The Use of Social Media Among Qatari Youth During Crises- A Survey

Dr. Nagwa El Gazzar[*]

Introduction

As access to the internet became prevalent in Qatari society, as well as the wide spread of latest models of IPhones and mobile phones, the usage of internet applications in communication among youth turned to be a popular stream of information they choose to engage on their own compared to listening to or viewing news coming from mainstream media. Communication in its simplest forms is exchange of information. People vary in their engagement with information, some are more active in information sharing and exchange than others. Information sharing via social networking sites -SNS can take a variety of forms: conversation, forwarding, overt endorsement, sharing and so on.

Importance of the research

The whole idea behind social networking sites, as different from traditional or mainstream media, is the concept of peer-to-peer sharing. So, instead of living in a one-to-many broadcast era, we live in an environment in which information can be expressed from many-to-many all the time. (Southwell, 2013, P.3).

[*] Associate Professor of Public Relations - Qatar University

During times of crises, information diffusion and communication between responsible entities and the public becomes of utmost importance. This research traces the information diffusion via social networking sites in the Qatari society, especially during the times of crises, where uncertainty is high and news feed using traditional media is limited. The results of the research would be of benefit to those involved in public policy when selecting appropriate and most effective tools for large-scale information dissemination using all forms of media.

Social media played the great part during a crisis situation that happened in March, 2012 in Doha, when a fire broke out in Villaggio shopping mall located west of the Doha city. As the mainstream media took time to report the crisis, Doha witnessed the birth of citizen journalism and active social media practice. According to Doha Center For Media Freedom, Doha news- which is an independent News Website- was the only and first media to inform people living in Doha on the incident. They produced stories and pictures as well as a video produced by a mass communication student. The incident resulted in many forms of social media sharing: the cartoonist Khalid Albaih, showed solidarity through a cartoon he published on Facebook, one photographer posted pictures of the rescue operation on Flickr. One customer tweeted about being left in her fitting room with no information. As the fire resulted in many expat causalities and deaths, the French community showed support to the victim's families through messages posted on the website "Vivre au Qatar".(Doha Center for Media Freedom, 2012). Qatari

mainstream media failed in reporting the crisis live, and people were getting updates on the incident from London's Daily Mail online which was reporting live from the site of the incident. (The peninsula Qatar, 2012)

The current research aims to assist crisis communication professionals understand the pros and cons of traditional and new media tools in communication strategies. How the public receives, decides to share and evaluate crisis information via social media compared to mainstream media sources is crucial to creating effective crisis communication strategies.

Research results would shed light on the complex nature of crisis communication in the new era of social media presence beside mainstream media forms. It would assist strategic communicators understand the complexity and importance of creating matching forms of information and using different forms of both traditional and social media to effectively deal with the crisis, within the specific environment of each culture and situation.

Review of literature

Definition ofSocial media:

Social media are a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0 and that allow for the creation of user-generated contents (Kaplan &Haenlein, 2010).

Social media and social networking sites- SNS describe similar online activities. They both focus on how users interact, that is attention on

users' behaviors. A major distinction between social media and social networking sites is that the latter take this connection of users to a step further and use it to create channels of communication and information for establishing relationships among individuals and organizations (as in the case of e-government). Another distinct difference is that social networks are not necessarily digital, but they can refer to any type of social connection among individuals that define in-group situations. (Duhe, 2012, p.6)

Social media arean umbrella term that encompass different practices of online technology that are used to share opinion, experience and perspectives between users. There are different classifications for the forms of social media. Kaplan and Haenlein identified six types of social media: collaborative projects-e.g.;Wikipedia, blogs and micro blogs- e.g,Twitter, content communities - e.g,YouTube, Flicker, social networking sites - e.g, Facebook, virtual game worlds - e.g,world of Warcraft, and virtual social worlds - e.g,second Life. (Kaplan et al, 2010,op.cite)

Currently, social media constitute an integral part of most communication and marketing strategies used for product launches, loyalty programs and sharing news. Even, citizen journalists use social media to share information with the public. A recent survey (2012) by American Red Cross found that social media sites are the fourth most popular sites for obtaining information during emergency times.(Walaski, 2013).

Social media has two distinct features that create a new level of communication and interaction; first, they allow the continuous

modification of content and applications by all participant users; and second, it forms an easy way to create and exchange of content, just enhancing interactivity (Ding, 2009). By social media in this research, we mean the variety of digital tools and applications used for interactive communication and content exchange among publics(Wright and Hinson, 2009).

As a new communication tool, social networking sites offer several advantages when compared to traditional or mainstream media: they are fast, not expensive at all, can target specific sectors of the population. But on the other hand, they have many disadvantages: messages can't be controlled, not everyone use SNS.

Some forms of traditional media may use SNS to remain in business. In response to the popularity of social media, newspapers distribute content via Facebook and Twitter. One study analyzed the top 66 US newspapers' social media presence, and found that Twitter is more effective than Facebook in terms of audience reach. Results also indicated that there is a strong relationship between social media and print readerships, as social media subscribers are part of print users.(Ju et al, 2014).

Social Media and Crisis Situations:

In today's societies, social media play a great role in the dynamics of crisis. Using the Fukushima nuclear disaster as crisis situation, research results found that talking about the crisis communication – which was considered as secondary crisis communication- was higher

in the newspapers when compared to social media because people consider traditional media as more credible (Utzet al, 2013).

