews and mentions, content creation, competition monitoring and social marketing. – Participant 2F, an agency practitioner with 25 years of experience.

Further, while the participants mentioned that it is hard to determine if social media can make crisis management more effective, as it depends on a number of other factors, the agency participants pointed out that recommending social media would make an agency or the proposing public relations practitioner appear more professional and up-to-date in public relations practice with its clients:

As an agency, we instruct many of our clients on public relations situations, including crisis communication. In our area of expertise, social media is a very important component and is always considered. It would make our agency far more skilled in public relations practice with clients. – Participant 2D, an agency practitioner with 20 years of experience.

Generally, American participants agreed that American public relations practitioners and organizations favor the

use of social media in crisis communication. The adoption is part of following communication trends or making practitioners appear more professional in their practice.

4.2. How organizations perceive of stakeholders' habits.
4.2.1. Vietnam: Most Vietnamese organizations think stakeholders seek and share crisis information on social media.

During the interview, four participants replied that their organizations naturally adopted social media because it is part of the current communication trend. Their organizations think that the stakeholders and most Vietnamese people now seek and share news through social media, except for people in suburban and rural areas and people of older generations. Additionally, these four participants noted that if a crisis starts on social media, the stakeholders pay even more attention to social media for updated information. They said that since organizations should be where their stakeholders are, organizations must maintain a social media presence. When asked if a social media presence is beneficial in crisis response, although the participants might be unsure of its effectiveness, the interviewees agreed that Vietnamese people prefer an organization's crisis response to be on social media.

> *[Adopting social media] is not a choice; we need to follow the trend. People are now asking questions on social media, sharing opinions on social media, creating issues on social media… Our company doesn't choose social media… Customers are using it. If we don't use it, we don't do our job properly.* – Participant 1F, an in-house practitioner with seven years of experience.

Further, although the participating practitioners and their organizations might be unsure of using social media, nine out of twelve interviewees agreed that most stakeholders prefer to see an organization's crisis response on social media. The participants also asserted that the stakeholders want to see a response on the same social media channel on which a crisis starts.

> *If a crisis started on social media, it is safe to say that the younger stakeholders are the ones who started it. They are the main users of social networks, and they understand the role of social media and its strengths and expect to receive responses on social media. This is logical because if they highly value one media, they tend to expect to get results from it.* – Participant 1B, an agency practitioner with 19 years of experience.

On the other hand, participant 1A (an agency practitioner with five years of experience) noted that if stakeholders seek news on social media, this does not mean that they only follow the information on an organization's own channels or look for direct responses to the people who started a crisis. Information on social media also includes traditional media news articles that are shared among netizens. As per participant 1A, these traditional media articles on social networks sometimes appear even more credible than a simple online "status" or "comment:"

> *It seems online media is overshadowing traditional media… However, traditional media is still trustworthy. Audiences can compare the news they receive [from social media and traditional media] and make conclusions. As traditional media is controlled by authorized organizations, the information is examined properly, it gains higher trust… People tend to use social media to get news, but sometimes this*

comes from traditional media news that they get online.

Besides the global and local trend of using social media, it is also worth noting that the increase in social media use comes from the unique characteristic of Vietnam's traditional media publications.

In [Vietnam], traditional media is government-owned, so communication activities are quite restricted. Social media is like a door taking us to more exact, faster information. If social media is important in other countries, it is more vital to our country because of that. Organizations are well aware of its strong effect. They know it can impact their image and business. I think, in one or two years, social media will be an essential part of business strategies in all organizations in Vietnam. – Participant 1B, an agency practitioner with 19 years of experience.

In brief, since younger stakeholders are using social media increasingly and they tend to seek and share crisis information on social media, most Vietnamese interview participants (and their organizations) expressed that social media will soon be adopted more in crisis communication.

