CRISIS MANAGEMENT FOR A CHAIN RESTAURANT TOWARD RUMOR DISSEMINATION IN SOCIAL MEDIA
การจัดการวิกฤตการณ์สำหรับภัตตาคารเครือข่ายต่อข่าวลือในสื่อสังคมออนไลน์

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Abstract

The rise of social media has brought an increasing interaction between customers and business. Anyone can share thoughts and opinions with anyone else. This new technology creates new challenges in many fields including the field of crisis management. The question is how companies should handle a crisis in social media. The purpose of this paper was to develop the ideas of how chain restaurants plan for crisis management regarding rumors dissemination in social media. The author starts by providing the definitions of crisis, crisis management, social media, and chain restaurant. Then, the author uses a three-stage approach for crisis management suggested by Coombs to explain how chain restaurants can respond.

Keywords : Chain restaurant, Crisis management, Crisis response, Rumor, Social media

บทคัดย่อ

ความก้าวหน้าของสื่อสังคมออนไลน์ส่งผลให้ลูกค้าและธุรกิจมีปฏิสัมพันธ์ระหว่างกันเพิ่มขึ้น ทุกคนสามารถที่จะแสดงและแลกเปลี่ยนความคิดเห็นซึ่งกันและกัน เทคโนโลยีด้านสื่อสังคมออนไลน์ได้ สร้างความท้าทายให้เกิดขึ้นในหลาย ๆ ด้านซึ่งรวมถึงด้านการจัดการความเสี่ยงของธุรกิจด้วย คำถามที่

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มักพบบ่อย ๆ คือ   บริษัทควรจะมีมาตรการรับมือกับวิกฤตการณ์ที่เกิดขึ้นในสื่อสังคมออนไลน์อย่างไร บทความฉบับนี้มีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อพัฒนาแนวคิดของการจัดการวิกฤตการณ์ที่เกี่ยวกับข่าวลือต่าง ๆ ใน สื่อสังคมออนไลน์ของธุรกิจภัตตาคารแบบเครือข่าย โดยเริ่มจากการให้คำจำกัดความเกี่ยวกับคำว่า วิกฤตการณ์ การจัดการวิกฤตการณ์ สื่อสังคมออนไลน์ และภัตตาคารเครือข่าย และผู้เขียนได้การนำ แนวคิดการจัดการวิกฤตการ 3 ขั้นตอนของ Coombs มาอธิบายเกี่ยวกับแนวทางการจัดการวิกฤตการณ์ ของภัตตาคารแบบเครือข่าย

คำสำคัญ : ภัตตาคารเครือข่าย การจัดการวิกฤตการณ์ การแก้ไขวิกฤตการณ์ ข่าวลือ สื่อสังคม
             ออนไลน์

Introduction

The restaurant business has gained significant popularity in Thailand during the past decade. The challenges were caused by many factors. For instance, two-earner households were less likely to prepare meals at home, the number of singles grew drastically and dine out more frequently, the tendency of married couples without children and single-parent households increased and, ultimately, the consumers placed a greater emphasis on leisure time (Arora, Chawla, & Bansal, 2014). These phenomena have created a surge of chain restaurants due to the constantly changing lifestyle of working people, especially in big cities. They need more convenience and high-quality food, but do not want to cook or eat at home (Kasikorn Research Center, 2015). The advancement of technology has led to a drastic increase in the use of social media, where consumers can instantly share experience about products and service quality of the restaurants they visit. Even though social media can be an effective marketing tool for promotion of restaurants, it does have significant drawbacks. Everything the customers write provides a certain personal perception, and the information can be shared rapidly without any screening. Thus, a chain restaurant's reputation can be negatively affected in a very short time, leading to a crisis in the business.

Crisis

There are many descriptions of crisis, but no commonly-shared definition. Although they may have conceptual similarities, they are not exactly the same. The focus of these selected definitions is on organizational crisis.

Millar and Heath (2004) viewed crisis as an event that suddenly occurs, demands quick reaction, interferes with organizational performance, creates uncertainty and stress, threatens the reputation and assets of the organization, escalates in intensity, causes outsiders to scrutinize the organization, and permanently alters the organization.

Lerbinger (2012) viewed a crisis as an event that brings, or has the potential for bringing an organization into disrepute and imperils its future profitability, growth, and possibly its survival.

Coombs and Holladay (2002) state that a crisis is the perception of an unpredictable event that threatens important expectancies of stakeholders, and can seriously impact an organization's performance and generate negative outcomes. They have developed a list of possible types of crises individual organizations may face and the characteristics of these crises (see Table 1).