When Marshal McLuhan introduced the concept "the medium is the message", new media haven't been in the scene yet. However, researchers found that the medium has a larger influence on users that the content of the message (Schultz et al.,2011) and the information channel chosen for crisis communication influences the audiences' acceptance of the crisis message (Liu et al., 2011)

A crisis is defined as "the perception of an unpredictable event that threatens expectancies of stakeholders and can impact an organization's performance, and may result in negative outcomes (Coombs, 2007, P2-3). Crises can be triggered and escalate via social media, but issues of crises gain credibility when they are handled by traditional media. Researchers used case study method to analyze five crises that were generated on YouTube, Facebook, blogs and Twitter and found that these crises were covered by traditional media because of gained newsworthiness from SNS. Based on previously mentioned, practitioners would use new media tools to counter crises online and manage the transition of crises to traditional media forms. (Pang et al, 2014)

Crises are considered to be social constructions, in that they are not only influenced by organizations, but also by the process of individuals making sense of it (Weick, Sutcliffe & Obstfeld, 2005). Researchers argue that it is the choice of a medium that influences such sense-making processes. When the crisis news reaches the public via social media in a quick and direct way, it positively

influence evaluation and perception of news and contributes to saving reputation than crisis communication via traditional media (Utz et al, 2013), (Schultz et al, 2011)

Crisis communication could happen under a long range of events: political- as in the case political demonstrations, social- within gathering events as football matches, natural disasters- as in the case of earthquakes, man- made crises- as in the case of scandals.

The effects of social media in comparison to traditional media have been studied in different crisis situations. In Ireland, during a dioxin contamination crisis, a content analysis was carried out to investigate the relationship between newspapers, blogs and Twitter regarding the sources used and the tone of news in each media form. Results found that traditional media relied in reporting on a variety of offline sources, and reported a wider range of topics when compared to social media that responded faster and diminished faster. (Shan et al, 2013). Another research examined social media – such as RSS feeds, podcast, microblogs, and SNS- as a tool for communicating food risks and benefit issues. It is found to be effective in involving the public in the communication process(Rutsaertet al, 2013).

The internet in general has changed the way people find information and interpret it. In the US, it was found that most people with health concerns go for online sources and consider it a significant source of health information, in addition to health professionals information. Online information included advices from peers, watching online videos about health issues, consulting online reviews for medical treatment. Most of the adult internet users used SNS in many ways: to

follow their friends' personal health experiences, to remember or memorialize other people who suffered from a certain health condition, to post comments or questions about medical issues, to post an online review of a doctor or of a hospital.(Fox, 2011).

When Facebook altered its platform to allow members to specify "Organ Donor" as part of their profile, and their "friends" inthe network were made aware of the new status as a donor, registration rates were dramatically elevated in the first two weeks of launching an online campaign for organ donations, proving that social media is highly effective communication tool in educating the public and solving serious problems of public health.(Cameron et al, 2013). Social media have been used as a marketing tool to promote public health, as they enable health professionals to reach out a wide range of publics on multiple public health issues. Public health professionals predict that it has the potential to promote and change many health-related behaviors and issues, especially in times of crisis. (Gupta et al, 2013)

Social media as a credible source of information during risks and crises have been examined by many researchers using experimental research on 3 Twitter pages. They found that recency of tweets has an impact on source credibility; with a mediating variable which is cognitive elaboration.(Westermanet al, 2013)

Since information published on the SNS has the potential to influence the way in which individuals think, behave and respond to information in times of crises, crisis communication has been linked in different researches to tourism industry.An online survey of 2,416 tourists form

5 different nationalities revealed that tourists with perceptions of the likelihood of crime, disease or other sources of crisis situation occurring during their trip turn to social media to see information if a crisis were to happen during their travel, as they conduct information searches that complements their risk perceptions. (Schroeder et al, 2014).

Many people believe communication technology offers great democratic promise that can help overcome some of the disparities that have divided us. But even increased access to new technologies will not automatically overcome the network tendencies of human groups in which some tend to be more connected than others. Southwell argues that the infrastructure of SNS that stems from our social nature can lead to the reification and amplification of disparities between people with each new release of information. (Southwell, 2013, p.6)

Social Networking Sites and Youth in Qatar:

One of the basic characteristics of youth in the twenty first century is that they are connected to their devices more than to people and society around them. Some researchers identified them as Generation Y, who rely heavily on technology for entertainment and social interaction. They have been born between 1981 and 1999 in different socio-economic status and different cultures. (Bolton et al, 2013)

In Qatar, social media have evolved far beyond social networking websites, to include micro-blogging websites such as Twitter, bookmarking and sharing websites such as Digg and Delicious, photo

and video sharing sites such as Flickr and YouTube and online discussion forums such as the Arabic language Qatar Shares and the English language Qatar living.(ictQATAR, 2013,p.3). According to the latest report by ICT- the Supreme Council of Information and Communication Technology, Facebook has more than 400,000 accounts from registered users in Qatar. It is used for brand marketing by many big businesses in Qatar like Vodafone, Qatar Airways.

Another recent report in the Gulfalso clarified thatQatar has the fourth highest percentage of Facebook users in the Arab World. As indicated in ICT Qatar and the previously mentioned report, Facebook is also Qatar's most popular social network. 34% of Qatar's population used Facebook in March 2013, while 13% of the population have profiles on LinkedIn, which give Qatar the second highest penetration in the region after UAE . (Dubai school of Government, 2013)

As for Twitter, Qatar is classified as an "emerging country", since 3.8% of the population used Twitter in 2013. In 2011, only 1.5% of residents were active users. The report showed that tweeting in Arabic is on the rise in the Arab World, as 76% of tweets in the region are in Arabic, whether tweets are coming from the government or from individuals.