4.2.2. U.S.: Most American organizations also think stakeholders seek and share crisis information on social media.

Further to the idea that social media already takes up a significant amount of time of American daily lives, the participants stated that American stakeholders seek and share many kinds of information on social media, including crisis information. The participants who had already used social media during crises mentioned that their stakeholders appreciated the effort to be candid and

quick in responding on social media channels:

For something that starts online, we would probably like to take care of it online, but maybe not publicly. Any time we have had negative feedback online, we have usually been able to diffuse it with private messages. Trying to resolve an online issue publicly can look great if it is an easy fix, but more difficult topics can get messy, and other people can chime in. The conversation can get out of control quickly. – Participant 2G, an in-house practitioner with eight years of experience.

Further, participant 2F, an agency practitioner with 25 years of experience, stated that organizations should not only reply on the social media channel on which a crisis started, but on all available social media channels:

While I think it's important to utilize all of your owned, earned and paid marketing outlets for crisis communications… People need to know the brand is on top of it – even if it is something as simple as – we're looking into it and we'll keep everyone updated. Otherwise, rumors spread, people start fake news, people begin saying negative things and more people are mad at the brand for not getting out ahead of the problem.

In brief, U.S. practitioners usually have social media as part of the crisis communication plan because they and their organizations think that their stakeholders refer to social media for crisis information.

4.3. The most concerned characteristics of social media when applied in crisis communication.

4.3.1. Vietnam: Vietnamese organizations appreciate social media's ability to spread messages quickly, but are concerned about its uncontrollability.

Five out of twelve Vietnamese participants said that the most prominent advantage of social media is its ability to spread messages quickly.

> *Social media is the fastest communication platform… It is a two-way communication channel so we can communicate with our customers to provide solutions in the fastest manner. In contrast, traditional [media] is more of a one-way communication tool that the customers can only read without any [conversation to verify or compare the information]. – Participant 1D, an in-house practitioner with three years of experience.*

The unwanted spread of harmful information for organizations on social media leads to another concern of this platform, which is control. Five participants mentioned that controllability (or uncontrollability) is the major issue. Organizations concern of the uncontrollability and are hesitant to adopt social media in their crisis communication plans. On social media, stakeholders are free to interpret (or misinterpret) or share the crisis responses. Organizations have very little influence on such interpretation, and their intended communication goal may not always be achieved. Thus, some participants noted that using social media could make crisis communication more difficult and less controllable:

> *It is easily uncontrolled. Different people have different ways to define control. Some believe losing control equals inability to interfere with netizens' content and influence their thoughts, while others believe that it means not achieving their desired [communication] goals. There are other definitions, but these two are the most common. That's why people are cautious and use social media to a smaller extent. – Participant 1B, an agency practitioner with 19 years of experience.*

> *[Social media's] weakness is that there are many flows of different information or different versions of our information. We don't know how people will interpret or interact with them. – Participant 1H, an in-house practitioner with 10 years of experience.*

As stated earlier, another uncontrollable factor is that social media makes crisis communication faster, as it carries information to audiences almost instantly and effectively. Negative information about an organization, including speculations, rumors and criticisms, can be spread online just as quickly as positive news.

The participants stated that their organizations weigh the value of speed and controllability of social media and traditional media in different crisis scenarios to make the decision:

> *Social media spreads information too fast and too uncontrollably... If there are only one or two negative comments, we can try to remove them; but if there are hundreds [of negative comments], we can't. The harder we try [to tamper with these comments], the worse results we get. – Participant 1C, an agency practitioner with 19 years of experience.*

> *[The degree of social media use] depends on how much we want to be "safe." We usually use key opinion leaders to seed a neutral viewpoint to help calm down a crisis, rather than make an official response, especially*

a response on social media. We don't want any crisis information, including our response, to be too widely spread that we can't control it. – Participant 1A, an agency practitioner with five years of experience.

In brief, its fast speed can be one influential factor for social media adoption in crisis communication, but it can also be a hindrance. The (un)controllability of social media allows for misinterpretation of organizational messages and deliberate spread of negative information. Therefore, it is considered one main influence, or obstacle, to the adoption of social media in crisis communication in Vietnam.