The author concluded that a crisis is an expected event resulting negative outcomes to the organization such as bad reputation and performance. It can be in terms of natural disaster, workplace violence, and rumors, to name a few.

Crisis Management

Crisis management aims to help organizations to manage crises and to minimize their negative impacts (Jaques, 2007; Coombs, 2019) states that crisis management seeks to prevent or lessen the negative outcomes of a crisis, and, thereby protect the organization, stakeholders, and industry from harm. To highlight its importance for companies, several scholars have presented crisis management as a strategic activity. For example, Fearn-Banks (2017) considers crisis management as a process of strategic planning for a crisis or negative turning point, a process that removes some of the risk and uncertainty from the negative occurrence and thereby allows the organization to be in greater control of desired outcomes. Burnett (1999) argued that crisis management should be viewed as a strategic action designed to avoid or mitigate undesirable developments and to bring about a favorable resolution of the problems.

Several authors (Richardson, 1994; Coombs, 2019; Meyers & Holusha, 2018; Jaques, 2007; Pearson & Mitroff, 1993; Augustine, 1995) view crisis management as a long-term process and suggested various approaches by stage of action. All these

models generally consider that managing a crisis can be analysed along a time continuum that extends from preventing and preparing for crisis to recovering from crisis.

These models represent different approaches to managing a crisis and differ in terms of the number of stages the process. Richardson (1994) offered a three-step framework. The pre-crisis/disaster phase focuses on prevention by addressing the threats that can cause a crisis. The crisis impact/rescue stage is the occurrence of the actual crisis. The recovery/demise stage involves restoring stakeholder confidence in the organization. Coombs (2019) divided crisis management into three main categories: First, the pre-crisis stage is concerned with prevention/preparation and aims to know what can be said or done to reduce the chance of crisis and moderate its harm if it occurs; second is the crisis stage or the actual response to a crisis, and third is the post-crisis stage which is concerned with the revision, the follow-up information, the lessons learned, and the preparation for the next crisis. Meyers and Holusha (2018) offered a four stage approach for managing a crisis that begins with the normal operations stage as a time when prevention practices are established. In this stage, operations are normal, but preparations are made to address an event that could occur. The second stage, emergency response, involves the first hours immediately following the onset of the crisis. The third stage, interim processing, represents an intermediate phase where temporary procedures are set up until normal operations can resume. The final stage, restoration, focuses on the transition back to normal operations. Jaques (2007) also proposed a four-stage relational, non-linear model to manage a crisis, and considers issue and crisis management in the context of interdependent activities and clusters of activities which must be managed at different stages. The four stages are crisis preparedness, crisis prevention, crisis incident management and post-crisis management. Pearson and Mitroff (1993) divided crisis management into five phases, namely signal detection, preparation and prevention, containment and damage limitation, recovery, and learning. Augustine (1995) suggested a six-stage model for crisis management. The suggested stages are avoiding the crisis, preparing to management the crisis, recognizing the crisis, containing the crisis, resolving the crisis, and profiting from the crisis.

Table 1 Typology of Crises and their Characteristics

Type of crises	Characteristics
Natural Disasters	-When an organization is damaged as a result of the weather or 'acts of God.' Examples include earthquakes, tornadoes, floods, hurricanes, and bad storms.
Workplace Violence	-When an employee or former employee commits violence against other employees on organizational grounds. Examples include killing or injuring co-workers.
Rumors	-When false or misleading information is spread about an organization or its products in order to harm the organization. Examples include rumors linking the organization to radical groups or stories that the organization's products are contaminated.
Malevolence	-When some outside actor or opponent employs extreme tactics to attack the organization. Examples include product tampering, kidnapping, terrorism, or computer hacking.
Challenges	-When the organization is confronted by discontented stakeholders with claims that it is operating in an inappropriate manner. Examples include boycotts, strikes, lawsuits, government penalties and protests.
Human Breakdowns	-When human error causes disruptions. Examples include industrial accidents and product recalls.
Mega-damage	-When an accident causes significant environmental damage. Examples include oil spills and radioactive contamination.
Organizational Misdeeds	-When management takes actions it knows will harm or serve to discredit or disgrace the organization in some way. Examples include favouring short-term economic gain over social values, deliberate deception of stakeholders and illegal acts by management.