A recent study conducted by Northwestern University in Qatar between the years of 2011 and 2013 generated more relevant statistics about Qatar internet usage patterns. Almost three fourth of all internet users in Qatar were found to use SNS. Sixty five percent of Qatari nationals use Facebook, when compared to non-nationals whose usage of Facebook reached ninety percent. The opposite is true when it

comes to Twitter usage as Qatari nationals use Twitter (65%) more than non nationals (48%). (Dennis, Martin &Wood, 2013)

According to Qatar's ICT landscape 2013, people in Qatar are more connected than ever before, broadband access is on the rise with eighty five percent of households in Qatar having a broadband connection. Youth aged between 15-24 have the highest penetration rates among different age groups of residents.Mobile penetration in Qatar now stands at approximately hundred percent, when compared to computer penetration that is on decline. As with technology young people continue to lead the way, with a ninety five percent smartphone penetration rate among Qatari youth, specifically. Major activities performed by users on the smartphone are instant messaging –seventy seven percent and social networking – sixty six percent.For Qatari citizens, the figure is ninety eight percent including ninety six percent of women and ninety four percent of seniors- who tend to lag far behind with computer and internet access(p.7). The specific tasked performed online by internet users are varied. Part of the tasks that has to do with the topic of the research include: downloading and watching movies -69%, reading newspapers and magazines -59%, getting information from e-government – 45%, using peer-to-peer file sharing – 32%, creating a web page/blog – 16%.(p.9)

The widespread of social media in the Arab world caused writers and analysts in the region to question the future of SNS and its influences on leading democratic movements in the Arab world. The role of SNS was clear in guiding public opinion and mobilizing societies to produce a new culture in the Arab region. (Al Jaber, K.,2014, The

Peninsula, January 30) . International reports found that Arab users of social media rely on it for political, social and religious situations when compared to their Western counterparts.(Duggan M. and Smith, A.,2013)

Theoretical Framework

There are many theories that cover the crisis communication subject. The Situational Crisis Communication Theory – SCCT concentrated on crisis situation and didn't differentiate between the different forms of communication whether direct or indirect. It classified three types of crises based on the attribution of responsibility and the ability to control the crisis:whether the crisis is preventable or intentional, accidental, and victim (Coombs& Holladay, 2002)

The social- mediated crisis communication model (SMCC) was more specific to social media. It was introduced by Jinet al first in 2011 (Jinet al, 2014). The model analyzes the key factors that affect how publics consume crisis information via social media compared to other sources. The theory is based on the relationships among social media, traditional media, and offline word- of- mouth communication. The findings indicate the primary role of crisis origin in affecting publics' preferred information form- whether social media, traditional media or word of mouth communication.

The social- mediated crisis communication model - SMCC has been applied in an experimental research to understand why and how publics communicate during times of crisis. Results confirmed the validity of the three different variables related to publics' crisis

communicative tendencies: traditional media, social media and word of mouth communication. Results also indicated that traditional media exert the stronger influence on how publics communicate about crises. (Liu et al, 2013)

The SMCC have several points of strength: it indicates how WOM communication occurs among organizations, it highlights social media creators, followers and social media inactives, it distinguishes between two types of relationships: direct - through social media and traditional media informing act, and indirect – through social media inactives receiving information reported by social media followers. In addition, the model clarifies the two –way flows between key publics and information sources. Finally, the model also adds five factors that affect how organizations respond to crises via the different forms of communication: crisis origin, crisis type, infrastructure, message content, and message form. (Liu et al.,2014)

The SMCC model was a development of a previously introduced model that focused on crisis and one of the forms of social media, which is blogs. Blog mediated crisis communication model –BMCC was presented by Jin and Liu (2010). The BMCC states the influential blogs affect blog followers by influencing their opinion and response to their need to be informed during crisis. The effect of these influential blogs extends to non-blog followers indirectly through the word-of-mouth communication between blog followers and non-blog followers. Latter, the model was extended to fit the variety of social media platforms and offline social interactions, not just blogs, and

substituted terms used in the model to express social media in general, not just blogs.

Hypotheses:

The formulated hypotheses examine the different influences of using social media as a source of information during crises situations on crisis communication. The current research argues that using social media as a source of information during crises impacts the cognitive, affective and behavioral dimensions of secondary crisis information. Social media usage during crisis situations is the independent variable, while secondary crisis information or dimensions of impact form the dependent variables.

The first dependent variable tests the cognitive dimension – where the receiver compares between the traditional media and social media as a source of information, store the information in mind and search for more news updates either in social media or mainstream media. The second dependent variable focuses on the affective dimension – in form of the formation of an attitude toward the news received via social media, evaluating the news source as trustworthy. The third dependent variable highlights the behavioral dimension – where the receiver of the breaking or crisis news decides to share it or forward it to others.

H1   Social media is the most important source of breaking news when compared to traditional media

H2   There is a correlation between the use of social media as a source of information and evaluation of the news as trustworthy.

H3   The more users receive the crisis information via social media, the more they are likely to share it or forward it among their circle.

Population and Sampling:

The population includes youth residing in Qatar, who are aged between 17 and 25, of both genders. This age frame is characterized of heavy reliance on internet applications, and social media.

The sample is a simple random sample, consists of 300 respondents, who are students at the College of Arts and Science at Qatar University, who use at least one of the forms of social media.

Research Method:

An online survey was administered using survey monkey on February 20-27, 2014. The introduction included a brief introduction of what is meant by social media, listed the different applications of social media, and asked students to answer the questionnaire only if they use one of the listed apps. This acts as a filtering question to make sure that respondents fit the required criteria for answering the questionnaire.

The survey consists of three parts:

Part one: measures usage patterns of both traditional and social media as well as the importance of traditional versus social media for respondents as a source of information.

Part two: investigates uses and gratifications of social media using Likert statements.