4.3.2. U.S.: American organizations also consider social media's reach to target audiences and its uncontrollability.

Five out of eight American participants mentioned that the most highly appreciated social media characteristic is its ease of reach and engagement with target audiences. This feature allows organizations to cut out the middle person and control the communication content to the stakeholders, and to meet with these stakeholders in an already existing online community. The interviewees shared that American people are integrating social media into a large part of their online lives.

Advantages include meeting people where they already are. People are integrating social media into a large part of their online lives. Rather than have a really cool website that you hope they visit, you can create a presence in a particular social media platform and make it easier for you to get whatever message you want directly to them. Social media also lets you cut out the middle man, so to speak. Not that long ago…, if an organization wanted to reach a lot of

people, traditional media outlets like television and print were key in that effort… Now with social media, you can control your content all the way to the consumer, and if you create good content, your consumers will end up helping you spread your content. – Participant 2G, an in-house practitioner with eight years of experience.

When asked if social media had been fully adopted into their crisis communication plans and if they had actually used social media in crisis response, five out of eight participants replied that their organizations had adopted social media into their plans. The remaining three participants responded that their organizations are still unsure whether to embrace social media in crisis communication because of its uncontrollability, caused by the aforementioned ease of reach.

Two participants replied that their organizations would not adopt this platform as they wanted a more controllable and trusted platform for communicating, which is traditional media:

We will not use social media for crisis communication as we're not sure using social media in crisis response would improve our current practice. We will use social media for cultural and branding communication, but not for [crisis communication]. It's true that most of the stakeholders will follow the news from social media, but they trust newspaper and television more, especially when the information is sensitive, like crisis news. – Participant 2E, an in-house practitioner with two years of experience.

Another participant, who worked for an agency, mentioned that while most of her clients had adopted social media, some clients had rejected this platform because

they thought social media was extremely widespread and it could reach too many people unnecessarily.

> *Clients that have decided not to use social media for even minor crisis communications were concerned about alerting the public to a situation only indirectly related to them. They didn't want to draw attention to a matter that perhaps their stakeholders hadn't even been aware. Thus, [for these clients], we will not use social media for crisis management.* – Participant 2B, an agency practitioner with 20 years of experience.

In brief, from the result of interview (2), the American participants expressed that even though most American organizations knew that social media can be useful in crisis communication and most public relations practitioners support its use, their organizations still hesitate to utilize social media in crisis communication efforts as they are worried about its uncontrollability.

4.4. Current perception of social media use in crisis communication.

4.4.1. Vietnam: Most Vietnamese organizations are not confident that their communication team can efficiently use social media during crises.

While most participants agreed that the initial adoption of social media in crisis communication is easy and requires little effort, they did not think social media is easy to use for crisis response. They mentioned that their organizations are doubtful of their ability to handle a crisis efficiently on social media. As an organization feels uneasy over the speed and uncontrollability of social media, it lacks confidence to keep up with the information flow or manage a crisis

tactfully. They are very cautious in using this platform for crisis response:

> *Social media is easy to adopt, but not easy to handle efficiently, especially during crises and when you have limited staff. There are many mistakes made when we respond to our stakeholders. As the social media platform includes [many channels], we need to have enough staff, experienced staff, to monitor, manage and interact on all the channels at the same time to prevent or stop the concerns of stakeholders.* – Participant 1E, an in-house practitioner with two years of experience.

Moreover, the participants mentioned that using social media requires high competency of their social media team. Since the speed and flow of information on social media is almost instant, and stakeholders' interpretation of information is uncontrollable, using social media in crisis communication requires more time and effort from a highly experienced and responsive team to monitor and craft the responses wisely. This competency was mentioned as one of the two most influencing factors in adopting social media in crisis communication. In most cases, organizations think that their teams are not competent enough to handle crises on social media and thus are hesitant to adopt:

> *Sometimes it's not the characteristics of social media that my clients consider. It's whether they trust [the consultant agency], their communication staffs, or their bosses to handle the situation well if a crisis goes viral online. They ask, "Can you keep up with the information sharing on social media? In such little time, can you make the right action or response before the netizens come up with another question?" Sometimes they just want to play safe with*

traditional tactics. – Participant 1J, an agency practitioner with six years of experience.