Source : Adapted from Coombs and Holladay (2002 : 170-171)

Social Media

Social media can be characterized as a dynamic and ad hoc communication channel where a variety of information is exchanged. So far there has not been a very clear definition of social media among academics. One reason for this can be the fact that shape and functionality of social media depends on many factors which makes it constantly evolving. Technological factors play an especially important role in social

media dynamics as social media development is directly dependent on the technology and platforms that enable the interactive website's content creation, collaboration and exchange by participants. According to Solis (2007), social media is a shift in how people discover, read, and share news and information and content. Evans and Bratton (2012) states that social media relates to a self-generated, authentic conversation between people about a particular subject of mutual interest, built on the thoughts and experiences of the participants. They are part of high-technology Internet functions, which are modified regularly with additional or replacing features.

Social media covers a wide variety of "online and mobile, word-of-mouth forums including social networking websites, blogs, company sponsored discussion boards and chat rooms, consumer-to-consumer email, consumer product or service ratings websites and forums, Internet discussion boards and forums, and sites containing digital audio, images, movies, or photographs, to name a few" (Hollensen, 2014).

Fotis, Buhalis, and Rossides. (2012) point out that social media is regularly identified as social software, social web sites, consumer-generated media, user-generated media, user-generated content websites, or even Web 2.0.

Social media is growing every day. Even if 90% of the 18 to 24 year-old Internet users network via any device at least once per month, social media affects every age group with much higher rates for the age groups over 35 years. Also, when looking at the average hours per week spent on online activities, it can definitely be seen that the world is becoming more connected, with an average of 4.6 hours per week spent on social media sites worldwide (Hubspot, 2012).

An example of social media that promotes the exchange of messages between people across the world is Facebook. Facebook was created in 2004 by Mark Zuckerberg, whose mission was to bring people together with different backgrounds and encourage interaction (Facebook, 2018). As of July 2018, there were over 2.13 billion monthly active users of Facebook. One impact that social media has on intercultural dialogue is providing a common medium for exchanging messages, and many people around the globe can use the Internet to communicate and collaborate. There are 101 translations available on the site, and about 83% of users are outside the U.S. (Facebook, 2018).

YouTube is a video-sharing website that began in 2005. YouTube allows individuals to interact with the global community by viewing and sharing user-generated video content (Bertsche, 2010). Because so many videos are shared by people around the world, traditional stereotypes of groups of people have begun to decline. People have the opportunity to comment on videos and participate in discussions and conferences. Numerous people have used YouTube, and this innovation became a driving force for change around the world (Ostrow, 2010). YouTube has over 1.57 billion users with over 150,000 videos uploaded daily (YouTube, 2018). Many companies use videos to promote their business to other countries. This strategy provides businesses with the opportunity to market their service or products to potential customers spanning across greater distances. With regard to worldwide current events, people upload videos to the Internet for the purpose of entertainment, information, or persuasion. Some videos bring about controversy, and people across the globe can voice their opinions on an issue, which may contradict societal norms and stereotypes.

Twitter is a form of social media that allows people to communicate information through microblogging. People use microblogging to talk about their daily activities and to seek or share information (Java, Song, Finin, and Tseng, 2007). Twitter is a social-networking site created in 2006 to relay real time information to users. Many people follow friends, celebrities, and musicians on this site to whom they feel connected, and develop acceptance for the actions and feelings of others. Twitter has influenced intercultural dialogue because many people worldwide are focused on the individual lives of others and have the desire for a connection and knowledge of events. This example of social media has shortened the ties of distance into knowing exactly what someone is doing without physically communicating face-to-face with that person.

Lastly, the iPhone is a device introduced by Apple in 2007 that combines the function of a mobile phone, MP3 player, and instant messenger (Nowak, 2008). The iPhone combines innovative features, such as the touch screen and wireless Internet access, and it encompasses different applications that include Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter. People can use the iPhone to connect with others on social media sites in a convenient, accessible manner, they can interact on the Internet without being face-to-face or even at a computer.

As stated, social media is very important to today's business both on marketers and business owners. They are able to communicate with their target audience on a daily basis. They can be used for business engaging in marketing, sales, customer service and other business activities.

Chain Restaurant

Chain restaurants are enterprises operating as a part of a large organization. They typically use the same type of menu and equipment and there are standards and practices developed for all the businesses in the chain (Fassh, Dipietro, and Smith, 2015; Scott, 2013) defines chain restaurants as restaurants that have a similar name, product and policy in all branches. A franchise can be founded at the local, provincial or national level while still owned by the parent company. There are many advantages of being a chain restaurant enterprise, e.g., not only being part of a large organization, but also having access to technological developments, staff training, investment and publicity.