Part three: is concerned of secondary crisis communication in terms of the cognitive dimension or sources of news during emerging crisis, saving it and search process for updates, as well as the affective dimension in terms of evaluating the news as credible or trustworthy, and the behavioral dimension in terms of sharing and forwarding information to others. Questions used true crises happened lately in Doha, as well as hypothetical situations to examine sources of information used by respondents during emergency or sudden situations. It also used Likert statements to measure both the affective dimension of judging credibility of news, and the behavioral dimension of tending to forward or share news with others.

Results

For making it easier in displaying the results, all percentage and frequencies numbers have been approximated to the nearest number.

Sample characteristics:

The sample consisted of 287 respondents, who are students at Qatar University. The sample is divided as follows:

Table (1)

Sample divided by gender

Gender	Frequencies	Percentage
Females	232	81
Males	55	19
Total	287	100

Due to the gender imbalance between the number of females who constitute more than two thirds of students at the university, and the number of male students in the college, gender balance in those who responded to the questionnaire hasn't been achieved, since females constituted 81% of those who responded to the survey (N=232).

Table (2)

Sample divided by age category

Gender	Frequencies	Percentage
17 or younger	3	1
18 – 20 years old	90	31
21- 23 years old	162	56
24 or older	32	11
Total	287	100

The majority of respondents are either sophomore or junior students – representing 56% who fall in the age category of 21-23 years old (N=162), followed by 31% who are aged between 18-20 years old, representing freshmen students (N=90).

First: Usage patterns of social media among youth in Qatar:

(a)Hours spent navigating the internet

When respondents were asked how many hours do they spend in a day using the different media forms, most of the sample clarified that they spend a minimum of two hours a day surfing the net, in comparison to using other forms of traditional media. The results are in the following table:

Table (3)

Patterns of media consumption among the sample

No. of hours	Watching television		Reading books/ mag		Surfing the net		Total
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N
Less than one hour	97	44	119	53	7	3	223
One – two hours	67	36	90	49	27	15	184
Two – three hours	45	31	27	19	71	50	143
Three – five hours	19	17	7	6	83	76	109
More than five hours	12	11	6	5	93	84	111

As shown in the above table, the majority of the sample spendmost of their time surfing the net, as the percentage of internet users increases as the time category increases. Reading or watching television takes the least of their time- either less than one hour or one-two hours (53% and 49%), while navigating the internet consumes between two and five hours a day – (50%, 76%).The highest percentage of respondents (84%, N= 93) stated that they spend more than five hours navigating the net.

(b)Frequency of checking the internet

Sixty two percent of the sample (N=175) indicated that they check the internet all the time, while twenty five percent (N=70) mentioned that they check it every one hour. Only ten percent mentioned that they check the net three times a day (N=28).

(c) Website that are most frequently used

The favorite websites they log to on daily basis are as follows: Instagram (N=195, 69%), YouTube (N=180, 64%), Twitter (N=125, 44%), then Facebook (N=105, 37%).

(d) Checking news online

As for checking news online, 41% of the sample (N=113) indicated that they don't check news online. Those who go for news online mentioned the following news sites: Al Jazeera.net (N=80, 29%), Doha news (N=52, 18%) and local newspapers' websites (N=43,16%).

The sample count on the following sources to update themselves with latest news: they ranked social media as their primary source of information(Average ranking=5.3), next they turn to friends and family (Average ranking= 5.2), then they either navigate the net or watch television (Average ranking=4.7).

(e) Usage patterns of mainstream media:

In their search corridor for news, youth trust news coming from mainstream media. The sample mentioned they use television, radio or newspapers because: they show the details (N=106, 38%), they believe it because it comes from authority (N=104, 37%), and they are fast in announcing the news (N=104, 37%). Only 19% of the sample-N=52- stated that they don't use these mediums.

Second: Uses and gratifications of social media among youth in Qatar

The sample use social media for different reasons. Frequencies of Likert statements which measure the uses and gratifications of social media were as follows:

Table (4)

Uses and gratifications of Social Media

Statement	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Total N
Using social media allows me to understand what's going around me	59% 166	36% 103	5% 13	------	283
Through social media, I can have a voice in all aspects of life	31% 87	51% 142	15% 42	4% 10	281
When using social media, I feel safe to say whatever issues I think about	18% 51	39% 110	36% 101	7% 19	281
Social media is a free zone to criticize any idea or situation	25% 71	45% 126	24% 69	6% 17	283
I feel comfortable after using social media because I express what I think	25% 70	45% 127	25% 70	5% 14	281
I consider all the news that come to me via social media as credible	7% 19	31% 87	42% 118	20% 55	279
Television is more reliable than social media	19% 53	41% 115	33% 94	7% 20	282

Youth in Qatar use social media for different reasons: it allows them to understand the world around them – 95% strongly agree and agree, it encourages them to express what they think so their voice can be heard –82% strongly agree and agree, whenever they use social media,

they feel safe - 57%, however 43% disagree with the issue of safety. Social media allows them to criticize whatever idea or situation they don't like – 70%, and finally using social media makes them feel comfortable as they express what they think – 70%.

However, they don't trust all news that come through social media – 62%, and when they compare social media to television, they consider television a more reliable source of information – 60%.

Hypotheses Testing:

The *first hypothesis* stated that:*Social media is the most important source of breaking news when compared to traditional media.*

In order to understand the communication process and the role played by social media during crisis, the survey used a true crisis situation of an incident that happened around the time of conducting the survey. A strong explosion shook the quiet city of Doha in February 27, 2014. It happened in a petrol station near a famous shopping mall called Landmark. Police hurried to the location and national media reported live from the location of the explosion. The Ministry of Interior reported the incident on its Twitter account, and the Minister of Interior mentioned during a press conference that the public will be updated by news developments via Twitter page of the Ministry of Interior. Three years ago, a similar incident happened, where 13 people died in a fire inside the mall. News of the fire that happened around 11 am were spread all over Doha via social media – BBM, SMS and local news websites. Traditional media didn't report the

incident on the spot,which allowed for spread of rumors, until national media covered the event latter in the evening.