To conclude, most Vietnamese public relations practitioners interviewed do not think it is easy to use social media in crisis communication. Therefore, besides the uncontrollability of social media, this lack of confidence is another obstacle to the social media adoption in crisis communication.

4.4.2. U.S.: Most American organizations still need to learn how to use social media in crisis communication.

Three participants mentioned that in crisis communication, social media is frequented more by the stakeholders than organizations. Thus, organizations need to learn how to use a fair share of social media in their crisis communication plans.

I think organizations are just starting to grasp the impact that social media has on a crisis communication situation. While there have been some incidents where social media has been used in crisis, this was more by social media participants versus organizations. I believe that organizations need to update their crisis communication plans to include a social media strategy. – Participant 2D, an agency practitioner with 20 years of experience.

Therefore, to increase the efficiency of social media in crisis communication and boost the confidence of an organization to allow more social media use during crises, the participants wanted to see more education on the platform, and were willing to let go of some control to achieve overall communication efficiency.

Organizations must have confidence in the group handling social media to respond responsibly in a crisis. Organizations must also be willing to let go of some control to those

addressing social media because of the rapid pace of information and the need to provide accurate information in a timely manner. However, it is hard for some senior executives to let go of that control. – Participant 2H, an in-house practitioner with 30 years of experience.

In summary, American participants generally agreed that most American organizations still need to learn how to use social media for crisis communication purposes. It was suggested that organizations learn to use and adapt more to this new platform, and not try too much to control it as they did with traditional media.

4.5. Expectation of social and traditional media use in crisis communication.
4.5.1. Vietnam: Vietnamese organizations expect a combined use of social media and traditional media in crisis communication.

Comparing social media and traditional media uses in crisis communication, three participants insisted that stakeholders still expect crisis responses on traditional media even if a response was given on social media:

I still support a combination of traditional media and social media in crisis communication. Although people may use social media a lot, it doesn't mean they prefer crisis responses on social media. Especially if a crisis concerns consumer rights, people will feel more respected when all the information they receive is from traditional media, like press releases published by trustworthy journalists and publications. – Participant 1E, an in-house practitioner with two years of experience.

Two other participants looked more into the nature of a crisis to decide the communication message and platform(s).

Participant 1H, an in-house practitioner with 10 years of experience, mentioned that social media is just a platform for organizations to communicate with stakeholders; it is only after the chosen message and reaction following the crisis that a suitable platform should be decided. They agreed that social media should not be used by itself but in combination with traditional media. For example, participant 1F, an in-house practitioner with seven years of experience, stated that it may not be clear which of the two platforms (social or traditional media) to choose. Therefore, a crisis communication plan may need to use both:

For me, I would never use [social media] as the main channel. It could take you down with one wrong sentence and the people will scream at you and you're dead… It's complementary. It should not be the sole channel. You do your own strategy and [traditional media and social media] come side by side helping you.

Accordingly, these two participants stated that they would keep using both social media and traditional media in their crisis communication plans, while they also predicted that there would be an increase in social media adoption in the near future. They explained that their crisis communication plans usually include a combination of social media and traditional media to leverage the advantages of both platforms, and the social media share in the plan could increase in the near future.

I may use more social media than I do now. But I still want to use half social media, half traditional media tools in crisis communication. When combined, the end-result [of a crisis] should be better. – Participant 1E, an in-house participant with three years of experience.

To conclude, while the Vietnamese participants have mixed opinions on whether social media should be used in crisis communication, a combined use of social media and traditional media in crisis communication is expected to maximize the effectiveness.

4.5.2. U.S.: American organizations prefer a combined use of social media and traditional media in crisis communication.

Irrespective of having handled an actual crisis, after weighing the positives and negatives and reviewing their experiences with social media in crisis communication, all eight participants of group two called for a combination of traditional and social media, insisting this solution is the best for crisis response. They pointed out that stakeholders usually regard social media as a less serious platform, so other traditional responses or a press conference should be used for official statements.