Recently the number of international chain restaurants in Thailand, such as Pizza Hut, McDonalds, Burger King, KFC, and Sizzler, has dramatically increased (Burusnukul, Binkley, and Sukalakamala, 2011). Furthermore, domestic chain restaurants have an important role to play in Thailand's food business. Popular and famous domestic chain restaurants are, for example, S&P, a Thai and international restaurant and bakery; MK Suki, a hot pot and Chinese dim sum restaurant; Seefah, a Thai and Chinese one-dish restaurant; Oishi, a Japanese restaurant; Yayoi, a Japanese fast food restaurant; and Grand Canyon, a western-style food café and restaurant, just to name a few.

Quality and customer satisfaction have long been recognized as playing a crucial role for success and survival in today's chain restaurant business. Thus, it is the responsibility of the management to offer good service and make customers satisfied by catering to their desires and wants. Customer satisfaction depends on such dimensions as assurance, responsiveness, reliability, empathy and tangibles, and further components such as personnel, price and situational factors. (Bateson & Hoffman, 2017). Apart from the service, chain restaurants often have problems of food safety in terms of advance preparation, worker contamination, contaminated raw food or ingredients, and high food costs (Fassh, Dipietro, and Smith, 2015).

The Three-Stage Approach of Chain Restaurant Crisis Management in Social Media

The three stage model of Coombs is today the most widely used and recommended framework to analyze and manage crises. This model supposes that crisis management can be divided into three distinct phases, but the process should be viewed as holistic and integrated and its phases should be considered in aggregate rather than as separate sets of activities (Penrose, 2000). The first stage, often named pre-crisis phase, focuses on prevention and preparation. The second stage, generally called the crisis response phase, begins when the crisis occurs and the management responds to it. The last stage, called post-crisis phase, is a recovery phase that addresses how the crisis was handled and allows the organization to better prepare for and prevent the next crisis. In this paper, the author intends to discuss what chain restaurants should do in those three stages as suggested by Coombs (2019).

Stage one: Pre-Crisis

The pre-crisis phase is concerned with prevention and preparation. Prevention involves seeking to reduce known risks that could lead to a crisis, such as implementing risk audits, safety measures and standards, and a control system. Preparation involves creating a crisis management plan that should be updated annually, selecting and training the crisis management team, conducting exercises to test the plan, and pre-drafting some crisis messages. The messages should include statements written by top management and communicated through channels designed for crisis communication. The applications of the crisis management plan and creating a crisis team are demonstrated below.

1) Crisis Management Plan

A crisis management plan for information dissemination in social media should be part of an overall chain restaurant preparedness plan. The main purpose of a crisis management plan is to reduce the impact of a crisis to the chain restaurant's business and reputation, and also protect the organizations' image or credibility. The content of the plan should include information as described below:

● Anticipate possible events that could discourage customers including staff service quality, food taste, cleanliness, etc.

● Define names and contact details of critical persons, including the crisis management team, and spokespeople who should be notified in the event of a crisis.

● Provide instructions on what is required in the immediate response – for example, who will deal with media enquiries and what resources they will need.

● Set the necessary type and style of communication channels, and put fact sheets and dark website pages in place.

● Identify which social media should be monitored, and which media should be used by the restaurants to communicate messages.

● Prepare a message notes template for crisis communication and give guidance on the type and style of these communications.

● Compile a contact list of all key stakeholders and media agencies.

2) **Creating a Crisis Team**

Numerous experts have advocated the need to set up a crisis management team. McCartney, Crandall, and Ziemnowicz (1999) notes this team is responsible for planning for a crisis before it occurs, as well as dealing with it when it really occurs. Pearson and Clair (1998) reported that organizations with crisis management teams showed a greater concern for and attention to potential crises than those without crisis management teams. The crisis management team in a chain restaurant should be comprised of the Chief Operating Officer (COO), General Manager (GM), Operations Manager (OM), Area Manager (AM), Restaurant Manager (RM), Marketing Manager (Mkt. M), and Legal Manager (LM). The crisis team is responsible for restoring command, control and communications during a crisis while gathering as much information as possible so that the directives of the senior manager can be well informed and effectively implemented. One way to determine the members of a crisis management team is to consider the best person and backup for each of the responsibilities listed below.

Table 2 Crisis Management Team and Responsibility

Responsibility	Responsibility of	Tel. No.	Backup	Tel. No.
Decision-making authority	COO	084-61347xx	GM	082-45327xx
Spokesperson to both media and general public	GM	082-45327xx	Mkt. M	083-78310xx
Communication with board members	COO	084-61347xx	GM	082-45327xx
Communication with customers	GM	082-45327xx	Mkt. M	083-78310xx
Communication with restaurant staff	AM	088-61347xx	RM	093-13210xx
Compiling records of events during crisis	Mkt. M	083-78310xx	GM	082-45327xx

Coombs (2019) considers that providing training to the spokesperson(s) is important for a crisis management team, because s/he should be well-prepared to talk to reporters from news agencies during a crisis. Hale et al. (2005) have highlighted the importance of building an image of legitimacy and trustworthiness.