When respondents were asked how did they first heard about the Landmark explosion, answers were as follows:

Table (5)

Sources of information about Landmark explosion in Doha

Source of information	N	%
Friends or family (direct communication)	105	38%
What's app or BBM (social media)	103	37%
Twitter (social media)	33	12%
I saw it myself (direct communication)	30	11%
Radio or television (mainstream media)	5	2%
Total	**276**	**100**

Frequencies indicate that 49% of respondents got the news via two different forms of social media: what's app – 37%, and Twitter – 12%. The other 49% of the sample got it via direct communication either with friends – 38% or eye witnessing the incident- 11%.

In their search for updates about the incident, the respondents ranked order the actions they did. The results are shown in the following table.

Table (6)

Sources of updated information during crisis situations

Action done to get more information during crisis	First rank	Second rank	Third rank	Other ranks	Average ranking
Checking social media to see if anyone wrote about it	39% 111	22% 63	25% 72	14% 41	4.7
Calling friends and family	33% 96	28% 79	12% 34	26% 287	4.5
Turning to official websites	6% 18	9% 24	17% 48	68% 194	3.2
Calling a friend in the authority	8% 22	20% 58	18% 53	54% 154	3.08
Searching for the news on national news websites	7% 19	10% 29	15% 44	69% 195	2.9
Tuning to mainstream media	7% 21	11% 31	13% 36	70% 199	2.6

Turning to social media was selected as the first option respondents turn to in search for more information about the sudden crisis. They mainly turn to social media because they expect that mainstream media won't reveal the information on the spot. The second action they ranked was the direct communication with friends and family to see if they have more information. The average rankingpoints to turning to mainstream media came in the fourth or fifth ranking by most respondents, which confirms turning to social media as a primary source for information during a crisis.

Considering social media as a primary source of information during crisis situations was also confirmed in the results of proposing a hypothetical situation of spread of H1N1 and asking respondents what would they do if they receive such news via social media. Detailed results are as follows:

Table (7)

Actions done when receiving information about hypotheticalcrisis situation

Action	N	%
I check the news online via social media	157	56%
I forward it to selected part of my contact list whom I think the information is important for them	73	26%
I don't do anything	73	26%
I forward it to all my contact list	56	20%
Total	281	100

The first response of respondents to a hypothetical crisis situation is also checking social media -56%, followed by sharing the information with respondents' circle- 26%. However, other 26% pursue a negative action by doing nothing- not trying to get additional information or even sharing it with others.

Based on the results of previous questions, therefore, the first hypothesis has proven to be true.

The *second hypothesis* stated that: *There is a correlation between the use of social media as a source of information and evaluation of the news as trustworthy.*

By evaluation of the news, we mean achieving the affective part of communication process, which is establishing an attitude towards the

news coming from social media, believe it and trust it as a source of information.

The hypothesis is tested through the statement that gives a rank to the trustworthiness of traditional media forms and social media. It states: "I believe and trust information that comes from", and the respondent is asked to rank order all forms of media. According to the average ranking of alternative answers, and for weighting the ranking whether an advanced (first and second ranking) or a latter rank (fourth or fifth rank), the researcher combined in one column the first and second ranking, third and fourth ranking, as well as other latter rankings. The results were as follows:

Table (8)

Credibility of news based on the source of information

News source	First& second ranking	Third & fourth ranking	Fifth&sixth ranking	Seventh & eighth ranking	Average ranking
Television	57% 164	38% 80	14% 40	1% 3	6.4
Newspapers	48% 138	41% 118	8% 23	2% 8	6.2
Twitter	36% 105	33% 94	21% 60	10% 28	5.4
Radio	18% 52	43% 123	33% 94	6% 18	5.02
Facebook	16% 47	25% 72	37% 107	22% 61	4.3
Instagram	9% 25	10% 31	58% 166	23% 65	3.5
What's app	4% 11	15% 45	25% 71	56% 160	2.9

As average ranking points out, the majority of respondents put the mainstream media (television- 57% then newspapers- 48%) in the first and second ranking as the most credible sources of information. However, 36% of respondents (N=105) placed Twitter in the first or second ranking as a credible source of information.

In the third and fourth ranking a credible source to trust, came another form of stream media which is radio – 43% (N=123), followed by Facebook in the fifth and sixth ranking-37% (N=107).

As for Instagram, the majority of respondents – 58% (N=166) put it in the fifth or sixth rank, followed by what's app, which they put in the seventh or eighth rank- 56% (N=160).

The issue of credibility of news source has also been tested through two Likert statements in Question no.12 that stated:

I consider information coming from Twitter or Facebook as rumors till I hear it from TV or read it in newspapers.

I trust news when it comes to me personally through friends more than when it comes through Twitter or Facebook.   The results are shown in the next table:

Table (9)

Trust in traditional media and direct communication sources compared to social media

Statement	Strongly agree	agree	disagree	Strongly disagree	Total	Average rating
Information coming from Twitter or Facebook are rumors till I hear it in TV or read in newspaper	35% 100	43% 122	18% 52	3% 9	283	1.9
I trust news coming to me personally more than news coming via Twitter or Facebook	21% 59	49% 139	28% 80	2% 6	284	2.1

The statements confirm the previous conclusion: traditional media as a source of information enjoy credibility and trust among respondents when compared to Twitter or Facebook. In addition, direct communication sources are considered the most credible when compared to social media as a source of information.