Because people receive information on multiple channels, it is important to be providing information to all the channels that may touch your stakeholders. Social media can be a great supplement to, but not substitution for, formal company statements, press releases, etc., to maintain contact with stakeholders in between formal statements… [While social media is helpful], more formal responses should be provided through [traditional media channels]. – Participant 2H, an in-house practitioner with 30 years of experience.

In brief, the American interviewees asserted that even in this digital age, an organization cannot singularly manage a crisis, and that the response needs to be on both platforms. Social media adoption does not necessarily mean organizations would use this platform alone; most organizations use it in addition to traditional media to maximize the effects. Social media and traditional media have to

work in concert to best communicate the organization's message.

5. Conclusion
5.1. Predictions

From the discussion of interviews and survey of groups 1 and 2, it can be deduced that Vietnamese and American organizations have similar perceptions and approaches in social media use in crisis communication. Further, it could be expected that Vietnam behave similarly to American in social media adoption for crisis communication, and therefore, the current crisis communication landscape in the U.S. will reflect and predict crisis communication in Vietnam in the near future.

5.1.1. Vietnamese organizations may favor more and use more social media in crisis communication.

Both groups believed that their stakeholders engage social media for crisis information seeking and sharing. Concerning whether social media was actually adopted after the suggestion had been raised, even though half of the interview participants advocated social media adoption and three-fourths of the survey participants had some social media integrated into their crisis communication plans, some still doubted the effectiveness and overall usefulness of social media. Nonetheless, most interview participants noticed that social media is a trending communication platform, and Vietnamese people spend a large part of their day with social media activities. They stated that because the practitioners and their organizations believed social media is currently a popular trend, social media should actually be approved and integrated into crisis communication plans.

On the other hand, the favor of the adoption of social media in crisis communication in the U.S. was stronger than that in Vietnam. All participants in

interview (2) indicated that American public relations practitioners strongly favored the social media use and most organizations had actually adopted it. American public relations practitioners and organizations support using social media in crisis communication, and the adoption is part of following the communication trend or to make the practitioners more professional in their practice.

Among the many social media channels, Facebook is the main channel in both Vietnam and U.S. Facebook is growing in Vietnam in a much similar to the way it did in the U.S. With the increasingly important role of Facebook as the main communication platform in Vietnam and the tendency of Vietnamese public relations practitioners to follow American practice, the researcher believes that Facebook, or social media in general, will be supported more thoroughly and will be used in crisis communication more frequently in the near future.

5.1.2. Traditional media will continue to be one main communication platform for crisis communication.

In both groups, the participants showed similar opinions that their organizations prefer crisis responses on both traditional and social media to increase efficiency, with a more focused use on traditional media platform. While this perception is culture-specific, and the credibility of traditional media in Vietnam is among the world's lowest (Parker *et al.,* 2012; Kruckeberg & Tsetsura, 2003), the current study suggests that traditional media will continue to be the main communication platform for crisis communication in Vietnam.

In Vietnam, public relations practitioners appreciate many characteristics of social media, some practitioners do not think it is overall

useful in crisis communication. Despite the mixed opinions on whether social media should be used in crisis communication, it was recommended that traditional media still be used together with social media to achieve better results. On the other hand, according to interview (2), social media is highly valued in the U.S. in crisis communication, and the practitioners think it is useful. Despite this, all participants in interview (2) stated that social media is regarded as a less serious platform, and that traditional media or offline responses should be used for official statements or in combination with social media in crisis communication. As organizational crises in the U.S. have long become case studies for public relations practitioners, if Vietnamese practitioners see a communication tactic works, it is most likely that they will adapt it into their crisis plans. Therefore, the researcher believes that Vietnamese organizations will continue using traditional media as one main communication platform during crises in near future.