Stage two: Crisis Response

The crisis response phase begins after the crisis occurs and involves management attempts to respond to a crisis. Hale, Dulek, and Hale (2005) consider this stage as the most critical of the three stages identified in crisis research literature. Crisis response strategies have three objectives relative to protecting reputations. They shape attributions of the crisis, change perceptions of the organization in crisis and reduce the negative effects generated by the crisis. Actions at this point significantly influence public opinion about the crisis and an organization handling of the event (Hale et al., 2005). Coombs (2019) noted that public relations play a critical role in the crisis response by

helping develop the messages that are sent through the various public information channels. The author next discusses the response phase in two aspects including initial crisis response, and reputation repair and behavioral intentions.

1) Initial crisis response

Once a rumor about a chain restaurant spreads, the crisis response focuses on three points, including being quick, being accurate, and being consistent. Being quick means that GM should have a message ready to communicate with the public in a short period because customers want to know what the real facts are. An early response may not have much information, but the chain restaurant has the opportunity to present itself as a source of the story. After checking all facts, it is important to communicate accurate information with the public. This is to demonstrate that the restaurant does not have anything to hide, which can build trust with stakeholders (Veil, Buehner and Palenchar, 2011). The GM needs to share information with the crisis management team so that different people can convey a consistent message to customers, restaurant managers and their subordinates. Channels of communication can be through the Internet, intranet, and mass notification systems.

2) Reputation repair and behavioral intentions

Adapted from Coombs' suggestions of reputational repair strategies, the author would like to propose the following nine strategies :

Attack the accuser: GM confronts the person or group who disseminates a rumor which claims that there is some problem with the restaurant.

Denial: GM simply denies that such rumor is not true because the restaurant has its quality control measures. In a case that a chain restaurant is managed under a franchise system, it is good to explain that the restaurant has to strictly comply with the owner's operation manual such as kitchen and service processes.

Excuse: GM minimizes the responsibility of wrongdoing by giving the reason due to misunderstanding by staff, or not brand's standard.

Justification: GM minimizes the perceived damage to the restaurant by informing the public that the standard used by the accusers to evaluate the impact of the questionable event is inappropriate.

Reminder: GM may describe positive characteristics about its existing positive performance in front of its stakeholders to generate goodwill. For instance, the GM reminds the public of its awards received from the government or any entity, the charitable donations or a history of fair treatment to its employees.

Compensation: GM offers free meals or special future discount to the accuser. These positive actions help reduce negative feelings.

Apology: GM admits the fault and asks stakeholders for forgiveness.

Stage Three: Post-crisis

According to Coombs (2019), the post-crisis phase deals with long-term effects or impacts of an event and how to return to business as usual. He suggested three "best practices" to manage the post-crisis phase including recovery, evaluation of crisis management, and next-crisis management preparation.

Recovery: This phase consists of corrective actions to solve the problems created by the crisis. The crisis management team (CMT) gathers customer information relating to satisfaction and complaints, monitor social media whether there are any rumors, meet customers casually, and solicit employee input. The CMT keeps stakeholders updated on the progression of any corrective information.

Evaluation of crisis management: When the crisis is resolved, it is important that the CMT investigate why the rumor took place and how to avoid that from happening again. The GM should analyze the procedures to improve the situation in the future. S/he can assign refresher training on the operational steps in the restaurant. The business can increase the frequency of quality audit checks.

Next-crisis management preparation: The CMT must start preparing for the next crisis to improve its crisis management plan. They may assign the Marketing Manager to monitor social media to ensure that no one is posting false statements or negative advertisements that could affect brand image.

Conclusion

With an increasing number of customers using social media, chain restaurant businesses must be aware that social media applications may result in negative outcomes for their outlets and brand. Using Coombs' three-stage approach to crisis

management, a chain restaurant should plan for a pre-crisis stage by creating a crisis management plan and team. The crisis response stage includes the initial crisis response and reputation repair and behavioral intention. The last stage, post-crisis, comprises a recovery, evaluation of crisis management, and the next-crisis management preparation. The most important stage is crisis response as the crisis has already occurred. Therefore, communication with the stakeholders should be quick, accurate and consistent in order to build trust.

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