Based on the results of rank ordering the different media forms based on their credibility as news source and the results of Likert statements that compares trustworthiness of both media, it is proven that respondents trust traditional media as a news source more than the different forms of social media, therefore, the second hypothesis has proven **not**to be true.

Hypothesis three stated that:*The more users receive the crisis information via social media, the more they are likely to share it or forward it among their circle.*

Sincethe action of sharing and forwarding the news coming via social media represent the behavioral part of the crisis communication process, the hypothesis have been tested using two Likert statements. The results are shown in the next table.

Table (10)

The behavioral dimension of crisis communication via social media

Statement	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Total
I like to share tweets and messages of breaking news happening in Doha with other people	15% 43	40% 113	33% 95	12% 35	286
I don't forward all the news I receive to my contact list, but I select only breakingnews	26% 73	48% 134	20% 56	7% 19	282

More than half of the sample agrees to the idea of sharing Tweets of breaking news with others 55% (N=156), which is a higher percentage than the percentage of those who disagreed to the idea of sharing-45% (N=130).

The second statement detected the action of forwarding only breaking news coming from social media. The percentage of those who agreed to the idea of forwarding only breaking news reached 74% (N=207).

The action part of crisis communication was also tested through proposing a hypothetical situation of a crisis news delivered via social media and checking the respondents' response. The question is stated as follows:

If I receive a message via Twitter or what's app about closing of 2 schools in Doha after discovering 8 cases of H1N1, I may do the following (Mark all that apply)

- Forward it to all my contact list

- Forward it to selected part of my contact list

- Call friends directly

- Check the news on social media

- Don't do anything

The results were as follows

Table (11)

Action of a hypothetical crisis communication delivered by social media

Action	%	N
Forward it to all contact list	20%	56
Forward it to select part of contact list	26%	73
Call friends directly	15%	43
Check the news online via social media	56%	157
Don't do anything	26%	73
Total	100%	281

More than half of the sample- 56% (N=157) chose to check the news online via social media before passing it to others, then they either

forward it to selected part of their contact list- 26% (N=73) or just do nothing about it- 26% (N=73). The percentage of those who prefer to act and forward the message to all contact list reached 20% (N=56). The respondents don't prefer direct communication with crisis news received through social media, as the percentage of those who selected the direct communication option- to call friends directly- were only 15% (N=43) of the sample.

Despite the fact that respondents prefer to share breaking news coming from social media with others, yet, before doing the action of forwarding it, they use other sources of social media to confirm crisis news, and they select part of their contact list to forward the news- not all of their contact list. This means that the behavioral dimension is not achieved spontaneously, but it entails thinking and searching for more information. Based upon the above mentioned results, the third hypothesis has proven to be partially true.

Conclusion:

The research investigated how social media plays a role as a source of information during crisis situations, and highlighted the different dimensions of effect that results from using social media as source of information during crisis and breaking events. The cognitive dimension represented the process of acquiring news and updates via different communication channels-including social media, while the affective and behavioral dimensions represented the evaluation of news sources as trustworthy and taking the action of forwarding it or sharing it with others using social media.

The survey used a true crisis situation happened in Doha to check on the media that was used by respondents to convey the news of the crisis incident. Almost half of the sample – 49% received the news either via What's app or via Twitter. The second used form of communication was the direct communication with friends- 38%.When checking the actions of respondents in their search for more updates about the crisis incident, they first thought of checking social media as it had the highest average ranking then they went on direct communication with friends and family. The final action they thought of when searching for updates of crisis news is turning to traditional media.

Even when respondents were offered a hypothetical crisis situation and were asked what would they do in order to know more about this situation, more than half of the sample- 56% mentioned they would check the news online using social media. The results confirmed the important role played by social media as a source of information and as a source of updated news during crisis situations in Qatar.

As for the affective dimension of secondary crisis communication, the survey checked how respondents evaluate the news source – whether traditional or social media- as believable and trustworthy. When respondents were asked to rank order the most media they trust as a source of information, they put mainstream media as television and newspapers in the first and second ranking, followed by Twitter as a form of social media. Although Instagram relies on photos, the majority of respondents put in either the fifth or sixth rank, along with what's app. The same result of trusting traditional media more than

social media as a source of information was also confirmed through Likert statements, where 78% of respondents (N=222) agreed to considering information from Twitter or Facebook as rumors till television or newspapers confirm them. However, despite the fact that 70% (N=198) agreed to giving higher level of trustworthiness to personal sources of information more than social media, yet 30% of respondents (N=86) disagreed with the same statement. This leads us to the conclusion that despite youth use social media as a primary source of information during crisis, yet, they trust news coming from traditional media more than news coming via social media.

The behavioral dimension of using social media as a source of information during crisis is achieved when users decide to forward it or share it with others. Results of Likert statements showed that youth like to forward and share breaking news with others in their network circle. However, they don't automatically do this action, but before forwarding, they check updates of news online in the different applications of social media and they also select friends from the list, and not forward to all of their list.

The above mentioned results portrayed the route users of social media go through when receiving crisis information from social media. Social media forces itself as an integral part of the communication process, especially during times of crisis and ambiguity. The widespread of mobile broadband in the Qatari society by almost all age categories- not just youth- and the Arabic language used in Twitter, what's app and Facebook have paved the road for the expansion of role played by social media applications in the

communication process and transfer of information during crisis. Yet, in crisis situations, mainstream media still win as a confident source of information.

Discussion:

In this paper, secondary crisis communication have been analyzed with respect to the effects of traditional media vs new media tools during the times of crises.