5.1.3. Vietnamese organizations need more training on how to use social media in crisis communication.

Another similarity of social media use between Vietnam and the U.S. is that a number of organizations in these two countries are not effective in their use of social media to address or diffuse a crisis. As discussed in interview (1), in Vietnam, the main influence on the decision to adopt or reject social media use is the platform's uncontrollability, which leads to lack of confidence in the ability of the organization to handle the crisis responsibly and efficiently. Five interview participants agreed that uncontrollability is the major obstacle that prevents organization from adopting social media in their crisis communication. Therefore, Vietnamese organizations lack confidence to keep up with the information flow or

manage a crisis tactfully and they are hesitant to use social media in crisis communication.

Likewise, American organizations lack confidence in handling social media to respond during a crisis, despite having used social media in crisis communication quite frequently. Three out of eight participants in interview (2) mentioned that their organizations still hesitate to adopt social media in crisis communication because of its uncontrollability. Further, all participants in interview (2) indicated that American organizations do not know how to handle social media efficiently for crisis communication purposes.

Compared to Vietnam, social media has become integrated in American people's lives earlier and more thoroughly, and the public relations industry in the U.S. is more developed. Nonetheless, it has taken a significant time for the American organizations to adopt social media in crisis communication and they still do not know how to use it effectively. Thus, it can be inferred that in the near future, Vietnamese organizations will also use social media ineffectively, and will require more training on how to use social media in crisis communication.

5.2. Managerial Implications

The findings of this study will provide insights into the use of social media in crisis communication. These findings are expected to be of interest to communication scholars and public relations/communication professionals in Vietnam. The many influences of social media adoption within an organization and the underlying beliefs of stakeholders can yield new and different ways to improve crisis communication practice. Even though the study is focused on the Vietnamese market, the results may be applicable more broadly and useful in

analyzing the same topics in other markets.

5.3. Limitations and Suggestions

This study presented apparent limitations in its sampling and methodology. One limitation is that the sampling techniques used in this study were nonprobability. While these techniques were appropriate to reach hard-to-find or very large populations of this study, they lead to several biases. The result of this study could suffer from researcher bias when choosing participants for the interviews or the under- or over-representation of particular groups within the surveys' samples. Moreover, while this study tried to reach representative sample sizes for all the samples, the results may not be representative or generalizable because of the shortcoming of these sampling techniques. Another limitation is that this study did not seek the causation of the practitioners' and stakeholders' perceptions of social media. It only found the correlations of the variables from the respondents' perspectives.

Despite its limitation, this study sheds light on the current crisis communication practice in Vietnam, the perceptions of both public relations practitioners and stakeholders, and predicts the practice in the near future. Future research should consider probability sampling techniques to improve the shortcomings of this study and formulate broader generalizations of the results.

On the other hand, through comparison between the perceptions in Vietnam and in the U.S., this study observed that it would take significant time for organizations to get used to social media and to comfortably use it. Even though American organizations have used to social media longer and more frequently than their Vietnamese counterparts, they still lack confidence in using it efficiently for crisis purposes. However, most American organizations still support social media adoption. Thus, it is predicted that in the near future, while traditional media will continue to be one major communication platform for crisis communication in Vietnam, Vietnamese organizations may favor more and use more social media. Vietnamese organizations also need more training and advice on how to use social media in crisis communication efficiently.

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APPENDIX

Table 1
Interview Participant Profiles

Group 1: Vietnamese practitioners				Group 2: American practitioners			
Participant	Gender	Workplace	Experience (years)	**Participant**	Gender	Workplace	Experience (years)
1A	Female	Agency	5	**2A**	Female	In-house	6
1B	Male	Agency	19	**2B**	Female	Agency	20
1C	Male	Agency	19	**2C**	Female	In-house	4
1D	Male	In-house	3	**2D**	Female	Agency	20
1E	Female	In-house	2	**2E**	Female	In-house	2
1F	Male	In-house	7	**2F**	Female	Agency	25
1G	Male	Agency	8	**2G**	Male	In-house	8
1H	Male	In-house	10	**2H**	Male	In-house	30
1I	Male	Agency	3				