The results confirms the strong relationship between the variables of SMCC model- Social Mediated Crisis Communication model. As the model highlighted the importance of word of mouth during crisis time, the results testing the cognitive dimension of acquiring news and updates indicated that the major source of information about the true crisis that happened before conducting the research was "friends and family" and social media –via what's app and BBM. When testing the affective dimension, comparing traditional media to social media in terms of trustworthiness, the traditional media won over social media. Word of mouth also plays an important role in evaluating news as trustworthy. The direct and indirect channels of communication that transfer information about crisis appeared in testing the behavioral component of the information processing, where information is processed either directly by the receiver through social media or traditional media, or indirectly via inactive users who receive information reported by followers via twitter or Facebook or what's app.

The above mentioned results point to the need to extend crisis communication theories and shed more light on the mediated role of social networking sites in crisis communication as a shift from one to many communication mode to many to many communication mode. There are many intervening variables in the process of new media crisis communication that need to be examined and experimented such as interpretations use experiences (Schultz et al.,2011) in addition to users' evaluation of medium credibility and the overall communication environment.

Integration of social media into crisis and risk communication is crucial for crisis management, but it needs to be well planned. Using social media has the advantage of gaining fast information that would reduce rumors, but it has to be well planned to gain trust and credibility

Having a comparison of a non-crisis information seeking situation builds the credibility of the results in times information seeking during crisis situations.

The findings of this study have practical implications when designing communication strategies for government and organizations during emerging crisis situations. Using social media would result in a more positive evaluation of the situation, and achieving higher levels of awareness when information dissemination is needed. Communication of consistent messages via social networking sites in line with traditional media forms could assist in limiting rumors and achieve news credibility.

Limitations and Future Research:

The area of crisis communication needs to be examined within a Middle Eastern perspective. Experimentation and qualitative content analysis would add to understanding how SNS function during crises within the Arab culture.

Testing a variety of publics would also add to assessment of crisis communication situation, as social media usage is expanding across different ages and different activities. Additional research are needed with different publics and different crisis situations that is limited to specific cultures and specific publics.

The current research focused on (the drivers to use) social media as a source of information seeking during crisis. The topic needs to extend its application beyond information search to evaluation and action stages

It is crucial that communicators understand public perception and behaviors in time of crisis situations so they can choose the appropriate channels for disseminating information and also design proper messages. Although social media is relatively a new medium, yet, it plays an important role in communication when it comes to the younger generation

References

Bolton, Ruth, N; Parasuraman, A.; Hoefnagels, A.; Migchels, N.; Kabadayi, S.; Gruber, T.; Komarova, Y. and Solnet, D. (2013)" Understanding Generation Y and their use of social media: a review and research agenda", *journal of Service Management,* Vol.24(3), 245-267.

Cameron, A.M; Massie, A.B.; Alexander, C.E; Stewart, B.; Montgomery, R.A; Benavides, N.R; Fleming, G.D and Segev, D.L. (2013) "Social Media and Organ Donor Registration: The Facebook Effect", *American Journal of Trasplantation,* (13), 2059-2065.

Coombs, W.T.(2007) "Protecting organization reputation during a crisis:The development and application of Situational Crisis Communication Theory. *Corporate Reputation Review,* 10, 163-176.

Dennis, E., Martin, J. D., & Wood, R. (2013). Media use in the Middle East,An eight-nation survey. Retrieved from http://menamediasurvey.northwestern.edu/

Ding, H (2009)"Rhetorics of alternative media in an emerging epidemic: SARS, censorship and extra-institutional risk communication", *Technical Communication Quarterly,* 18(4), 327-350.

Doha Center for Media Freedom, (2012), inhttp://www.dc4mf.org/fr/node/1799?page=1

Duggan, Maeve and Smith Aaron (2013) "Social Media Updates 2013", Pew Research Center, January 2014, in http://pewinternet.org/Reports/2013/Social-Media-Update.aspx

Duhe, Sandra (2012)"New Media and Public Relations", Peter Lang Publishing, Inc,NY Second edition.

Dubai school of Government, 2013, in(http://www.dsg.ae/En/News/ASMR_5_Report_Final.pdf

Fox, Susannah (2011)"The Social Life of Health Information", http://pewinternet.org/Reports/2011/Social-Life-of-Health-info.aspx.Retrieved February 21,2014.

Gupta, Anita, Tyagi, Mukta and Sharma, D. (2013)"Use of Social Media Marketing in Healthcare", *Journal of Health Management,* 15(2), 293-302.

Jin, Yan, Liu, B.F. and Austin, L.L. (2014)"Examining the Role of Social Media in Effective Crisis Management: The Effects of Crisis Origin, Information Form and Source on Publics' Crisis Responses", *Communication Research,* Vol 41(1), 74-94, in http://crx.sagepubl.com/content/41/1/74.refs.html

Ju, Alice, Jeong, S.H. and Chyi H.I (2014)"Will Social Media Save Newspapers", *journalism Practice,*8:1, 1-17.

Kaplan, A., M.,&Haenlein, M.(2010) "Users of the world, unite. The challenges and opportunities of social media", Business Horizons, 53,(1),59-68.

Liu, B.F., Austin, L. &Jin,Y. (2011)"How public respond to crisis communication strategies:The interplay of information form and source", *Public Relations Review,* 37(4), 345-353.

Liu, B.F.; Jin, Y. and Austin, L.L. (2013)"The Tendency To Tell: Understanding Publics' Communicative Responses To Crisis Information Form and Source", *Journal of Public Relations Research,*(25), 51-67.

Pang, A., Abul Hassan, N.B., and Chong, A.C.Y.(2014)"Negotiating crisis in the social media environment – Evolution of crises online, gaining credibility offline", *Corporate Communications: An International Journal,* vol.19(1), 96-118

Rutsaert, P.; Regan, A.; Pieniak, Z.; McConnon, A.; Moss, A.; Wall, P.; and Verbeke, W. (2013)"The use of social media in food risk and benefit communication", *Trends in Food Science & Technology*, 30, 84-91.

Southwell, Brian G. (2013) "Social networks and Popular Understanding of Science and Health", RTI press Publication, The Johns Hopkins University Press.

Schultz, F.,Utz, S.&Goritz, A.(2011)"Is the medium the message? Perceptions of and reactions to crisis communication via twitter, blogs and traditional media.*Public Relations Review,* 37,20-27.

Shan, L., (2013)"Food crisis coverage by social and traditional media: A case study of the 2008 Irish dioxin crisis", *Public Understanding of Science*, 0(0) 1-18, in http://pus.sagepub.com/content/early/2013/01/30/0963662512472315.

The Peninsula Qatar (2012) in http://thepeninsulaqatar.com/news/qatar/196079/official-media-faces-barrage-of-criticism

Walaski, Pamela (2013) "Social Media- Powerful Tools for SH&E Professionals", *Professional Safety*, April, Pp. 1-11.

Weick, K.E., Sutcliffe, K.M.,&Obstfeld,D.(2005)."Organizing and the process of sensemaking.*Organization Science,* 16(4), 409-421.

Westerman, David; Spence, P.R. and Van Der Heide, B. (2013)"Social Media as Information Source: Recency of Updates and Credibility of information", *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication,* 19, 171-183.

Wright, D.K., & Hinson, M.(2009) "An updated look at the impact of social media on public relations practices", *Public Relations Journal*, 3(2), Spring.

Utz, Sonja, Schultz,Friederike, Glocka, Sandra (2013)"Crisis communication online:How medium, crisis type and emotions affected public reactions in the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear disaster", Public Relations Review, 39, 40-46.

Appendix

The questionnaire

Hello,

The survey is about usage of social media as a source of information. Social media means a lot of internet applications we use: Twitter, Facebook, Whats app, Instagram, LinkedIn, Flickr, Google plus and so on. If you don't use any of these apps, please don't answer the survey.

Thank you for your time.

(1) How many hours- in a typical day- do you spend do you spend doing the following activities:

- Watching TV (0-1 hour) (1 -2 hours) (2-3 hours) (3 - 5 hours) (more 5 hours)

- Reading   (0-1 hour) (1 -2 hours) (2-3 hours) (3 - 5 hours) (more 5 hours)

- Surfing the net(0-1 hour) (1 -2 hours) (2-3 hours) (3 - 5 hours) (more 5 hours)

(2)How often do you check the net (either via the mobile or IPad or the laptop)

- All the time

- Every one hour

- Three times a day

- Twice a day

- I hardly check the internet

(3) My favorite sites I log to daily are (check all that apply)

- Facebook   - Twitter   - Instagram

- LinkedIn   - google plus   - Dig

- Delicious   - Flicker   - YouTube

- Qatar Shares   - Qatar living   - Yahoo

(4) I usually check on news on the web using the following websites:

- Al Jazeera.net   - BBC.net

- Doha news   - Local newspapers' websites

- Blogs   - Other source, please mention ……….

(5) I count on the following media to update myself with information about current events: (rank order giving 1 to the most important, 5 to the least important)

- Friends and family talks

- Television

- I navigate the net

- Social media

- Newspapers (online or printed)

- Radio

- Other news source, please mention …………………

(6) When searching for news, I use television, radio or newspapers because: (check all that apply)

- I believe in what they say because news come from authority

- They are fast in announcing the news

- They show the details and answer all of my questions

- I don't use this medium.

- Other , specify ………

(7) Please state whether you agree or disagree with the following statements:

Statement	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Using social media allows me to understand what's going around me				
Through social media, I can have a voice in all aspects of life				
When using social media, I feel safe to say whatever issues I think about				
Social media is a free zone to criticize any idea or situation				
I feel comfortable after using social media because I express what I think				
I consider all the news that come to me via social media as credible				
Television is more reliable than social media				

(8) How did you first hear about the petrol station fire near Landmark last week?

- Friends or family told me

- I got it via what's app

- I got it via Twitter

- I heard it in radio or television

- I was near by and saw it myself

- Other answer, please specify………………..

(9) To know more about the developments of the fire, I did the following: (please rank order giving 1 to the first thing you did)

- I called friends and family

- I called a friend in the authority

- I checked social media as what's app or twitter to see if anyone wrote about it

- I turned to official websites as the website of the ministry of interior

- I searched for the news on national news websites

- I turned to TV news, or listen to the local radio news

(10) If I receive a message via Twitter about the closing of 2 schools in Doha after discovering 8 cases among children of H1N1, I may do the following: (check all that apply)

- I forward it to all contact list

- I forward it to selected part of contact list whom I think the information is important for them.

- I call my friends directly.

- I check the news online via social media

- I don't do anything.

- Other, specify …..

(11) I believe and trust information that comes from (rank order)

- A tweet

- A Facebook message

- A newspaper article

- The news in television

- Local radio news

- Instagram

- What's app

- I don't know

(12) Please state whether you agree or disagree with the following statements:

Statement	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
I consider information coming from Twitter or Facebook as rumors till I hear it from TV or read it in newspapers.				
I trust information that comes from television more than information coming via Twitter or Facebook				
I like to share tweets and messages of breaking news happening in Doha with other people				
I don't forward all the news I receive to my contact list, but I select only breaking news				

(13) Which category below includes your age?

- 17 or younger

- 18 – 20

- 21 – 23

- 24 or older

(14) What is your gender?

- Female

- Male